

NEWSLETTER

Bonhoeffer Society for Archive and Research

Number 18, January 1980

Editor: Clifford Green

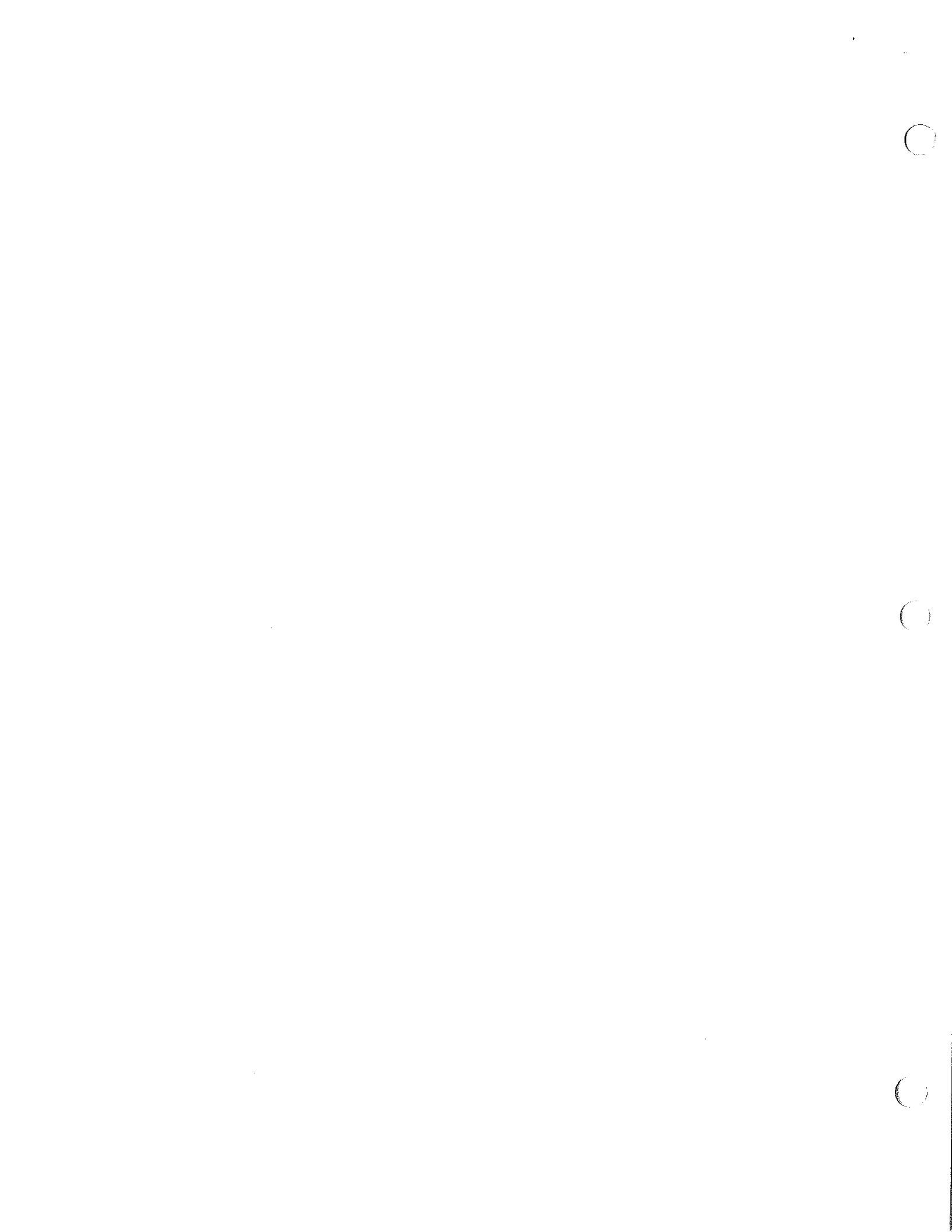
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Philadelphia, PA 19141

PLANS FOR OXFORD: NEWS FROM NEW YORK

About 30 members of the Society in North America have registered to attend the Third International Bonhoeffer Conference in Oxford next March 28 to April 1. Many paper proposals have been received, and members of the Executive Committee worked on program details in New York last November; another meeting to complete the program will be held shortly.

Please note that the Society is not organizing group flights; for economical flights contact your travel agent about APEX fares, Laker and Icelandic (to Luxembourg). In late February or early March all registrants will receive a letter with the following information: detailed travel directions from London to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford; an outline of the program; instructions for those presenting papers. Note that we will follow our usual custom of pre-reading papers, but they will not be mailed out in advance; rather, authors will take multiple copies of their papers to Oxford for distribution to participants.

Last November in New York the Society had another successful annual meeting. Stimulating discussions followed the papers of Jim Burtness, Charles Sensel, Wayne Floyd, and Giles Milhaven; unfortunately James Duane was unable to present his paper. Instead a fruitful discussion planning our future seminar sessions (see Newsletter #17, p. 2) was held. It was decided that the research seminar for 1980 will focus on Bonhoeffer's Ethics; Bill Peck is coordinator of the seminar. Several people have committed themselves to participate, dealing with such themes as: textual problems in Ethics; correlation with the biography; the book's relation to ethical thinking elsewhere in the Bonhoeffer corpus; Bonhoeffer and Lutheran ethics; the relation of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics to other types of ethical thinking; etc. The advance theme chosen for 1981 is "Bonhoeffer and the Jewish People." Ruth Zerner will coordinate this seminar.



BOOK REVIEW

Clifford Green, The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927-1933. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975, 356 pp.

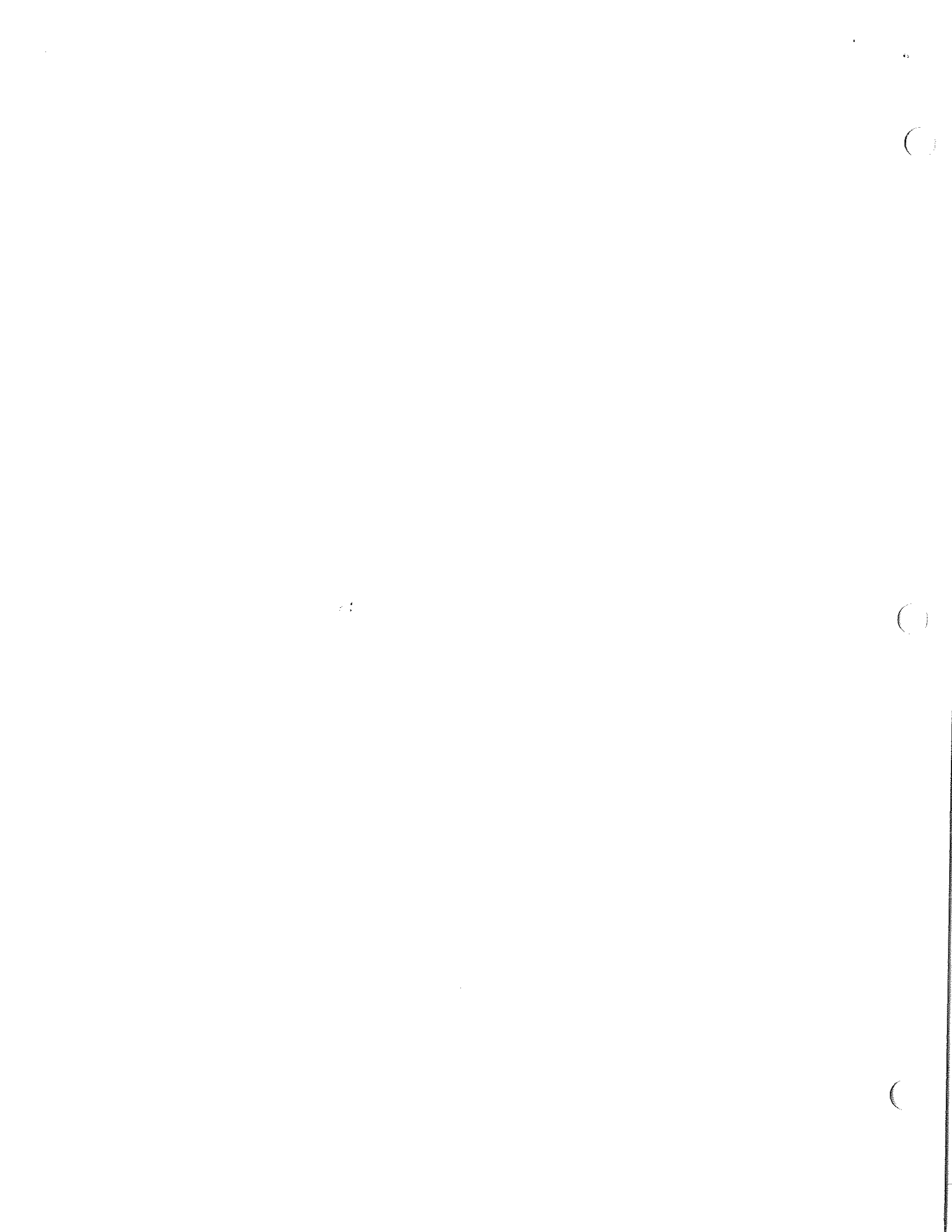
Reviewed by: George Hunsinger, New Brunswick Theological Seminary

[When George Hunsinger wrote in a recent article that this book "has been unjustly neglected" and that it "is one of the two or three best works on Bonhoeffer in English," even the modesty of a British-born editor could not restrain him from requesting a review for the Newsletter. Mr. Hunsinger, a new member of the Society, is completing his Ph.D. in theology at Yale, and is the editor of Karl Barth and Radical Politics (Westminster, 1976), a discussion of the Marquardt thesis. Last year he was Theologian-in-Residence for the Riverside Church Disarmament Program.]

Harvey Cox once suggested that reading Bonhoeffer is something like taking a theological Rorschach ink-blot test-- the wildly different responses seem to tell us more about Bonhoeffer's interpreters than they do about Bonhoeffer himself. Is his theological development marked by a basic continuity or by radical discontinuities? Is his christology essentially Barthian, essentially Hegelian, or essentially something else? What is the key to this theology as a whole--a new ontology, a new ecclesiology, christology itself, an ever-increasing secularism? While this list of questions could easily be extended, it is the proliferation of hermeneutical confusion that makes Clifford J. Green's contribution to Bonhoeffer studies so welcome. Rarely has a single volume done so much to clear the air and to reorient scholarship along the right track. No future study of Bonhoeffer will be able to ignore Green's thesis that attending to "the sociality of Christ and humanity in Bonhoeffer's early theology goes a long way toward resolving the outstanding hermeneutical problems.

Green's lucid, and at times even eloquent, study of Bonhoeffer's early writings stands as a model of scholarly exposition. It is filled with penetrating insights, careful textual analysis, relevant comparisons, balanced judgments and common sense. Without in any wishing to detract from other fine studies such as the one by Rasmussen, it seems fair to say that Green has established himself as the foremost Bonhoeffer scholar writing in English and that he is rivaled only by German scholars such as Ernst Feil and, of course, Eberhard Bethge. We cannot be too thankful for the appearance of Green's work and can only regret that its publication in the AAR dissertation series has apparently prevented it from receiving the widespread attention it deserves.

Chapter I of this masterful work contains some even-handed criticism of previous scholarship which sets the stage for the author's own line of inquiry. Among the writings



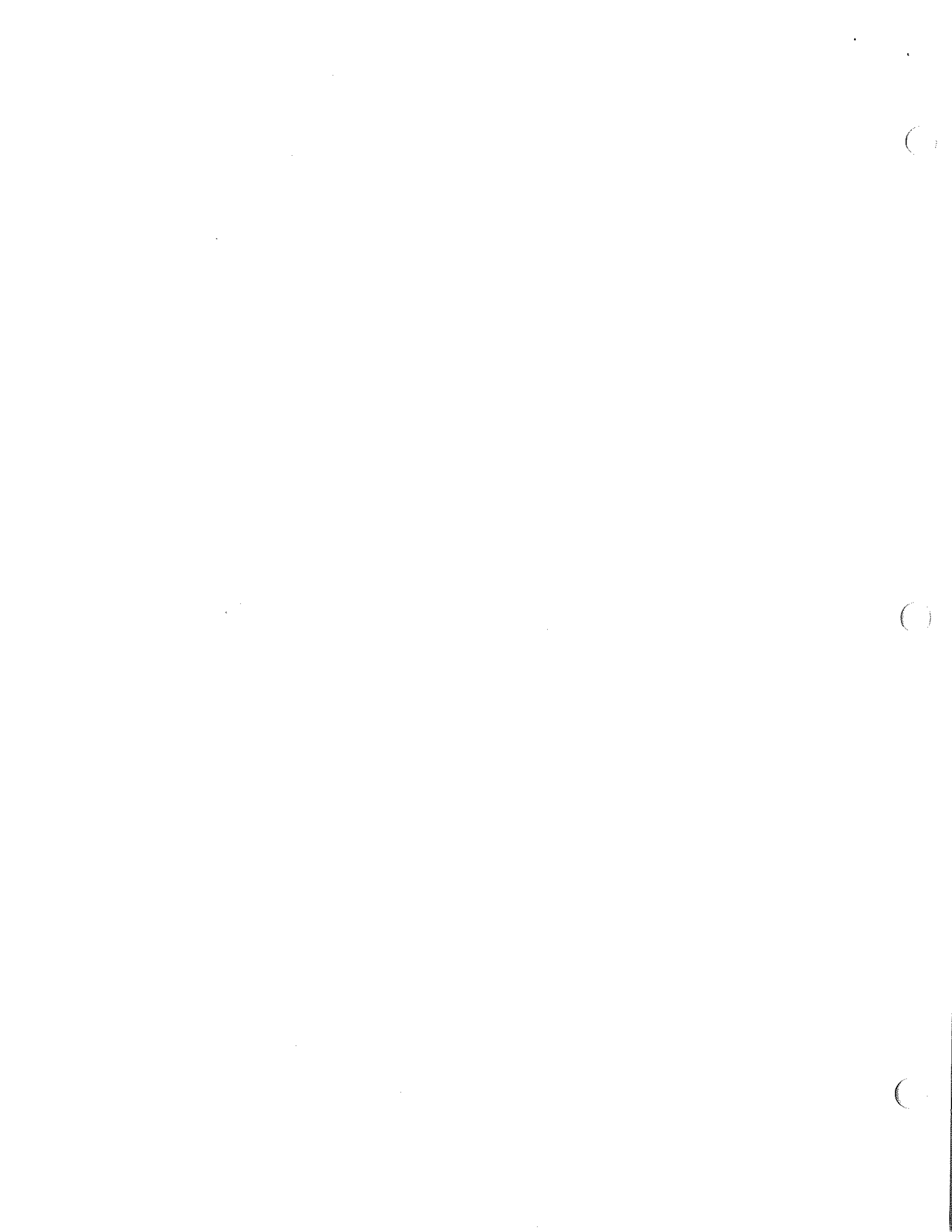
considered are those of Mueller, Godsey, Phillips, Ott, and Dumas. Unfortunately, Feil's imposing Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers (Muenchen: Chr. Kaiser, 1971) appeared too late for Green to take into account. The future agenda of Bonhoeffer studies will need to assign a high priority to measuring the contributions of Green and Feil against each other.

Chapter II, an analysis of Sanctorum Communio (1927), begins the documentation of Green's thesis. Green argues persuasively that Bonhoeffer's first book is not, as has usually been supposed, concerned primarily with ecclesiology, but rather with a broader concept which frames the discussion of everything else, in which the church is only one topic among others. Bonhoeffer's primary concern in this volume is "sociality" -- a social anthropology intrinsically connected to christology. This concept is thoroughly relational: human beings cannot be conceived apart from their relation to Jesus Christ; and even Jesus Christ cannot be conceived apart from his relation to theologically significant social groupings. Woven into this complex "sociality of Christ and humanity" is a distinctively modern soteriological problem -- the psychic and social forms of human power -- a problem which Green isolates with great ingenuity and then traces through various stages to a final resolution in the prison letters.

Easily the most brilliant section of Green's work is Chapter III, which tackles the elusive and complicated Akt und Sein (1929). Pursuing his fundamental insight, Green comes to the surprising conclusion, thoroughly documented, that Bonhoeffer is again focussing on soteriological problems of power rather than primarily on matters of ontology or of revelation. By showing how Bonhoeffer develops and corrects his earlier anthropology, and by uncovering the soteriological issues behind the lengthy polemical forays, Green achieves a truly remarkable hermeneutical breakthrough. The connections between Bonhoeffer's first two works have at last become clear and intelligible.

Somewhat less compelling is the discussion of Nachfolge (1937) in Chapter IV. Written between 1935 and 1937, the material in Nachfolge seems to reflect questions which were agitating Bonhoeffer well prior to that time. Green takes those questions back to 1932, when Bonhoeffer developed his theology of discipleship in outline and when he experienced a conversion "from the phraseological to the real" in personal faith. Although Green makes a strong case that Nachfolge reflects the situation of 1932, two problems detract from his treatment of it.

First, here as elsewhere, Green draws too sharp a distinction between the personal and the political. The "formative impulse" for Nachfolge may indeed stem from 1932, but that is no warrant for neglecting the events of the intervening years and consequently the political situation in which the final composition of the book occurred. Green fails to bring out the political in the personal to the extent that it is to be found in Nachfolge.



Second, an early provenance for Nachfolge makes it easier for Green to overdraw, as he tends to do, the connections of that volume to Bonhoeffer's other writings. To be sure, Green makes about as good a case as possible that Nachfolge stands in some kind of continuity with the rest of Bonhoeffer's work, both earlier and later. It is one thing to argue, however, that the theme of sociality is "presupposed" by Nachfolge, and quite another to contend that it is "indispensable" to that work. I suspect that Nachfolge is more of an aberration in the Bonhoefferian corpus than Green, in his legitimate desire to show what lines of continuity might exist, is prepared to allow. His discussion of Nachfolge is not extensive enough for him fully to make his case, but his minimalist statements, as opposed to his maximalist ones, are certainly plausible. Bonhoeffer's experience of a personal spiritual turning point, his engulfment in the throes of the Nazi crisis, and his fresh reading of Kierkegaard may all have conspired to take him off on more of a tangent than the rest of his work would suggest. It remains the merit of Green's discussion, however, that it allows us to assess better than ever before just what it was in Bonhoeffer's development that Nachfolge was departing from and just what lines of continuity might remain, even if less than substantial.

Chapter V provides some splendid reading of Bonhoeffer's lectures on "Schoepfung und Suende" (1932-33) and "Christologie" (1933). Green ably shows how the theme of sociality, the basic anthropological categories, and the close correlation between christology and anthropology are all carried over and developed in these lectures. Soteriological question of power, strength and weakness continue to be the pivot on which Bonhoeffer's thinking turns, thus confirming beyond all question Green's approach to the early theology.

An inkling of how fruitful Green's emphasis on sociality will be for a full-scale reconsideration of Bonhoeffer's later writings is provided by the concluding remarks in Chapter VI, a limited inquiry into the prison letters. No area of Bonhoeffer interpretation, of course, has engendered more perplexity and diversity of opinion. Green's discussion of what Bonhoeffer meant by "Muendigkeit" and by "religionless Christianity" is simply the best I have encountered in any language.

A fuller evaluation of what Green has accomplished would also single out for special praise his non-reductionist approach to the autobiographical dimension in Bonhoeffer's theology, his illuminating comparison of Bonhoeffer and Barth on the imago dei, and his soteriological differentiation between Bonhoeffer and Luther. Two points of relevance for future Bonhoeffer studies, however, cannot pass without at least some discussion.

First, Green's attention to the theme of sociality raises in an especially acute way the neglected question of Bonhoeffer's relation to the Ritschlian school. It is no criticism, considering the scope and purpose of his work, to

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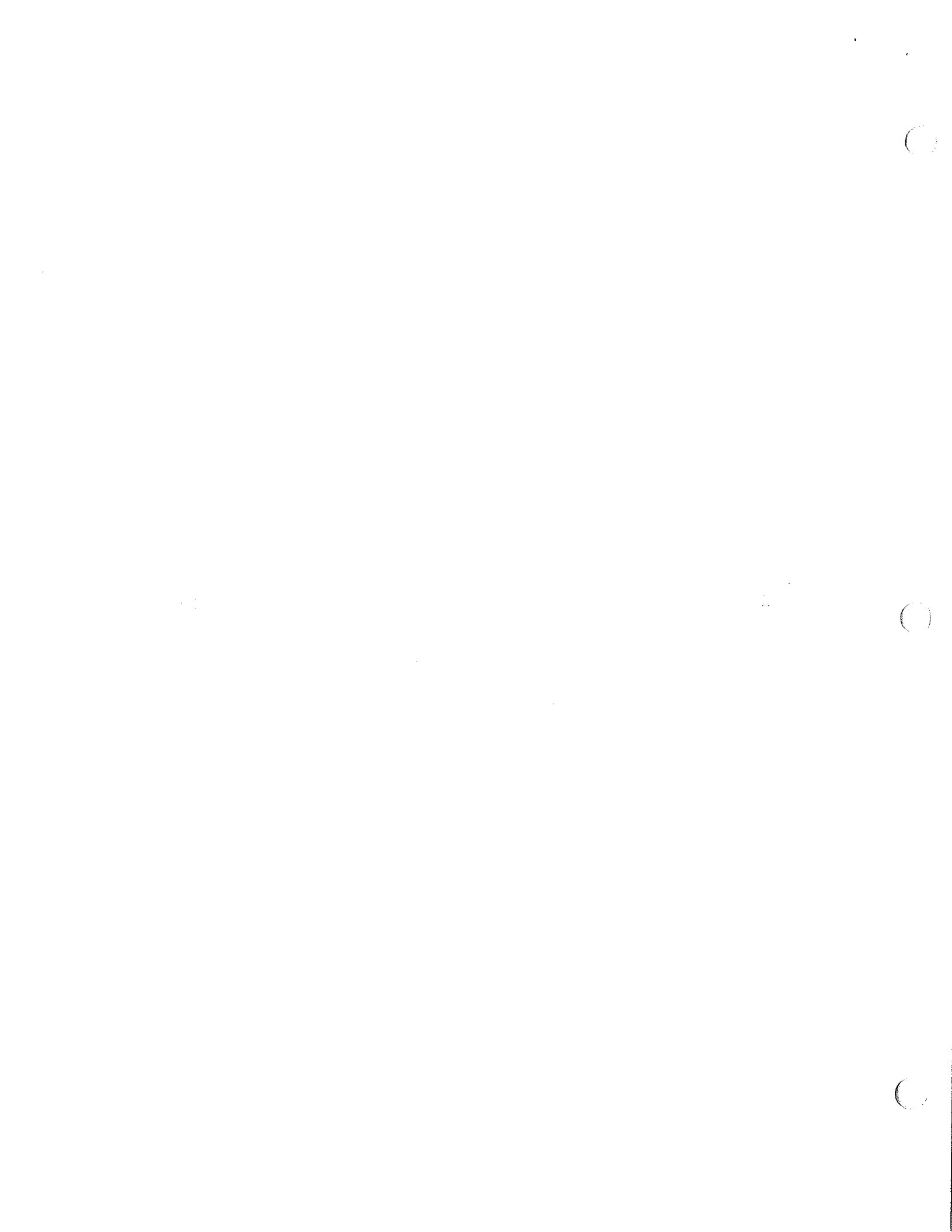
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say that Green touches on this question without exploring it more fully, especially when one recalls that Feil dismisses the question abruptly. Not only were Bonhoeffer's immediate teachers -- Harnack, Holl, Seeberg -- all members of this school, but many of Bonhoeffer's most distinctive themes, as Green has allowed us to see, carry distinctly Ritschlian overtones. Among these themes are the rejection of metaphysics, the emphasis on ethics, the notion of Christian community as the locus of revelation, the separation of faith and doctrine into into opposing categories, and above all the development of a "relational" christology.

Closer attention to these Ritschlian roots would shed new light on Bonhoeffer's relation to Barth. It is now clearer than ever before that despite the various influences on Bonhoeffer's theology, Bonhoeffer occupies a rather vexing position somewhere between Ritschl and Barth. Bonhoeffer never seems to have grasped how much Barth's break with liberalism depended on a break with relationalism in christology. The persistence of this relationalism in Bonhoeffer would seem to stand not only behind Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Barth (especially that of "revelational positivism"), but also behind Barth's suspicions about Bonhoeffer. Without attempting to be anything more than suggestive, I will hazard the following hypothesis: Bonhoeffer was a "first-order Barthian" and a "second-order Ritschlian."

A second point of relevance for Bonhoeffer studies is this: has not the time long since passed for us to disentrail ourselves from Bonhoeffer's heroism in order to look more soberly at his politics? Green, like so many others, consistently underestimates the vestiges of conservatism lodged in Bonhoeffer's political thought, despite all countervailing tendencies. Green is well aware that the traditional German Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine involves a conservative emphasis on "order," but he fails to recognize how much of this emphasis Bonhoeffer retains, not only in "Dein Reich Komme!" (1932), but also during the resistance period. We may well surmise that a more politically radical Bonhoeffer was struggling to emerge, but we need to recognize the significant extent to which this never occurred.

Green's analysis shows how much Bonhoeffer could speak of collective social groups in highly apolitical terms. A kind of thoroughgoing personalism marks his concept of "sociality," grounded as it is, almost exclusively in an "I-Thou" model of what it means to be human. In a culture such as our own, with its increasingly heightened consciousness that "the personal is the political," Bonhoeffer's abstract conceptuality will certainly seem strange and inadequate. Apolitical notions of sociality are bound to strike us as pre-critical, and rightly so. Bonhoeffer transmits a peculiar blind-spot of German Lutheranism and of Western Augustinianism generally-- one which has historically hamstrung the development of a more progressive political theology.



It would probably be an exercise in cultural arrogance, however, were we to reject Bonhoeffer's social conceptuality out of hand. Pre-critical though it may be, it perhaps preserves an important insight which in our present cultural climate is likely to be overlooked. For while it is quite true that the personal is the political, is it not also true that the personal is not the political? While the political comes to expression in the personal, does it not also encounter there a certain limit? If so, then perhaps a "post-critical" conception of sociality will still have a good deal to learn from Bonhoeffer's work, even while striving to overcome much of what it represents.

TRANSLATIONS OF BONHOEFFER TEXTS

Currently being translated for publication this year by Collins is Bonhoeffer, Fragmente aus Tegel, edited by Renate and Eberhard Bethge and published by Kaiser in 1980; see Newsletter No. 14.

Last Spring David Manrodt, Pastor of Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran church in Baltimore, completed his doctoral dissertation on The Role of Eschatology in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, under the auspices of the Ecumenical Institute of St. Mary's Seminary & University.

The dissertation contains three appendices with translations of Bonhoeffer texts. Two are translations of seminar papers written by Bonhoeffer in 1926; the German texts are not yet published. The seminar papers are entitled: "Church and Eschatology, or, Church and Kingdom of God" and "Review of Old Protestant Eschatology. The Teaching of the Old Protestant Dogmatics concerning Life after Death and Last Things."

Appendix D (100 pp.) contains selected translations from Gesammelte Schriften I-V, the principle of selection being writings relevant to Bonhoeffer's eschatology. Many pieces are partially translated; those translated in full are:

Letter to Sutz (I, 50)
"The Social Gospel" (I, 104-12)
Postscript to the Nineteenth Circular Letter (II, 515f.)
Letter of December 12, 1937 (II, 529)
"Resurrection" (III, 405-9)
"The Ascension of Jesus Christ" (III, 409-15)
Sermon for All Souls Sunday, 1933 (IV, 160-65)
Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, 1933 (IV, 166-70)
Sermon Outline on the Epistle for the Ascension (IV, 183-86)
Outline for the Reformation Festival (IV, 193-96)
Thoughts for the Preacher for Memorial Day (IV, 197-99)
Outline for a Youth Sermon (IV, 220-23)
Advent Sermon Outline, Psalm 50.1-5 (IV, 223f.)
Advent Sermon Outline, Luke 21. 25-36 (IV, 225-27)
Outline on a Text from Revelation (IV, 233-36)
Exaudi Sermon on Psalm 42 (IV, 391-99)

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NEWS ITEMS

John Godsey's Preface to Bonhoeffer, out of print for a number of years, was recently reissued by Fortress Press in a paperback edition. It contains translations of Bonhoeffer's "Thy Kingdom Come" and "The First Table of the Ten Commandments," and also an Introduction by John.

Am gegebenen Ort, a collection of lectures and addresses from the past decade, is the title of Eberhard Bethge's latest book, recently published by Chr. Kaiser Verlag. Many of the chapters are discussions of Bonhoeffer: his religionless Christianity proposal; the theological foundations of his political resistance; freedom and obedience according to Bonhoeffer (Eberhard's lecture given at the opening of the Bonhoeffer Archive at Union Theological Seminary); the concept of guilt in Bonhoeffer; and others. Also included are several pieces deriving from Eberhard's contributions to Christian-Jewish dialogue, discussions of the Confessing Church, a report on his visit to South Africa, and a selection of sermons. Some of the pieces have already appeared in English. The whole collection is most valuable, not only as a contribution to Bonhoeffer studies but above all as a legacy of Eberhard's own theological work in recent years. The book's appearance at the time of Eberhard's seventieth birthday is an occasion for double congratulations. The 280 page volume is priced at approximately DM 32.

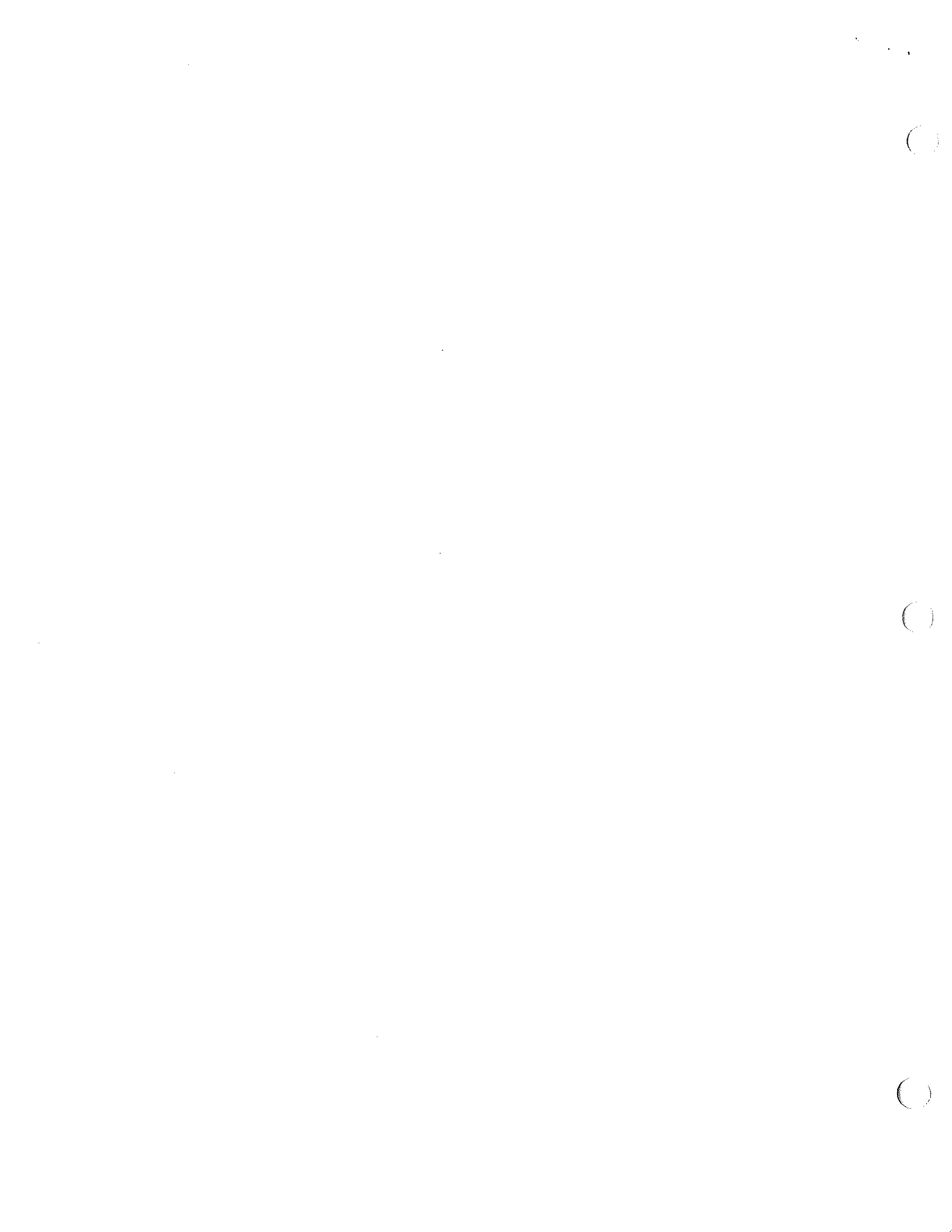
Christian Kaiser Verlag announces several recent and forthcoming books of particular interest: Martin Stöhr (Hg.), Erinnern, nicht vergessen. Zugänge zum Holocaust (with a contribution by Eberhard Bethge); Albrecht Schönherr, Horizont und Mitte. Aufsätze, Vorträge, Reden, 1953-1977; Günter Brakelmann (Hg.), Kirche im Krieg. Der Deutsche Protestantismus am Beginn des II. Weltkriegs; and Eberhard Busch, Juden und Christen im Schatten des Dritten Reichs.

For its annual "Weinachtsbruss" Kaiser distributed Ferdinand Schlingensiepen's lecture from the Bethge celebration at Kaiserswerth last August, "Der Tod des Lehrers." In the spring Kaiser will publish the third in the series Internationales Bonhoeffer Forum, Konsequenzen. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Kirchenverständnis heute, edited by Ernst Feil and Ilse Tödt.

Howard Summers, a South African member of the Society, reported completing an M.A. thesis (for which he was awarded a distinction) on the subject Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theocrat or Ethical Humanist? The thesis was submitted to the University of Witwatersrand in 1978.

Ronald Christian (Fairfax, VA) completed last spring a master's thesis for Luther Theological Seminary entitled Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Community and Discipleship as Emphasized and Applied in the Life and Mission of a Covenant Church. Jim Burtness was thesis adviser.

Was it a first? In 1961-62 John Fletcher, translator of Creation and Fall, taught a Bonhoeffer course at Hollins College, Roanoke,



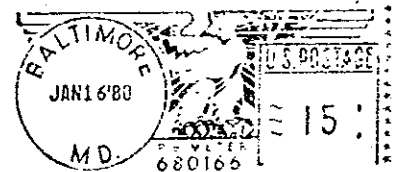
Virginia; the course was offered again in the first term of 1963-64. The folks at Hollins think this was the first undergraduate course on Bonhoeffer to be offered in the United States. Are they right?

Recently published by Eerdmans is John de Gruchy's The Church Struggle in South Africa; it contains a Foreword by Alan Paton. John is our corresponding member of the Executive Committee in South Africa. He also edited Eberhard Bethge's South African lectures, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, and is the editor of the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa.

Work is progressing on the International Bonhoeffer Bibliography. Recently a revised manuscript was sent off to Germany, incorporating the material from USQR in 1976, the update in Newsletter #12 (1978), and additional primary and secondary sources since then. A last minute appeal: if you know of items overlooked, or errors printed, in the above bibliographies of English language sources, please notify Clifford Green (307 Gittings Ave., Baltimore, MD 21212) as soon as possible.

And finally, in the spirit of bumper sticker piety: Have you paid your dues this year?

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