

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER: A PARAGON OF MODERN PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP
IN THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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Abstract

The current study analyzes the leadership of Dietrich Bonhoeffer through the lens of Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination* and identifies him as a prophetic leader distinctly within the Judeo-Christian faith tradition. Three main characteristics of prophetic leadership, as outlined by Brueggemann, are utilized to describe Bonhoeffer's leadership as exemplified in various writings and activities within Finkenwalde. The three characteristics are recognizing YHWH as ultimate authority, nurturing a counter-cultural community based upon biblical standards, and confronting errant, immoral, and amoral governing authorities. The prophetic leadership of Bonhoeffer does not refute other leadership theories that have been applied to him, but adds depth to understanding his leadership practices. His commitment to God, service to the faith-community, and outspoken nature against the government encroachment reveal how he led like the biblical prophets. Furthermore, a definition of prophetic leadership is provided, which has been missing from the academic literature.

Keywords: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Walter Brueggemann, prophetic leadership

To my wife, Angela, for her patience, support, and enduring example of a deep and
abiding faith in Jesus Christ

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The scholarly literature on World War II reveals a rich and vibrant array of personalities who exhibited remarkable leadership characteristics in the face of a global, existential crisis. Many military, political, and business leaders of that time have been studied in order to identify the precise techniques, worldviews, and backgrounds which helped to forge these leaders. World War II offered a unique crucible to develop, fortify, and test leaders across the world. The intensely dynamic context of Nazi Germany revealed many exceptional leaders who emerged from the gauntlet of hatred and destruction, and are recognized today as wonderful examples of strong leadership in the midst of hardship and affliction. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of these fascinating leaders. His context as a Lutheran theologian, German patriot, a scholarly mind, and a faithful voice for biblical truth within the crucible of the tragic Nazi political landscape sets him apart as a uniquely skilled and accomplished leader. Instead of quietly submitting to antisemitic legislation and action, he prophetically spoke out against Hitler from the outset of the Führer's political career, setting his own personal trajectory as a bright and energetic young man who ultimately sacrificed his own life. At the same time, he developed a counter-cultural monastic community of faithful Christian pastors, teaching them to follow in his footsteps.

Research Question and Thesis

Bonhoeffer's leadership practice has been viewed through various leadership lenses with great insight, yet there are elements which have yet to be identified and explained. His leadership has been described as adaptive, relational, sacrificial, moral,

and spiritual, yet there remains a gulf to be explored regarding two juxtaposed activities: his pastoral practices and his politically charged public pronouncements. This study will fill a gap in both leadership studies and in Bonhoeffer studies. The research question is as follows: how did Dietrich Bonhoeffer demonstrate prophetic leadership? The study will answer this question with the following thesis: Bonhoeffer demonstrated prophetic leadership as described by Walter Brueggeman in *Prophetic Imagination*.

Research Method Selection

This study will use the historical-philosophical paradigm in order to examine Bonhoeffer's leadership style and offer a definition and prescription for prophetic leadership. Many primary and secondary resources will be analyzed to accurately describe Bonhoeffer's life, faith, theology, and practices including Eberhard Bethge's biography of Bonhoeffer, and Bonhoeffer's own works, *Ethics*, *Life Together*, *The Cost of Discipleship*, and *Letters & Papers from Prison*. Furthermore, Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination* will be utilized as the main framework for prophetic leadership while leveraging other theological works to bolster the prophetic paradigm. The resulting argument will assert that Bonhoeffer's leadership style is most accurately described as prophetic leadership, while also providing a framework for prophetic leadership as a study in itself with Bonhoeffer as a case study.

Literature Review

Biblical Prophet as Leader

The concept of a prophet is rooted in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and must first be understood from this perspective if a modern understanding is to be reached, as exemplified in the calling of the Prophet Isaiah, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord,

saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”¹ Charles Hodge noted how the biblical role of a prophet was one who spoke for God.² The predictive nature of certain prophetic messages was ancillary to the message itself, which was impregnated with a divinely urgent warning for the original audience. The focus was not primarily foretelling, but forthtelling. John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill defined the biblical prophets as, “[t]hose who proclaim the divine plan in all of its fullness.”³ Joshua Searle offered a simplified explanation of the prophetic worldview, suggesting that the biblical prophet was one who recognized the spiritual elements at work within the physical world, with eternal consequences.⁴ Samuel Kincheloe recognized that the prophet speaks on behalf of another, specifically God, with a message overflowing, or bubbling over in abundance.⁵ Walton and Hill explored a similar perspective, explaining that the biblical prophets offered godly advice or admonition to the royal courts while also offering social analysis and criticism of the people of God.⁶ Robert R. Wilson explained that the biblical prophets were both change agents and

¹ Isaiah 6:8 (New American Standard Bible).

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology: Volume II* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018), 463.

³ John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Ancient Context to Contemporary Relevance*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 251.

⁴ Joshua T Searle, “Prophecy, protest and public theology: The relevance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prophetic mandate in today’s post-truth world,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 20, no. 2 (December 8, 2020): 104.

⁵ Samuel C. Kincheloe, “The Prophet as a Leader,” *Sociology and Social Research* 12, no. 1 (September-October 1927): 460.

⁶ Walton and Hill, 253.

religious preservationists, providing stabilization for governmental change while also undergirding a theological worldview for society.⁷ Willem A. VanGemeren expanded on the role of the biblical prophet, noting that they evoked a change in worldview of their followers which created counter-cultural communities, while also criticizing the dominant culture and the errant political leadership.⁸ Henry Smith and Levi Krueger remarked that prophets do not have an official office from which they speak; they are neither elected nor appointed.⁹ Patrick Miller recognized that much of prophetic ministry is accomplished in private, interpersonal ministry, rather than in public address, such as the Prophet Nathan confronting King David.¹⁰ The literature, therefore, suggests that biblical prophets were unique leaders, unelected, selfless in their messaging, felt a sense of urgency and importance to their messages, and were uniquely raised to positions of leadership.

Samuel Kincheloe, in his dissertation, described the process by which a prophet came to his exceptional position. The prophet emerged from a religious community when he responded to the needs of the community as a special and difficult occasion arose.¹¹

⁷ Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 294.

⁸ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 38.

⁹ Henry Smith and Levi Krueger, *A Brief Summary of Literature on Leadership* (Bloomington: Bureau of Cooperative Research, Indiana University, 1933), 23.

¹⁰ Patrick D Miller, "Toward a Theology of Leadership: Some Clues from the Prophets," *The Asbury Journal* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 44.

¹¹ Samuel Clarence Kincheloe, "The Prophet: A Study of the Sociology of Leadership," [The University of Chicago, 1929.] ProQuest Dissertations & Theses

The context became pertinent with a prophetic need when the people and leaders were out of alignment with God's revealed Law.¹² Each biblical prophet was unique in his context, but he gained prestige in their prophetic role similarly by responding to crises and the needs of the followers. The prophets were spiritually birthed from these intense and strained contexts as they became the mouthpiece of God, turning the community back toward God. Alternatively, Hodge suggested the prophets arose from a divine calling and empowering, rather than an emergent sociological process.¹³ These two perspectives need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, Kenneth Keathley recognized this paradoxical mystery found within the Scriptures, that God works in, and through, humanity, inspiring those He chooses, remaining sovereign over creation, while not voiding human agency.¹⁴ Roy Honeycutt identified Moses as the exemplar of both God working through man, and man retaining agency.¹⁵ Furthermore, Ralph Stogdill expanded on Kincheloe's work, noting that prophets often become symbols of the movements they are leading, thus the movement and the prophet are symbolically

Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/prophet-study-sociology-leadership/docview/301785496/se-2., 6>.

¹² VanGemeran, 19.

¹³ Hodge, 463.

¹⁴ Kenneth Keathley, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church, Revised Edition*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 558-59.

¹⁵ Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr., "Exodus," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 1, Revised*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1969), 313-14.

synonymous.¹⁶ Reviewing the literature all together reveals a special dynamic in which the prophet must be ready, willing, and able to respond, the situation must be ripe for a prophet to speak, and the divine calling ultimately must be in place. Much like there is no leader without followers, there is no prophet without a divine calling within a ripe context.

Many biblical scholars have focused their work on the fulfillment of prophecy, or the foretelling aspect of prophetic ministry, with less regard to what contributes to a prophet's leadership prowess. In the vein of prophetic fulfillment, Phillip G. Camp sought to understand why biblical prophecy was often imprecisely fulfilled, concluding that Yahweh is not bound to humanity's framework of fulfillment.¹⁷ Klaus Koch saw prophets as individual thinkers within various cultural contexts recognizing them as unique personalities.¹⁸ Hodge was less concerned about foretelling, and more attentive to the nature of the prophet's message. He centered the authority of the prophet and the origination of the message in divine authority and authorship, with the prophet merely being an obedient organ of communication.¹⁹

The literature reveals a vast array of varying perspectives on the biblical prophets.

¹⁶ Ralph M. Stogdill and Bernard M. Bass, *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 19.

¹⁷ Phillip G. Camp, *The Deuteronomistic Theology of Prophecy as Indicated by the Consistency between Prophecies and Fulfillment: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 283.

¹⁸ Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian period*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁹ Hodge, 463.

Yet, there is a substantial lack of clarity surrounding the duties of the biblical prophets, their leadership traits and style, and a general definition of what a biblical prophet is and does. This current study will not address all of the duties, traits, and styles of a prophet. Instead, a general overview will be provided as outlined by Brueggemann and as exemplified in Bonhoeffer's leadership.

Modern Prophet as Leader

Much work has been accomplished to recover a prophetic paradigm within modern Christendom and academia, yet no comprehensive or conclusive definition has been provided for a modern prophet or prophetic ministry. Lee Boleman and Terrence Deal supported the concept of the prophetic leader as a symbol of a movement and a champion for a greater cause.²⁰ Moses Maponya and Eugene Baron suggested that the ecclesial prophetic aim is integrally linked with the evangelistic nature of the church, but they stopped short of defining this prophetic aim.²¹ Louise Kretzschmar linked modern prophets to whistleblowers who are often ignored or silenced due to their accusations, yet their messages are necessary for organizational health and sustainability.²² VanGemeran warned against the over-emphasis of the prophetic task upon current social and political

²⁰ Lee G. Boleman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organization: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 7th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, a John Wiley and Sons, imprint, 2021), 379-82.

²¹ Moses S. Maponya and Eugene Baron, "The Recovery of the Prophetic Voice of the Church: The Adoption of a 'Missional Church' Imagination," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (July 27, 2020): 9, doi:10.4102/ve.v41i1.2077.

²² Louise Kretzschmar, "A Christian Ethical Analysis of the Importance of Prophetic Leadership for Sustainable Leadership," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (February 27, 2023): 5, dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2685.

concerns and an under-emphasis upon the Gospel's comprehensive scope.²³ Although social justice and political issues overlap with the prophetic program, the strictly social justice or political view of prophetic ministry misses out on the divinely initiated and designed program of prophetic ministry. VanGemeran clarified that the Judeo-Christian worldview recognizes God's concerns as beyond the present context.²⁴ To miss this perspective limits the scope of the Gospel. God is not confined by or to human organizations or worldviews, but has a will beyond what humanity can encapsulate, or even comprehend. The prophetic ministry is not confined to strictly socio-political matters, but contains a transcendent Judeo-Christian spiritual element, as well.

Miller noted how the role of a prophet is not oriented towards effectiveness, skill, or accomplishments, but towards shifting the modern paradigm to God's will.²⁵ Timothy George explained how the prophet's goal is to reestablish God's will among the people, reshaping the prevalent paradigm of the day.²⁶ The prophet's worldview is informed by his orthodox faith, and his mission is to reform the worldview of those around him. Yi Wang, an imprisoned Chinese pastor, revealed the modern prophet's desire is not merely a political restructuring, or even the overturning of a government entity, but total and full

²³ VanGemeran, 379-80.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Miller, 49.

²⁶ Timothy George, "The Work of God: Salvation," in *A Theology for the Church, Revised Edition*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, 157-204 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 174-75.

submission and obedience to God and His kingdom, both temporally and eternally.²⁷ The goal, from this perspective, is not political, but spiritual with political implications.

Walter Brueggemann and *Prophetic Imagination*

Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination*, published in 1978, remains a unique and lauded work studying the sociological implications of the biblical prophets.²⁸ Jamie Gates and Mark H. Mann noted how both individuals and ecclesial organizations continue to find *Prophetic Imagination* to be a constant reminder to return to the biblical elements of the prophetic traditions, rather than conform to modern culturally pervasive traditions.²⁹ Brad E. Keele explained Brueggemann's work in the following manner:

By bringing together elements of social-scientific exegesis, rhetoric and liberationist perspectives, Brueggemann's the *Prophetic Imagination* constructed a way of reading that engages in social criticism of both the political, cultural and economic dynamics in the texts and those at work in the contemporary circumstances and dominant discourses into which the texts may speak, especially the church's liturgical life and practices in the industrial West.³⁰

Derek Knoke considered the socio-political scope of *Prophetic Imagination* while suggesting Brueggemann's work brings theological elements of the Scriptures to the reader's practical life, where homiletics, evangelism, and hermeneutics become practical

²⁷ Yi Wang and Ian Johnson, *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement*, ed. Hannah Nation and J. D. Tseng, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 222-23.

²⁸ Jamie Gates and Mark H. Mann, *Nurturing the Prophetic Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brad E. Keele, "Prophecy, Canon and Imagination: Walter Brueggemann's The Prophetic Imagination and the Contributions of Biblical Interpretation to the Prophetic Project," ed. Jamie Gates and Mark H. Mann, *Nurturing the Prophetic Imagination*, 5-15 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 8.

theology working out in one's everyday life.³¹ George R. Horton recognized the psychotherapeutic aspects of Brueggemann's work, noting how the pervasive empirical mindset has widespread implications and must be dismantled individually through the paradigm of the prophetic critique.³² The literature reveals Brueggemann's work as beyond the confines of theological studies, venturing into various domains, including sociology, politics, and even psychotherapy.

Andrew McAuley Smith recognized the elements within *Prophetic Imagination* to be focusing upon retraining the worldview of the community and empowering those oppressed by empirical regimes.³³ Lisa P. Stephenson noted Brueggemann's focus upon political theology and how the biblical prophets nurtured, empowered, and led their follower communities.³⁴ Truls Åkerlund noted how *Prophetic Imagination* should be read through the lens of Christian leadership, where the leader's "prophetic imagination includes naming and grieving loss and despair, including judgment, as the deeds and

³¹ Derek Knoke, "Walter Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, and the Productive Science of Homiletics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 181.

³² George R. Horton, "Otherwise than Empire: Psychotherapeutic Implications of Brueggemann's Prophetic Imagination," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 50, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 37.

³³ Andrew McAuley Smith, "Prophets in the Pews: Testing Walter Brueggemann's Thesis in 'the Prophetic Imagination' in the Practice of Ministry." (PhD Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), 18. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/prophets-pews-testing-walter-brueggemanns-thesis/docview/304521976/se-2>.

³⁴ Lisa P. Stephenson, "Prophetically Political, Politically Prophetic: William Cavanaugh's Theopolitical Imagination as an Example of Walter Brueggemann's Prophetic Imagination," *Journal of Church and State* 53, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 569-70.

policies of our societies evoke devastating consequences...it is a clash between competing narratives and worldviews.”³⁵ Brueggemann’s work has been widely read and recognized as practical to both leaders and followers, and although it is not a work on leadership there are many aspects which overlap with leadership studies. *Prophetic Imagination* will be utilized to triangulate the biblical prophetic tradition, leadership studies, and Bonhoeffer’s example as a modern prophet.

Brueggemann reviewed the prophetic task from a sociological perspective in his book *Prophetic Imagination*. He asserted, “[t]he task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”³⁶ He explained that the prophet’s worldview is grounded in the recognition of God, YHWH, as the ultimate authority.³⁷ Furthermore, prophets leveraged divine authority to confront political oppression and bring liberation to enslaved peoples.³⁸ Brueggemann described oppressive regimes as the royal consciousness and the prophetic worldview as the alternative prophetic consciousness.³⁹ The prophets were not merely confronting authorities, systems of government, or legislative bodies, but oppressive belief systems, exploitative

³⁵ Truls Åkerlund, “Preaching as Christian Leadership: The Story, the Sermon, and the Prophetic Imagination,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 86.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

philosophies, and pervasive paradigms. Brueggemann recognized that prophetic ministry is often misunderstood as a politically charged social justice scheme.⁴⁰ He believed the social justice view of prophetic ministry to be short-sighted and ignorant of the transcendent and eternal will of God. Brueggemann clarified that prophetic ministry should recognize God as the initiator of prophetic ministry and actively concerned with more than political matters, including personal holiness, worship, community, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines.⁴¹ Brueggemann understood God's will to be, "outside the totalism of the day and that will not be mocked or countermanded by the practice of that totalism."⁴² He believed God's agenda is not fully known by mankind, but is revealed, if not fully then in part, by the prophetic agent. To limit the prophet's focus to a political concern is to limit God's aim for the prophetic leader, which must not be done.

Brueggemann followed up his celebrated work, *Prophetic Imagination*, with an article titled *Prophetic Leadership: Engagement in Counter-Imagination*, published in 2011.⁴³ Although the title sounds as if it is a leadership study, it is actually a revisiting of the concepts within his previous writing, an application of the current U.S. socio-political context, and a prescription of how to confront American exceptionalism in the modern church. He discussed many issues that modern Christians would find beneficial, but are not relevant to the current study. For that reason, Brueggemann's *Prophetic Leadership*

⁴⁰ Ibid., 127-28.

⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann, "Prophetic Leadership: Engagement in Counter-Imagination," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1.

will not be leveraged for this study. Yet, his article reveals the continued interest in *Prophetic Imagination* and the usefulness of applying his work to modern leadership contexts.

Contemporary Prophetic Leadership

No review of prophetic leadership would be complete without a brief discussion regarding the recent prophetic leadership theory which has arisen within academic literature recently pertaining to Islam. Some within the Muslim world have recognized leadership aspects exhibited by the Prophet Muhammad, and they seek to establish a uniquely Islamic theory for leadership based upon his example. Dian Retnaningdiah et al, outlined four components of leadership gleaned from Muhammad: Vision, Motivation, Strategy, and Honesty.⁴⁴ Nik Maheran Nik Muhammad explained how the theory leverages the trait approach to leadership, but goes beyond, emphasizing the responsibilities of followership, as well as the leader.⁴⁵ Peter Northouse explained the trait approach as a perspective of leadership that recognizes specific traits leaders are born with and sets them apart from the rest of the population that is unfit, or unable to lead.⁴⁶ Robingun Suyud El Syam claimed that Muhammad's prophetic leadership is

⁴⁴ Dian Retnaningdiah, Mellisa Fitri Andriyani Muzakir, Nur Ellyanawati Esty Rahayu, Reno Candra Sangaji, Tomi Agus Triono, and Anas Hidayat, "A Literature Review: Future Prophetic Leadership," *Management Analysis Journal* 12, no. 1 (March 30, 2023): 44.

⁴⁵ Nik Maheran Nik Muhammad, "Prophetic Leadership Model: Conceptualizing a Prophet's Leadership Behaviour, Leader-Follower Mutuality and Altruism to Decision Making Quality," *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 3 (September – December 2015): 93.

⁴⁶ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 9th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2022), 27.

rooted in ethical and authentic leadership, rather than the trait approach.⁴⁷ Islamic prophetic leadership is still in its infancy and will surely develop into a more robust theory within the following decades, especially within Muslim contexts.⁴⁸ For the purpose of the current study, Islamic prophetic leadership will not be leveraged as it is rooted within Muhammad's leadership revealed in the Quran, whereas prophetic leadership for this discussion should be understood within the context of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Yet, Islamic prophetic leadership is beneficial to this current study because it reveals that modern scholars are finding legitimacy in prophetic leadership.

Modern Leadership Theories

Three modern leadership theories have much overlap with prophetic leadership; biblical servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership. Biblical servant leadership is a uniquely Christian leadership theory which leverages the servant leadership paradigm of leadership. Gene Wilkes described Jesus as the model of biblical servant leadership, "*he taught and embodied leadership as service. Jesus was a Servant Leader in every sense of the concept. I would describe him as one who served his mission (in biblical language, 'the will of [his] Father')* and led by serving those he recruited to carry out that mission."⁴⁹ The defining goal of this approach is to serve the follower community while aiming to fulfill God's program. Spiritual leadership is similar, but its

⁴⁷ Robingun Suyud El Syam, "Prophetic Leadership: The Leadership Model of Prophet Muhammad in Political Relation of Social-Ummah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (December 27, 2017): 392-93.

⁴⁸ Muhammad, 93.

⁴⁹ C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 9 (emphasis original).

goal is primarily focused upon obedience to God's will. Henry and Richard Blackaby defined spiritual leadership as "moving people on to God's agenda."⁵⁰ Spiritual leadership recognizes beneficial elements from various different leadership theories, claiming those are redemptive aspects of God's design for leadership. Spiritual leadership is ultimately accountable to God, not stakeholders.⁵¹

Northouse defined transformational leadership as, "the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower."⁵² Transformational leadership is juxtaposed against transactional leadership, which is primarily a contingent relationship between leader and follower. All three of these leadership theories are unique in their own right, but overlap in regards to morality, motivation, and an end focus beyond daily tasks. These three leadership theories will be utilized to ground prophetic leadership within a modern leadership paradigm.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Modern Prophet

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is considered in modern Christian circles as an exemplary leader with varying perspectives of his leadership style. Paul Lehmann dubbed him "the prophet of new Christianity" just a few years after his death.⁵³ Eric Metaxas' popular

⁵⁰ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*, Revised & Expanded (Nashville: B&H), 36.

⁵¹ Blackaby and Blackaby, 38.

⁵² Northouse, 186.

⁵³ Paul L. Lehmann, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 23, no. 1 (Fall 1967): 31.

biography hailed Bonhoeffer as a prophet, going so far as to put the word prophet in the book's title; *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*.⁵⁴ Brent Thomason recognized Bonhoeffer as a prophet of his time and highlighted four areas of his actions that overlap with the biblical prophets: shepherding the flock, serving the community, criticizing social constructs, and modeling sacrifice.⁵⁵ David Cook argued that Bonhoeffer was a prophetic leader utilizing the Beatitudes, Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5 at the Sermon on the Mount, as the standard for prophetic leadership.⁵⁶ The current study differs from Cook's work by grounding prophetic leadership in Brueggemann's work on the biblical prophets, rather than the Sermon on the Mount. Ralph Joglar described Bonhoeffer as a prophetic and sacrificial leader in his recent dissertation, but he too did not provide a description or definition of prophetic leadership.⁵⁷ Dale Braswell compared Bonhoeffer to the prophet Isaiah in his willingness to speak out even though he recognized his own

⁵⁴ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), ix.

⁵⁵ Brent Thomason, "Bonhoeffer's Leadership Through Preaching," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Perspectives on Costly Leadership*, ed. Jay Harley (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 138-39.

⁵⁶ David Cook, "Bonhoeffer as a Prophetic Leader," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Perspectives on Costly Leadership*, ed. Jay Harley (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 94.

⁵⁷ Ralph Joglar, "The Sacrificial Life and Prophetic Leadership of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," [PhD diss., Fordham University, 2023], 7. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sacrificial-life-prophetic-leadership-dietrich/docview/2753686941/se-2>.

failures.⁵⁸ Jennifer Santer recognized Bonhoeffer's theology as prophetic in nature.⁵⁹

Larry Rasmussen stated that he was influenced by Gandhi, whom he considered a modern prophet.⁶⁰ A significant number of scholars since the 1960s, including those mentioned above, have identified Bonhoeffer as a prophetic leader, yet there is no clear consensus regarding the definition of prophetic leadership. The silence surrounding prophetic leadership raises the question: what is prophetic leadership?

Braswell reviewed Bonhoeffer's adaptive leadership skills during his time in the German Resistance.⁶¹ Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson found Bonhoeffer's distinctly robust spiritual life as the motivation for his moral leadership.⁶² Dale Meinecke argued that Bonhoeffer was a relational leader based upon his numerous writings and his numerous interpersonal relationships.⁶³ Michael Haggard viewed Bonhoeffer through the

⁵⁸ Vernon D. Braswell, "Adaptive Leadership Elements in the Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from 1933–1945," [PhD diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2023], 151. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/adaptive-leadership-elements-life-dietrich/docview/2922330516/se-2>.

⁵⁹ Jennifer M. Santer, "Bonhoeffer: A Man of His Times; a Prophet for our Times: An Exploration of Religionless Christianity and the Missio Dei," [PhD diss., University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 2009], ii. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/bonhoeffer-man-his-times-prophet-our-exploration/docview/305159916/se-2>.

⁶⁰ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 213.

⁶¹ Braswell, 1.

⁶² Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 227.

⁶³ Dale Meinecke, "Bonhoeffer as a Leader of Students: His Development into a Relational Leader," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Perspectives on Costly Leadership*, ed. Jay Harley (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 94.

lenses of moral and spiritual leadership based upon his efforts with the Confessing Church and the illegal underground seminary at Finkenwalde.⁶⁴ David Gides discussed Bonhoeffer's part in the Confessing Church and the failure of the church's leadership in its resistance activity.⁶⁵ Experts have established that Bonhoeffer was a leader, and yet all of the leadership theories applied to him fall short of exploring and explaining the fullness of Bonhoeffer's theological foundation for leadership, the recognition of a spiritual calling to reform the Church, his confrontation of the Nazi government, and his creation of a counter-cultural community in Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer himself wrote of these foundational elements of prophetic leadership in his beloved book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

The time is coming when the confession of the living God will incur not only the hatred and the fury of the world, for on the whole it has come to that already, but complete ostracism from 'human society,' as they call it. The Christians will be hounded from place to place, subjected to physical assault, maltreatment and death of every kind.⁶⁶

Bonhoeffer recognized what he was facing, understood the calling, and submitted in

⁶⁴ Michael S. Haggard, "A Bid to Come and Die: The Impact of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Leadership Against the Nazification of the German Protestant Church, 1933 through 1943," [PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015], 138. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/bid-come-die-impact-dietrich-bonhoeffers/docview/1712398777/se-2>.

⁶⁵ David M. Gides, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology of the World as a Key to Understanding His Political Involvement," [PhD diss., Fordham University, 2005], 423. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://library.dbu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/dietrich-bonhoeffers-theology-world-as-key/docview/304998013/se-2>.

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 151.

obedience to the task of prophetic leadership.

Bonhoeffer's Overlap with Biblical Prophetic Practice

The biblical prophets each had unique ministries and contexts, leading and ministering in a variety of ways. Walton and Hill explained Nathan used parables, Ahijah dramatic action, Elijah and Elisha both utilized miracles, Hosea used a living parable, Jeremiah leveraged both a living parable and object lessons, Ezekiel used allegory, object lessons, and living parable, while Zechariah leveraged a vision.⁶⁷ Matthew Henry noted how Jeremiah wrote melancholic prose in Lamentations as a way to stir within his audience a holy sadness and direct their focus upon God.⁶⁸ James E. Smith suggested that Amos used “prophetic oracles, visions, and hymn fragments” to bring God’s message to both Israel and Israel’s enemies.⁶⁹ Arno Clemens Gaebelein noted how Ezekiel received both messages and visions of Jerusalem’s destruction, the punishment of Israel’s enemies, and the future restoration of Jerusalem.⁷⁰ Brueggemann explained how Moses confronted Pharaoh and dismantled the Egyptian oppressive and exploitative political system through the worship of Yahweh and rejection of Pharaoh as divinely authoritative.⁷¹ The biblical prophets were thus uniquely expressive, creatively

⁶⁷Walton and Hill, 254.

⁶⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. IV. – Isaiah to Malachi*, Complete and Unabridged. New Ed. (1712; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 711-12.

⁶⁹ James E. Smith, *The Minor Prophets* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1994), 130.

⁷⁰ Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918), 6.

⁷¹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 6-7.

confrontational, and imaginative in their outspokenness.

Bonhoeffer did not exactly match or mirror a single biblical prophet, yet his aim and resolve remained the same as the biblical prophets. He understood the Church's prophetic ministry would set itself against earthly authorities because the Church values God's standards over earthly standards.⁷² This caused him to be seen as unpatriotic, much like many biblical prophets. He even foreshadowed his own prophetic ministry in his sermon on Jeremiah in London in 1934. He spoke about Jeremiah's reluctance to accept a call to prophetic ministry, God's sovereign calling, and Jeremiah's ultimate submission to God.⁷³ He noted how Jeremiah certainly must have felt a desire to not speak on God's behalf so as to save himself personal grief and abuse, yet, "he simply couldn't; he was compelled and under pressure, as if someone were breathing down his neck and driving him on from one prophecy of truth to the next and from agony to agony."⁷⁴ In preaching on Jeremiah, he revealed the divine motivation that would ultimately cause himself to speak out. His own prophetic ministry was marked by vocal and written criticism of the Nazi ideology, first as it infiltrated the church, and then as it defied God's laws and sought to exterminate the Jewish people. Bonhoeffer did not model his life after a single biblical prophet, yet the prophetic paradigm remains imprinted upon his life, death, and legacy.

⁷² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Volume 1*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 15.

⁷³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Volume 2*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 117.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Justification of Study

Bonhoeffer's leadership can be analyzed utilizing a number of different leadership theories. Furthermore, he has been studied through the lens of leadership and through the lens of theology, offering an array of beneficial vantage points to this historic leader. Arguments can be made using modern leadership theories that he was an adaptive leader, servant leader, and even a transformational leader. An argument can also be made that he utilized biblical principles to lead. What scholars have neglected, however, is how Bonhoeffer leveraged the leadership style of the biblical prophets, combining both theological and leadership principles in his leadership practice.

Joglar's recent dissertation purported to recognize Bonhoeffer as a prophetic leader, and yet did not provide a definition or description of prophetic leaders.⁷⁵ His study was focused upon an ecclesiological view of *Discipleship* and *Life Together* with an aim to develop a prescription for educating new pastors in church life and worldview. Metaxas' popular biography labeled Bonhoeffer a prophet.⁷⁶ Still, no definition of a prophetic leader, or how Bonhoeffer fulfilled the role of a prophet, has been provided. Metaxas' label of prophet seems to carry the connotation of the foretelling aspect of a prophet due to Bonhoeffer's foresight regarding how Hitler's rhetoric would poison the German culture.⁷⁷ While Bonhoeffer is often understood to be a modern prophet, especially from a leadership perspective, there is no adequate explanation of what a prophetic leader is or why Bonhoeffer should be recognized as such.

⁷⁵ Joglar, 99.

⁷⁶ Metaxas, ix.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 138-39.

The prophets in the Scriptures led in a unique manner.⁷⁸ They fostered counter-cultural communities while they confronted errant, amoral, and oppressive regimes utilizing Judeo-Christian values.⁷⁹ Modern leadership theories have focused upon the relationship of leaders and followers to achieve a common goal, while remaining rather silent regarding the philosophical and moral paradigms of the leaders.⁸⁰ The prophetic leader, while steadfast in his duties to maintain relationships with the follower community, is also concerned with confronting errant government based in their Judeo-Christian value system, recognizing God as the ultimate authority.⁸¹ Bonhoeffer, as a German pastor and theologian, held to this Judeo-Christian worldview, and utilized a prophetic paradigm in a unique manner. The gap in both Bonhoeffer and leadership studies will be the focus of the current study.

This study will leverage the work of Brueggemann and other theological works to provide the Scriptural basis of a prophetic leader, while utilizing modern academic leadership literature to reveal the potential overlaps and gaps of prophetic leadership. This new and emergent leadership theory will be a multidisciplinary venture, grounded in the theological and philosophical Judeo-Christian worldview and moral system, while also leaning on transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, biblical servant leadership, and spiritual leadership theories. Bonhoeffer's *Ethics, Life Together*, and

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁰ Northouse, 6-7.

⁸¹ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 437.

some of his prison letters will be used to explain his worldview, while his public actions, such as leading Finkenwalde and activity in the Confessing Church, will be used to exemplify how his worldview was practical and resulted in specific prophetic activity.

Chapter Summaries

The current study will utilize six chapters to outline the argument that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a prophetic leader and discuss the various elements of prophetic leadership. Chapter one will review the literature of biblical prophets, modern prophetic leaders, Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination*, contemporary prophetic leadership, and the various leadership theories attributed to Bonhoeffer. The gap in both Bonhoeffer and leadership theories will be revealed and the need for a new, distinctly Judeo-Christian leadership theory, called prophetic leadership, will be raised to fill this gap.

Chapter two will discuss the historical context of Bonhoeffer from the contexts of a dissenting, yet patriotic, German citizen under Nazi rule, an outspoken theologian within Lutheran Germany, and a resisting Confessing Pastor within an overwhelmingly Nazified culture framed by the *Reichskirche*, the official Church of the Third Reich. Bonhoeffer will be analyzed as a faithful Christian who recognized God as the ultimate authority, a loving and tender pastoral director of the Finkenwalde community, and as a respectful, yet strong, outspoken voice against the amoral Nazi government evidenced in his early radio address, signing of the Barman Declaration, and other vocal acts of resistance. A definition for prophetic leadership will be provided.

Utilizing Brueggemann's concepts surrounding how biblical prophets led, the third chapter will begin with an analysis of prophetic leadership exemplified by

Bonhoeffer. Recognizing God, YHWH, as the ultimate authority and foundation for all of life, including leadership, is the first characteristic of prophetic leadership.⁸² A review of the theology of Deuteronomy 6:4, *The Shema*, will be discussed as critical to prophetic leadership. This will be juxtaposed with many modern leadership theories' pragmatic grounding, theological agnosticism, and moral relativism in order to reveal the categorical difference between the theologically grounded prophetic leadership and the primarily utilitarian nature of other leadership theories.⁸³ The study will review how Bonhoeffer grounded his life and work in this theological truth, which influenced and formed his leadership practice.⁸⁴

Chapter four will discuss another element of prophetic leadership, which is creating a counter-cultural community.⁸⁵ The study will note how prophetic leaders develop communities that hold to a differing worldview than the dominant worldview. The biblical examples of Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus will be used to establish the biblical example of prophets and supported by Brueggemann's work.⁸⁶ Once this is established, Bonhoeffer's example of the illegal seminary at Finkenwalde will be considered as an example of this counter-cultural community within Nazi Germany.

Chapter five will analyze the final characteristic of prophetic leadership, which is

⁸² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 6.

⁸³ Northouse, 330.

⁸⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1955), 337-39.

⁸⁵ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

how the biblical prophets respectfully confronted government officials when they were in error.⁸⁷ The study will articulate the difference between prophetic confrontation and modern popular forms of confrontation, such as picketing, protests, and rioting. Furthermore, the study will reveal how the biblical prophets bypassed the political process, not looking to legislate morality and justice, but looking to God to bring about ultimate morality and justice. Bonhoeffer's many moments of confronting the Nazis will then be reviewed, including his radio address on the Führer Principle, his essay *The Church and the Jewish Question*, and the memorandum to Hitler regarding multiple grievances of the Church.

Chapter six will synthesize elements of previous chapters, analyzing the elements of prophetic leadership throughout the dissertation to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer exemplified the prophetic leadership style. This chapter will clearly demonstrate how Bonhoeffer fulfills prophetic leadership, meeting the three characteristics of prophetic leadership. He exemplifies a successful prophetic leader, not because he led a successful campaign or amassed a large following, but because he was obedient to YHWH. Prophetic leadership will be established as a distinctly Judeo-Christian leadership theory, measured not by normative metric systems, but by biblical standards. A prescription will then be shared for how prophetic leadership should be utilized in a modern context. The chapter will conclude with suggested future areas of potential research in prophetic leadership.

Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life is the exemplar of prophetic leadership due to the

⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 40.

context in which he lived, his unique gifting, his biblically sound teaching, and his faithful practice. His example provides a helpful case study for prophetic leadership in the modern world, still grounded in the Judeo-Christian faith but living within a post-Christian context. Modern leadership theories have failed to fully encapsulate his leadership style, which can most accurately be understood as prophetic leadership. This study will identify Bonhoeffer as the paragon for prophetic leadership and utilize his example as a guide for future would-be prophetic leaders.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Introduction

Bonhoeffer and his fellow Germans found themselves in a difficult position after World War I. The country was in crises and on the verge of collapse.¹ Following the devastating events of the Great War, Germany sought to reassemble and recalibrate under the Weimar Republic.² This was practically impossible due to the draconian nature of the Treaty of Versailles, which was intended to punish the Germans for their actions.³ Tumult and fear aided in the rising nationalistic sentiment as the Great Depression further crippled the country, setting the stage perfectly for an evil empire to arise and lash out against its perceived enemies.⁴ There were a number of cultural, political, and religious factors involved in the turn of events leading to the rise of National Socialism in Germany and what became known as World War II. These factors are crucial to Bonhoeffer's context as a prophetic leader.

Adolf Hitler was commonly perceived as offensive and repulsive in interpersonal situations early in his political career, causing many people to walk away confused and

¹ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: a History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 57.

³ Bharat H. Desai and Jay B. Desai, "On the Century of Peacemaking at the 1919 Treaty of Versailles: Looking Back to Look Ahead," *International Studies* 57, no. 3 (July 26, 2020): 206.

⁴ Kenneth C. Barnes, *Nazism, Liberalism & Christianity: Protestant Social Thought in Germany & Great Britain, 1925-1937* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 1.

upset.⁵ He came from humble Austrian beginnings, lacking political clout, strong education, or robust finances. He was one of the most unlikely candidates to become the leader of Germany. However, he utilized the myth of Aryan racial superiority and leveraged it as an intolerant and exclusive religion, forging a new nationalistic identity of excellency and superiority for Germany.⁶ With the help of the small, yet politically savvy, National Socialist party, he rose to power by using strong imagery in uniform and spreading the propaganda that all of Germany's problems were the fault of the Jews. He used these tools to gain support and rally Germans to adopt his end goals.⁷

The Germans had inherited a long history of Protestantism, thanks to the work of Martin Luther, among others.⁸ Hitler's ideology was categorically opposed to Lutheran theology, yet most Protestants embraced the nationalistic beliefs and scrubbed their theology of the Jewish traditions in order to accommodate this new hateful philosophy, with little resistance.⁹ Their syncretistic exercise resulted in the formation of the *Reichskirche*, or in English, the Reich Church, headed by Ludwig Müller as *Reichsbischof*, Reich Bishop, with the help of the German Christians, an antisemitic

⁵ Eugene Davidson, *The Making of Adolf Hitler: the Birth and Rise of Nazism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 2.

⁶ Carl-Martin Edsman, "The Myth of the State, or the state's Religious Legitimation," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 6 (January 1, 1972): 170.

⁷ Northouse, 358.

⁸ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

⁹ Rainer Bucher, Rebecca Pohl, and Michael Hoelzl, *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011), 10.

religiopolitical organization.¹⁰ The resulting religious institution, practice, and belief system were diametrically opposed to Lutheran theology. This no longer mattered to many Christians as the Nazi mythos had replaced the Lutheran Protestant Christianity.¹¹ By combining nationalistic and religious fervor with Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, Hitler was able to rise to power despite all his leadership faults.¹² As many in the church gave in to this evil ideology, however some, like Bonhoeffer, stood against it, using strong leadership principles to guide their actions.

This chapter will review the context of the rise of the Third Reich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in order to provide a clearer perspective of his prophetic leadership as a devout Christian, dissenting German, bold theologian, and tender Pastor. As a prophetic leader, Bonhoeffer developed and nurtured a counter-cultural biblical community of followers with God as the ultimate authority yet he respectfully, albeit assertively, confronted the amoral earthly authority which laid claim over the community. Each biblical prophet found themselves within an inimitable context; whether it be the political regime, follower community, or the prophet's background, they all varied from each other. Yet, as previously established, they all gained credibility and prestige similarly based upon their responses to the events within their context. Thus, this chapter's analysis is essential to understanding Bonhoeffer's prophetic leadership.

¹⁰ Edwin Robertson, *The Persistent Voice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Wiltshire: Eagle, 1987), 83.

¹¹ Edsman, 170.

¹² *Ibid.*, 177.

Antecedent Events

No two leadership scenarios are the same, but it is important to understand the three main factors: leader, followers, and context.¹³ Each of these variables uniquely interact in a specific way to alter the scenario.¹⁴ One must first understand the events prior to Hitler's rise to power, the mindset of the German people, and the untamable personality of Hitler in order to fully grasp the situation. This study cannot cover all of the antecedent events, so special focus will be given to the most pertinent events to Bonhoeffer's prophetic leadership context from a high-level perspective. In a similar fashion, not all of the leaders and followers of the era can be mentioned, so a similar cursory review will be provided to give enough information to explore the various ideologies, leadership practices, and failures which worked together during the Third Reich's takeover of the German Protestant Church and how Bonhoeffer fit in, and responded to, the scenario, resulting in such a profound example of prophetic leadership.

Treaty of Versailles

The victorious Allies designed the Treaty of Versailles to be a harsh punishment to Germany due to the Kaiser's malfeasance during the Great War.¹⁵ The Treaty required the Germans to pay reparations, give up a number of territories, and accept full

¹³ Steven J. DeKrey, David M. Messick, and Charles Anderson, *Leadership Experiences in Asia: Insight and Inspiration from 20 Innovators* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia), 2007), 2.

¹⁴ Gary A. Yukl, William L. Gardner, III, Nishant Uppal, *Leadership in Organizations*. 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2020), 11.

¹⁵ Ruth B. Henig, *The Weimar Republic, 1919-1933* (London: Routledge, 2002), 31.

responsibility of the war, resulting in wide-spread emotional and financial devastation.¹⁶ Many German citizens were astonished that the treaty would be signed and held long-standing grudges against those involved in the signing.¹⁷ The generally despised treaty was signed on June 28, 1919, causing devastation to the German economy and infrastructure.¹⁸ A growing nationalistic sentiment of ‘us against the world’ began to grow within the recovering country. Sebastian Haffner suggested that many sought “liberation from democracy.”¹⁹ The political right hated those involved in the signing of the treaty and anyone who supported it, considering them enemies of Germany.²⁰ The growing tension prompted an urge to find a common enemy, not yet fully articulated, in anyone who did not support the general German sentiment.

Political Instability, Economic Insecurity, and Violence

Germany remained unstable for a number of years which, in turn, led to the development of polarized political groups. Communist activists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were assassinated on January 15, 1919 for their revolutionary ties.²¹ An

¹⁶Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Fall of Berlin* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 17.

¹⁷ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, William Glen-Deopel, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Fountain Books, 1970), 90.

¹⁸ Henig, 33.

¹⁹ Haffner, Sebastian. *From Bismarck to Hitler: A Review* (Munich: Droemer Knaur Publishing Group, 2015), 237.

²⁰ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 31.

²¹ Katerina Clark, “Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution”,” *Studies in East European Thought* 70, no. 2-3 (July 10, 2018): 153.

attempted coup was led by Wolfgang Kapp on March 13, 1920, which was called the Kapp *Putsch*, and was unsuccessful.²² Three months before the *Reichstag* elections, a workers' strike was stifled, but left 1,000 workers dead and further national dissolution.²³ Matthias Erzberger, the Minister of Finance, was assassinated on August 26, 1921 by right-wing terrorists.²⁴ Walter Rathenau, the Foreign Minister, who was a successful Jewish businessman as well, was assassinated by a far-right extremist group on June 24, 1922.²⁵

The political turmoil would continue to churn in the following year. In January 1923, Germany failed to fulfill their reparations, particularly the coal requirement, amidst hyper-inflation.²⁶ November of 1923 saw Hitler's failed *Putsch* in Munich, where he was arrested the next morning.²⁷ At the same time, there were Communist rumblings in Saxony, revealing unrest on both extremes of the political spectrum. After a few years of rather stable times, Black Thursday occurred on October 24, 1929, initiating the Great Depression with a global impact.²⁸ Deathly demonstrations continued throughout this

²² Alan Sharp, "The Enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919-1923," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 426.

²³ Henig, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵ Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 19.

²⁶ Henig, 46.

²⁷ Bethge, 32.

²⁸ Henig, 15.

time period.²⁹

As the social and economic impacts hit Germany, Hitler's Nazi party was on the rise, presenting itself as the perfect antidote to the global influence upon their great nation. Unemployment, political extremism, and the plurality of political parties all worked together to hinder the effectiveness of parliament, resulting in overall dissatisfaction with the government of the Weimar Republic.³⁰ Chancellor Herman Mueller resigned in March 1930 and was replaced by Heinrich Bruening who then pressured Hindenburg to invoke Article 48 as a way of quickly and efficiently stabilizing the government.³¹ Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution allowed decisions to be made without the *Reichstag's* legislative process in cases of emergency that required immediate action.³² Bruening lost the confidence of the various political parties in the parliamentary system due to the overreaching power play.³³ The *Reichstag* was dissolved, creating a power vacuum which made the way for a more authoritarian government to quickly take its place.³⁴

²⁹ Bethge, 196.

³⁰ Sibylle H. Lehmann, "Chaotic Shop-Talk or Efficient Parliament? The Reichstag, the Parties, and the Problem of Governmental Instability in the Weimar Republic," *Public Choice* 144, no. 1-2 (July 2010): 102.

³¹ Shirer, 137.

³² Henig, 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴ James K. Pollock, "The German Reichstag Elections of 1930," *American Political Science Review* 24, no. 4 (November 1930): 989.

Hitler's National Socialist party gained a 664% increase in parliamentary representation, from 12 seats to a startling 107 seats, in the 1930 *Reichstag* elections.³⁵ Hitler ramped up his public speaking, party campaign events, and propaganda efforts in order to bolster the rapid support he was gaining.³⁶ Support for the National Socialists rose as unemployment spread across Germany.³⁷ Shirer noted Hitler's political claims, "[h]e would make Germany strong again, refuse to pay reparations, repudiate the Versailles Treaty, stamp out corruption, bring the money barons to heel (especially if they were Jews) and see to it that every German had a job and bread."³⁸ At the same time, communist political strength was growing, as was alleged communist violence, causing the deaths of 38 Nazis at the hands of Communists in 1932.³⁹ The Nazis were guilty of violence as well, but they twisted the narrative to make themselves appear innocent and the Communists as the aggressors.⁴⁰ After the long and unsettling years following the Great War, Germany was starved for leaders who would provide resolution to their

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 993.

³⁶ Peter Selb and Simon Munzert, "Examining a Most Likely Case for Strong Campaign Effects: Hitler's Speeches and the Rise of the Nazi Party, 1927-1933," *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 4 (August 7, 2018): 1063.

³⁷ Bruno S. Frey and Hannelore Weck, "A Statistical Study of the Effect of the Great Depression on Elections: The Weimar Republic, 1930-1933," *Political Behavior* 5, no. 4 (1983): 409.

³⁸ Shirer, 137-38.

³⁹ Keegan, 35.

⁴⁰ Thomas Childers and Eugene Weiss, "Voters and Violence: Political Violence and the Limits of National Socialist Mass Mobilization," *German Studies Review* 13, no. 3 (October 1990): 481.

troubles, with little regard for how they would lead.⁴¹

Hitler Becomes Chancellor

Over the next few years, the general populace became more radicalized as the nation was eager for some sort of political solution.⁴² During this time, Hitler continued to gain support among many strong financial and political influencers whom he then exploited for his own political and personal gain. The *Reichstag* was tumultuous and unproductive, with no agreement or leading coalition, causing an air of confusion, frustration, and political turmoil, all working in Hitler's favor.⁴³ On January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg made the fateful appointment of Hitler to chancellorship in the expectation that he could control the popular figure.⁴⁴ Hitler then used the *Führerprinzip*, the Führer principle, a concept that the Führer's words have authority above and beyond the law and any other organization, to push through immediate actions to Nazify Germany.⁴⁵

Equipped with new authoritative power, Hitler called for the official dissolution of the Weimar Republic and the installation of the Third Reich.⁴⁶ It has been argued that the years following World War I saw a general degradation of the political climate, creating a polarized populace with an essentially powerless government, allowing Hitler

⁴¹ Keegan, 31.

⁴² Davidson, 314.

⁴³ Shirer, 182.

⁴⁴ Keegan, 35.

⁴⁵ Marsh, 159.

⁴⁶ Henig, 75.

to exploit the scenario to gain control of the country.⁴⁷ This interpretation glosses over the resistance he experienced coming to power, but if Hitler had not come to power, there were other extremist organizations who were poised to step up similarly. Shirer lamented, “In this way, by way of the backdoor, by means of a shabby political deal with the old-school reactionaries he privately detested, the former tramp from Vienna, the derelict of the First World War, the violent revolutionary, became Chancellor of the great nation.”⁴⁸

The *Reichstag* Fire

Once instated, Hitler wasted no time in pushing through his drastic and hateful agenda. Goering, under Hitler’s guidance, led the Gestapo (short for the German *Geheime Staatspolizei*) designed as a secretive police power under Nazi control.⁴⁹ Bethge noted, “[t]hese extraordinary conditions of chaos reached their height with the *Reichstag* fire, which also marked the beginning of Hitler’s radical reign of terror and his correspondingly drastic legislation.”⁵⁰ A fire broke out at the *Reichstag* building on February 27, 1933 and on February 28 an overreaching act, the Decree for the Protection of People and State Against Communist Acts of Violence Endangering the State, was passed to take away many of the citizens’ rights, obtain stronger governmental control, and institute the death penalty for anyone breaking these new rules.⁵¹ The draconian

⁴⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁸ Shirer, 184.

⁴⁹ Michael E. Tigar and John Mage, “The Reichstag Fire Trial, 1933-2008: The Production of Law and History,” *Monthly Review* 60, no. 10 (March 1, 2009): 27.

⁵⁰ Bethge, 196.

⁵¹ Tigar and Mage, 27-28.

measures were ostensibly in reaction to the terroristic *Reichstag* fire and necessary to protect against a Communist uprising.

The Enabling Act

The Nazis continued their consolidation of power disguised through the legal process by passing the Enabling Act of 1933.⁵² This act, titled the Removal of Distress from People and State, allowed Hitler the ability to pass laws without approval which were against the Constitution.⁵³ This law set the stage for the Third Reich to morph into a dictatorship, bypassing any need for the *Reichstag*, allowing Hitler to create any new law without legislation even if it was unconstitutional.⁵⁴ Goering encouraged Hitler to leverage the decree of February 28 to arrest any dissenting voice in order to pass the Enabling Act.⁵⁵ Goering successfully paved the way for Hitler to march into his tyrannical leadership by arresting the Communists and blocking the Social Democrats from voting against the act.⁵⁶ Hitler now had ultimate legislative power to build the Third Reich in his own image, including Bonhoeffer's beloved Protestant Church.⁵⁷

⁵² Shirer, 196.

⁵³ Wolfgang Gerlach and Victoria Barnett, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 12.

⁵⁴ Danny Orbach, *The Plots against Hitler* (New York: Eamon Dolan Books, 2016), 5-6.

⁵⁵ Shirer, 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 196-99.

⁵⁷ Christiane Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 36-37.

The Aryan Paragraph

The Aryan Paragraph was signed into law on April 7, 1933 banning all non-Aryans from public service, including positions in the church.⁵⁸ The goal was to remove Jews from all positions of authority and begin to introduce the general public to the Nazis legislative attacks against the Jewish population. Thus, Protestant Churches experienced a drastic change:

German Christians enjoyed open support from Nazi party and state organs. In the summer of 1933, they dominated the process that unified Germany's twenty-nine regional Protestant churches into the Protestant Reich church; they imposed one of their own, former naval chaplain Ludwig Müller, as Germany's first and last Protestant Reich bishop. German Christians gained control of ecclesiastical government in all but three regions – Bavaria, Hanover, and Württemberg.⁵⁹

This seizure of authority in the church was in-line with Hitler's expressed plan to take control of Christianity, just a few months earlier on February 1, 1933.⁶⁰ He was now positioned to ensure all actions and teachings, including doctrine, interpretations, and sermons were under his authority. The Protestant church, which had enjoyed autonomy since Martin Luther's work in Germany, was now overtaken by the Nazis and renamed the *Reichskirche*.⁶¹ Hitler had successfully reconstructed Germany into an authoritative dictatorship with all spheres of life under his control in just a matter of months.

⁵⁸ Marsh, 162.

⁵⁹ Bergen, 15.

⁶⁰ Bethge, 196.

⁶¹ Marsh, 162.

Antisemitic Theology and Church Domination

Hitler expected every institution to submit to his hateful worldview, including the church's actions and mission.⁶² He did not believe in any kind of orthodox Christianity, but recognized the ability to manipulate and co-opt the religion for his political benefit.⁶³ The loyal Nazi, Ludwig Müller, acting under the new authority as *Reichsbischof*, took the reins of the National German Protestant Church, and drove it into Nazi theological territory.⁶⁴ The German Christians, who maintained the backing of Müller, and thus the Nazi government, adhered to a disturbingly distorted theological system where the goal was to attain a pure Aryan church.⁶⁵ Martin Luther's shameful antisemitic writings were used to promote their anti-Jewish theology, specifically his essay *On The Jews And their Lies*.⁶⁶ While Hitler, and Nazism in general, were paganistic, the German Christians believed their syncretistic efforts to blend Christianity with Nazism was an evangelistic movement, and thus were motivated to find common grounds in a mutually beneficial effort.⁶⁷ The German Christians and the Nazis found a shared goal in the exclusively Aryan church. Similarly, the Catholic Church in Germany was held under Nazi authority

⁶² Tietz, 36-37.

⁶³ Bucher, et al, 10.

⁶⁴ Bergen, 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁷ Marsh, 162.

with the signing of the Reich Concordat in 1933.⁶⁸ This treaty should have eased relations between the Reich and the Catholic Church, instead the Church was crippled and abused, many priests were imprisoned, schools and programs shut down, and communications silenced.

The Nazis began to hang Christianity with its own noose by leveraging a hermeneutically erroneous Pauline teaching in order to support submission to Nazi authority.⁶⁹ The Apostle Paul, in Romans 13 wrote, “[e]very person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”⁷⁰ This Scripture does not teach a blind nor willful submission to amoral governmental acts, but to submit in general to earthly authorities.⁷¹ Wayne Grudem explained the limits of this submission: “God requires his people to disobey the civil government if obedience would mean directly disobeying God.”⁷² Nazi theologian, Emanuel Hirsch, did not confine the obedience of Romans 13, instead asserted full obedience to the government was a requirement of all Christians.⁷³ John Stroup noted, “[a]fter 1933 Hirsch used his doctrine of hidden sovereignty to emphasize the benevolent

⁶⁸ John Brown Mason, “Christianity Faces Caesarism,” *The Sewanee Review* 47, no. 4 (October - December 1939): 463-64.

⁶⁹ Jack Goodyear, “Bonhoeffer and the Führer Principle,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Perspectives on Costly Leadership*, ed. Jay Harley (Nashville: Randall House, 2021), 76.

⁷⁰ Romans 13:1 (New American Standard Bible).

⁷¹ Grudem, 437.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ John Stroup, “Political Theology and Secularization Theory in Germany, 1918-1939: Emanuel Hirsch as a Phenomenon of His Time,” *Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 3 (December 31, 1987): 350.

continuity between God's plan and the work of Hitler."⁷⁴ Nazi theology declared Hitler as a servant of God, uniting the Führer with the divine, and recognized God's revelation through the Volk, the Germanic people.⁷⁵

Nazi theology divorced Jesus from his Jewish heritage and hailed him as the most supreme Aryan.⁷⁶ Nazi scholars founded the Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life in order to ground these new Nazi theological concepts in a pseudo-academic and syncretistic endeavor.⁷⁷ This new theological system placed the protection of German Volk above the ethical requirement to not murder, deeming murder less important than protecting Aryans.⁷⁸ Luther's antisemitic writings were used to argue that Jesus' mission was to attack Judaism.⁷⁹ Thus, to murder the Jews was the highest goal of Christianity in order to protect the purity of the Aryan race. Bergen explained, "[u]ltimately the German Christians preached Christianity as the polar opposite of Judaism, Jesus as the arch-antisemite, and the cross as the symbol of war against Jews."⁸⁰ The Old Testament was removed from the biblical canon as it could not be detached from its Jewishness, while the New Testament was redefined in an

⁷⁴ Ibid., 351.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 352.

⁷⁶ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 53.

⁷⁷ Ryan Buesnel, "The Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics in the Nazi Bible," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35, no. 3 (August 2022): 457–58.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 460.

⁷⁹ Bergen, 161-62.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 143.

antisemitic light.⁸¹ Although they had no thorough theological system, and they were perplexingly illogical at best, the German Christians found unity in their undying devotion to nationalism above and beyond Christianity.⁸² They successfully deJudaized the *Reichskirche* from its biblically Jewish roots, both New and Old Testaments, as well as its overall liturgical practice and leadership.⁸³ The *Reichskirche* became ‘Christian’ in name only. It was a categorically different religion than its orthodox roots.

Bonhoeffer’s Response

Bonhoeffer was born into a large, astute, and affluent family, well connected socially and politically, lovers of music, and academically respected.⁸⁴ He had a deep and abiding love for Germany, desiring for peace in the Fatherland, and in Europe.⁸⁵ In a sermon on Germany’s National Memorial Day, February 21, 1932, speaking of the German soldiers who gave their lives in World War I, he boldly preached, “one can and should love one’s fatherland unto death.”⁸⁶ He was not against a natural pride and desire to sacrifice for one’s country, but of the bastardization and manipulation of this emotion. His father, Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer, was vocal early on about his distrust for Hitler and

⁸¹ Heschel, 26

⁸² Robertson, 82.

⁸³ Bergen, 167.

⁸⁴ Bethge, 4-11.

⁸⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1928-1936, from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Volume 1*, trans. John Bowden, ed. Edwin Hanton Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 79-80.

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 15.

unease with the Third Reich.⁸⁷ The Bonhoeffer home was a place to congregate for music and intellectual conversations with friends and family.⁸⁸ As the Nazi regime gained momentum in Germany, these gatherings became a place to discuss the troubling political climate, and eventually the musical nights were a cover for conspiracy and treason.⁸⁹

Commitment to God's Ultimate Authority

Bonhoeffer maintained a strong commitment to the ultimate authority of God which no earthly authority could subvert. He boldly defended “the absolute, direct, and unaccountable authority of Jesus.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, he recognized the theological ordering of authority resting in God who then creates and establishes earthly authority. He explained in his *Ethics*, “the being of government lies beyond its earthly coming into being; for government is an institution of God, not in its coming into being but in its being.”⁹¹ He explained further, “[e]ven when the government incurs guilt and is open to ethical attack, its power is from God. It has its existence solely in Jesus Christ, and through the cross of Christ it is reconciled with God.”⁹² As an earthly institution, the state is bound up within the same sinful world as humans, and thus is in need of

⁸⁷ Robertson, 78.

⁸⁸ Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a Family* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), 13.

⁸⁹ Elisabeth Sifton and Fritz Stern, *No Ordinary Men: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans Von Dohnyanyi, Resisters Against Hitler in Church and State* (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), 8.

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 57.

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 334.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 335.

reconciliation to God as much as humans. Bonhoeffer's paradigm of authority undergirded his protest and empowered him to lead those believers under his own authority. His understanding of a rightly ordered authority will be studied further in chapter three.

Vocal Criticism

In early 1933, Bonhoeffer took to the radio waves to criticize the *Führerprinzip*, which was gaining popularity amongst young and excitable Germans.⁹³ This popular idea leveraged by the Nazis taught that authoritative power rested upon the Führer, or the leader, and supported a totalitarian, top-down style of government. This was an offensive and worrisome concept for the theologian, which he opposed from a theological perspective, putting Christ's authority above all, even the would-be misleader.⁹⁴ *Reichsbischof* Müller, acting in alignment with the *Führerprinzip*, extended the Aryan Paragraph to the *Reichskirche*, which instituted the defrocking of Jewish clergy.⁹⁵ The Nazi overreach into the church troubled Bonhoeffer because it was not only a violation of the Church's authority, but it was a violation of his theological convictions of recognizing Jews as brothers and as God's chosen people.⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer boldly denounced the Nazi invasion into the Church and theology.⁹⁷

⁹³ Marsh, 159.

⁹⁴ Bethge, 194.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁹⁷ Marsh, 168.

The Nazi incursion on German Christendom did not go unchallenged. A remnant of the orthodoxy recognized the heinous abomination occurring in their midst and sought to confront it.⁹⁸ The Pastor's Emergency League was created by Martin Niemöller in order to assemble dissenting pastors into an organized resistance against the *Reichskirche* and its Nazi influence.⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer was an early member of the Pastor's Emergency League, and one of its most outspoken members.¹⁰⁰ This ecumenical movement produced the Barmen Declaration, authored primarily by the respected theologian Karl Barth, as a definitive creedal statement for a biblical Christianity free from Nazi influence.¹⁰¹ In it, they stated that the church was under the authority of Christ and the Scriptures, not the state; they renounced the Nazis' antisemitic philosophy, and furthermore, they renounced the *Reichskirche*.¹⁰² The Barmen Declaration birthed the Confessing Church, which demanded to be recognized as a separate organization and not an opposing group of pastors within Müller's association.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Jørgen Glenthøj, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Way Between Resistance and Submission," in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, ed. A. J. Klassen, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 173.

⁹⁹ Bergen, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Haggard, *Pastors Against Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Church Struggle in Nazi Germany* (New York: 5 Fold Media, LLC, 2018), 78-79.

¹⁰¹ Michael Weinrich, "God's Free Grace and the Freedom of the Church: Theological Aspects of the Barmen Declaration," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 404-5.

¹⁰² Heschel, 4.

¹⁰³ Bethge, 297.

Bonhoeffer felt as though the Confessing Church's stance was not strong enough.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, he supported the confessional nature of the other members, but he was convinced more direct action should be taken against Hitler's hateful regime in regards to its treatment of the Jews. As Goodyear noted, "Bonhoeffer lamented the fact that no official word of protest concerning this violence came from any of the Protestant Churches in Germany."¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer co-authored a letter to Hitler himself, noting all of the wrongs Germany was participating in, overtly revealing his own anti-Nazi sentiment.¹⁰⁶ He also submitted grievances to Hanns Kerrl, the Minister of Church Affairs, who took over the management of church relations after Müller left.¹⁰⁷ His vocal criticism was grounded in his theological conviction that the government was created by God, and thus subservient to divine authority. As a minister of the Church, he had divine authority to prophetically confront the government. His bold prophetic confrontation will be studied in more detail in chapter five.

Finkenwalde – A Prophetic Community

In 1935 Bonhoeffer started the illegal seminary at Finkenwalde as a way of continuing to resist the Nazi movement with his theological expertise.¹⁰⁸ The short-lived seminary was an experiment in Protestant monastic life, where everyone, student and

¹⁰⁴ Marsh, 271.

¹⁰⁵ Goodyear, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Bethge, 443-44.

¹⁰⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, trans. Reginald Fuller, Frank Clark, and John Bowden, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1953), 65.

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, 110-12.

professor alike, lived life together in communal worship. It was a beautifully designed way of living that went beyond purely pedantic foci and sought to bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The Confessing Church had need of theological training for their pastors and Bonhoeffer was not only qualified to teach, but was poised to lead this community against the grain of Nazism.¹⁰⁹ This community of pastors living, studying, worshipping, and communing together was not a retreat from the Nazi infiltration, but rather a preparation to rejoin the fight against National Socialism and strengthen the Church which had been greatly abused by the State.¹¹⁰

Finkenwalde was Bonhoeffer's attempt to put into practice his new ideas concerning a more effective theological and spiritual schooling. He had become disenfranchised by the sterile, overly pedagogical academic system and sought to bring the spiritual disciplines into the seminary environment.¹¹¹ The facilities were small, sparsely furnished, and modest.¹¹² There were daily lectures, communal devotions, worship services, and games.¹¹³ His aim was not only to focus upon academic theology, but to teach theology in practice with community, interpersonal relationships, private

¹⁰⁹ Marsh, 226.

¹¹⁰ Katie Day, "Pedagogical Values in Teaching Public Theology: Resonances from an Underground Seminary," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 25, no. 2-3 (June-September 2022): 51.

¹¹¹ David I. Smith, "Teaching Bonhoeffer: Pedagogy and Peripheral Practices," *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 21, no. 2 (July 2017): 147-48.

¹¹² Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, "Finkenwalde," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Fontana Books, 1973), 107.

¹¹³ D. Smith, 148.

meditation, and intentionality. He was mocked and disregarded by those who did not understand, nor appreciate, the monastic Protestant community at Finkenwalde.¹¹⁴ Karl Barth wrote to Bonhoeffer concerned with the strong emphasis on the unique practice, particularly the, “smell...of monastic eros and pathos, for which I for now have neither the appropriate sensorium nor any real use.”¹¹⁵ The community at this seminary operated differently than those in the surrounding Germany, and this was a point of confusion and frustration for many.

The young seminarians were trained for a short two-year period at the crossroads of monasticism and theology, both practical and theoretical. Their worldviews were reshaped together through the happy and hard times, resulting in a stronger and deeper community of believers.¹¹⁶ Word of the clandestine community spread and Nazi goons began intimidating many of the seminarians due to the counter-cultural nature of the beliefs and practices of Finkenwalde.¹¹⁷ The Gestapo closed the seminary in the Fall of 1937, bringing an end to Bonhoeffer’s theological resistance project, leaving him no authority to continue practicing resistance on a strictly theological basis.¹¹⁸ This inspiring prophetic community will be studied in greater depth in chapter four.

¹¹⁴ Wilhelm Rott, “Something Always Occurred to Him,” in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, NY: Fontana Books, 1973), 132.

¹¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde, 1935-1937*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, ed. H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brouck (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 268.

¹¹⁶ Kelly and Nelson, 146.

¹¹⁷ Bethge, 487-88.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

The Death of a Prophetic Leader

When Jews started being deported, Bonhoeffer's conscience would no longer let him just speak out against Hitler; he actively joined in a conspiracy to overthrow Hitler and his Third Reich.¹¹⁹ The conspiracy evolved into an assassination attempt upon Hitler's life.¹²⁰ While others were more concerned with the preservation of church life, Bonhoeffer was concerned with the preservation of human life. Due to his involvement in the conspiracy, he was arrested on April 5, 1943.¹²¹ The Gestapo did not originally know of his involvement with the assassination conspiracy, only that he was involved in a conspiracy to subvert Nazi authority in multiple ways.¹²² Eventually, while Bonhoeffer was still in prison, Admiral Canaris' personal diary was found containing damning evidence of the Bonhoeffer's participation in the conspiratorial activities, and Hitler ordered all imprisoned conspirators to be executed.¹²³ He went to the gallows at Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, where he died without protesting his conviction or punishment.¹²⁴ While, Bonhoeffer's participation in the conspiracy and his death at the gallows are fascinating aspects of his life, they lay beyond the scope of this current project and, thus will not be studied under the lens of prophetic leadership.

¹¹⁹ Robertson, 139-40.

¹²⁰ Glenthøj, 174-75.

¹²¹ Robertson, 194.

¹²² Marsh, 344-45.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 388-89.

¹²⁴ Bethge, 830-31.

Leadership marked by Divergence – Prophetic Leadership

Dietrich Bonhoeffer decided to take a divergent path when the realms of politics and religion converged in Nazi Germany. While many Germans in the church chose to capitulate to the evils of the Nazis, Bonhoeffer chose to confront and resist. The consequences of this choice were the losses of his highly regarded ministerial position, family, freedom, and eventually his life. He did not, however, lose his dignity, faith, or honor; instead he maintained that which Hitler could not take from him, and gained world-wide acclaim, influence, and a platform which grew well beyond many of his contemporaries, after his death. His service, sacrifice, and commitment to biblical truth, free of compromise, has helped him to retain his beloved position in both world and church history.

Bonhoeffer recognized God's authority as above and beyond any earthly authority, which provided the encouragement to confront the Nazis' overreach into the Church's authority and their evil antisemitic actions. As a prophetic leader, he nurtured and developed the counter-cultural community of seminarians at Finkenwalde, utilizing biblical concepts to redefine their worldviews from the dominant culture to a biblically consistent paradigm of Christianity. This leader stood up against the Third Reich and was crushed by it, but his prophetic leadership was resurrected and remains victorious as the Nazis remain defeated. It is worth a review of the prophetic leadership attributes Bonhoeffer exhibited in order to understand why he stands out among other leaders who lived during the same political and religious convergence. The follow chapters will be dedicated to the review of Bonhoeffer's prophetic leadership attributes. Prophetic leadership, as extrapolated from Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination*, is defined, and

will be defended, as the process by which a leader develops and nurtures a counter-cultural biblical community of followers with God as the ultimate authority and respectfully, yet assertively, confronts immoral and amoral earthly authorities and systems which would lay claim over the community.

CHAPTER 3: FIRST CHARACTERISTIC OF PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP - GOD'S ULTIMATE AUTHORITY

Introduction

Bonhoeffer's understanding of authority was fundamental to his prophetic leadership, so this chapter will focus upon this concept and how authority set the trajectory of his leadership practice. Leadership and power are closely related concepts.¹ Researchers have noted the overlap of leadership and power, recognizing that power is relational and utilized within the context of leadership. James MacGregor Burns explained, “[w]e must see power—and leadership—as not things but as *relationships*.”² Power, authority, influence, persuasion, and coercion are all factors in the conversation surrounding how a leader moves followers towards a common goal.³ Joseph Nye convincingly argued for smart power, the strategically combined use of both hard and soft power, the push and pull strategies, for motivating people toward a common goal.⁴ Modern leadership theories consider power to be derived from personal appeal, competency for guidance, positional authority, ability to reward and punish, or the use of knowledge as a commodity.⁵ Thus, power is a perceived factor that the leader has obtained over the follower. The leader does not innately have power, but gains power to

¹ Northouse, 10-12.

² James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 11.

³ Stogdill, 10-12.

⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 22-23.

⁵ Northouse, 11.

then influence others. The prophetic leader receives power and authority from God, as He is the ultimate authority, not from a position or title that the leader holds. Bonhoeffer, then, received his authority not from his position or influence within the church or university, but from God almighty.⁶

Power and authority, while essential to the leadership conversation, cannot be self-contained or self-derived. Aristotle argued that everything which exists has an origin from the Unmoved Mover, which is eternal, good, active within creation, and is God.⁷ The ancient philosopher noted, “[w]e say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God.”⁸ The Judeo-Christian tradition supports this concept that the locus of all creation is found within God.⁹ Jesus said, “[a]ll authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”¹⁰ The Apostle Paul asserted that God’s power is eternal, a concept which is difficult to comprehend.¹¹ What is more, Paul told Timothy that God gives power to his

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328. Bonhoeffer explained his understanding of authority granted by God in his *Ethics*: “In using the term ‘church,’ and especially in clarifying its relation to the terms ‘government’ and ‘state,’ we have to distinguish between the spiritual office or ministry and the congregation or the Christians. The spiritual office is the divinely ordained authority to exercise spiritual dominion by diving right. It does not proceed from the congregation, but from God.”

⁷ Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 879-80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 880.

⁹ Gen. 1:1, 1 John 1:1-5, Col. 1:16.

¹⁰ Matt. 28:18 (New American Standard Bible).

¹¹ Rom. 1:20.

followers.¹² God is thus sovereign over all of creation, including earthly rulers, governments, and nations, whether secular or religious, and any power or authority they have comes from God.¹³

Robert Mounce decisively declared, “there is no authority apart from that which God has established. He alone is the sole source of authority, and it has pleased him to delegate authority to those in charge of the public well-being.”¹⁴ The Judeo-Christian paradigm of leadership recognizes that God is the initiator and sustainer of authority and power, which He then grants to earthly authorities.¹⁵ Authority finds its roots within the creator, and are subject to Him. This is why the Psalmist claimed, “He rules over the nations.”¹⁶ Furthermore, Christian theology supports the idea that God has created all earthly authorities as part of the divine plan for creation.¹⁷ All people who wield power and authority are ultimately accountable to God. Bonhoeffer taught that all earthly authorities are ordered according to God’s good plan under His divine authority, thus the government official, “becomes for the Christian a servant of God.”¹⁸ This is an essential aspect of leadership, and yet many leadership scholars are agnostic regarding God. This chapter will work from the presupposition that all power and authority find their origin

¹² 2 Tim. 1:7.

¹³ Grudem, 434.

¹⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 27.

¹⁵ John 19:11.

¹⁶ Psa. 22:28 (New American Standard Bible).

¹⁷ Rom. 13:1, 1 Pet. 2:13.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 342.

from God and are thus accountable to Him. Whether priest or peasant, clerk or king, all are answerable to Him, and derive whatever authority they wield from Him.

The First Characteristic – Recognize God, YHWH, as Ultimate Authority

The first characteristic of prophetic leadership is recognizing YHWH as the ultimate authority. Brueggemann concretely grounded all authority within God, the creator, yet, not just any god, but YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁹ This God is the God of ages, the ancient of days, the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible. Furthermore, Brueggemann declared, “Yahweh, the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality and is captive to no social perception but acts from his own person toward his own purposes.”²⁰ What is more, the prophet, as previously established, is a mouth-piece for YHWH and recognizes Him as the ultimate authority from whom the message is being sent. Thus, the prophet does not act on his own authority when developing or nurturing a community and does not subvert authority when confronting government officials, emperors, or kings. The prophet acts on behalf of God, walking, speaking, and working as an ambassador of God.²¹ Brueggeman argued that God is the creator and sustainer of all creation, including authority, and the prophet walks in submission to this God.

God Sovereignly Established Governments

God beautifully designed both church and government institutions to function

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 6.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 2 Cor. 5:20.

perfectly in tandem without interference betwixt or between each other.²² The Apostle Paul deemed government as God's active tool within the world to maintain the chaos of sin and expected the church to submit to government as unto God himself.²³ Similarly, Jesus taught that the two institutions had their own separate spheres of concern.²⁴ A rightly ordered society would see both church and government operating successfully within their own biblically mandated spheres; the church giving honor, obedience, and respect to government, and the government giving religious freedom to exercise faith.²⁵ Governments are part of God's good plan on the earth, and yet like everything else in Creation, have experienced the fall, and thus fail to meet their intended goal.²⁶ This does not mean that all governments are so fatally flawed that they should be abandoned: in most cases these institutions can be reconciled back to God's will. A biblical ordering of authority will consistently place God over and above all earthly authorities, and will look to God to reconcile the brokenness of governments.

Brueggemann explained that God's desire is to continue to reshape earthly authorities to His will: "[t]he ministry of Moses...represents a radical break with the social reality of Pharaoh's Egypt."²⁷ In this view, God is not bound to any human system,

²² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 204.

²³ Rom. 13:1.

²⁴ Mark 12:17.

²⁵ 1 Tim. 2:1-2.

²⁶ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 47.

²⁷ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 5.

whether government, religion, or philosophy. God's priorities and plans transcend human understanding. As God remains above worldly powers, He is free to lay claim, convict, reshape, or reform them. The powerful and sovereign YHWH is free to act of His own accord without consulting earthly authorities. Brueggemann explained,

if a God is disclosed who is free to come and go, free from and even against the regime, free to hear and even answer slave cries, free from all proper godness as defined by the empire, then it will bear decisively upon sociology because the freedom of God will surface in the brickyards and manifest itself as justice and compassion.²⁸

Brueggemann framed God's sovereignty as impacting the earthly community of kingdoms, the peoples and politics, the workers and the wages, pervasively redefining reality. Only the divinely sovereign can lay claim to all of reality in such a comprehensive manner.

The Prophet's Hope and Faith in YHWH

The prophet must work by faith, trusting and hoping in YHWH despite how reality appears. Brueggemann explained, "[h]ope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion; and one does that only at great political and existential risk."²⁹ Here, Brueggemann asserted that the prophet's tool is hope in God, yet this hope could place the prophet into harm's way. The prophet, acting upon God's authority, is not exempt from the punishment of an errant, immoral, or amoral regime. The Apostle Peter's words undergird this concept, "[w]e must obey God rather than men."³⁰ The prophet looks to God as the ultimate authority in the world, rather than the

²⁸ Ibid., 113.

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

³⁰ Acts 5:29 (New American Standard Bible).

regime they find themselves within. There is a bigger and broader, universal and divine regime to which prophet submits.

When the prophet is called by YHWH, whether to lead a community of followers, or to confront an oppressive empire, the prophet must remain grounded in whom he is obeying: God or the emperor. Brueggemann noted that Jesus “announces his new royal authority. He is now the king who displaces the king.”³¹ Thus, oppressive earthly powers will find an opponent in the prophet who brings God’s message of displacement. This is why hope is such a powerful tool for the prophet to wield; he must hope in God’s plan, trusting that His way is right. Brueggemann explained that this hope is “in the language of covenant between a personal God and a community.”³² Hope subverts the errant earthly authorities because it places trust in God’s authority and promise, rather than the earthly regime’s. Brueggemann stated, “[t]hose who would be prophetic will need to embrace that absurd practice and that subversive activity.”³³ The prophet must lean on God, even when it is counter-intuitive, when it seems foolish, and when the prophet has no other option.³⁴ In leadership terminology, YHWH is the leader, and the prophet is the follower.³⁵

³¹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 113.

³² *Ibid.*, 65.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ 1 Cor. 1:25, Prov. 3:5-6, Ps. 119:105.

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 319. Chapter five will analyze when and how to directly confront earthly governing authorities, but it should be noted that the Christ-follower should not always be looking for opportunities to subvert authorities. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer explained how Paul and Silas used their unjust jailing in Acts 16:16-40 as an opportunity to further the Gospel message, rather than seeking legal confrontation.

The Shema – Deuteronomy 6:4

The prophetic leader should always be submissive and obedient to God, thus he must always be listening to God. The Judeo-Christian tradition calls the act of listening, *shema*, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for hear, or listen.³⁶ The Shema, a core theological concept of obedience, is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, and reads, “Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”³⁷ Shema is an imperative for the follower of YHWH, and even more so for the prophetic leader to both hear and heed God.³⁸ Brueggemann explained, “[t]he term *listen (shema)*, is decisive for Deuteronomy. It implies ceding one’s life over to another in obedience.”³⁹ He goes on further to explain that if the follower does not obey God, then the Shema is nullified, resulting in the “the compromise of covenantal identity.”⁴⁰ Brueggemann suggested that the Shema goes beyond listening; it is concerned with the recognition of, and obedience to, God’s authority.⁴¹ When the theological concepts of God’s sovereignty, authority, and power are taken together with the Shema, God is placed as the ultimate leader, and the faithful follower is placed subservient to Him in an obedient and covenantal relationship. The follower does not merely follow God out of an emotional connection to Him, but also out

³⁶ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 122.

³⁷ Deut. 6:4 (New American Standard Bible).

³⁸ Wilson, 123.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

of duty and covenantal commitment. The Shema requires obedience to YHWH, and the prophet willingly obeys. A faithful prophetic leader will always shema God, seeking His guidance and His will for the follower community, and he will respond obediently, as will be analyzed in Bonhoeffer's life.

Bonhoeffer and the First Characteristic

Bonhoeffer had a high regard for God's authority. He claimed, "the absolute, direct, and unaccountable authority of Jesus."⁴² On November 19, 1933 he preached to his German congregations in London on Repentance Day, that "Christ alone is the one whom no one can avoid, no one can pass by...Christ alone is the judge of us all, whose judgement is everlasting."⁴³ In a context where Hitler claimed to be the Führer with ultimate authority, Bonhoeffer's claim was not only theological, but also political. If God has supreme authority, then there are two troubling truths for Hitler: the Führer is not the final authority, and Hitler is accountable to God. Bonhoeffer was so committed to his allegiance to God that he was willing to suffer and die for it.⁴⁴ Thomason explained, "the consolation of the Christian is knowing the victory that follows the suffering of his own cross."⁴⁵

Bonhoeffer's Teaching on Obedience to YHWH

If a prophet is to see YHWH as final authority, then obedience is an essential characteristic of the prophetic leader. Bonhoeffer explained the importance of obedience:

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 57.

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 99.

⁴⁴ Thomason, 157.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

“[f]or faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.”⁴⁶ For Bonhoeffer, one cannot disentangle a relationship with YHWH and obedience to Him. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer warned against only intellectual understanding of obedience, rather than the willful act of obedience, encouraging the reader to be, “done with academic discussion and to get on with the task of obedience.”⁴⁷ He understood that some will get lost in the theological and philosophical minutia of obedience and never really learn to obey God. Bonhoeffer explained that one should practice obedience, not just understand it: “[t]he doer is here the man who simply knows of no other possible attitude to the word of God when he has heard it than to do it.”⁴⁸ He analyzed Matthew 7:21-23 and recognized that the truly faithful to God is “the doer—is the man of humble obedience.”⁴⁹ The German theologian did not offer a faithful Christian the option of non-obedience or disobedience; the only option was to obey God.

Bonhoeffer’s Understanding of God’s Ordering of Government

With God as the creator and the rightful ruler of all creation, everything which He created falls under His divine plan and sovereignty, including government. Bonhoeffer explained this view of government, saying, “Government is divinely ordained authority to exercise worldly dominion by divine right. Government is deputyship for God on

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

earth. It can be understood only from above. Government does not proceed from society, but it orders society from above.”⁵⁰ He explained God’s purpose for government as

The mission of the government to serve Christ is at the same time its inescapable destiny. Government serves Christ no matter whether it is conscious or unconscious of the mission or even whether it is true or untrue to it. If it is unwilling to fulfill this mission, then, through the suffering of the congregation, it renders service to the witness of the name of Christ. Such is the close and indissoluble relation of government to Christ. It cannot in either case evade its task of serving Christ. It serves Him by its very existence.⁵¹

Bonhoeffer reasoned that God created earthly ruling authorities to carry out His divine plan, regardless of the government’s acknowledgement or not. Thus, the theologian established God as the divine sovereign with the government as His servants to safeguard against the chaos of sin in the world, which the citizens are to respect and obey.⁵² How and when one is to disobey government will be analyzed in chapter five.

Bonhoeffer’s Teaching and Practice of Hope

Bonhoeffer clung to hope as a tangible way of walking in faith, pursuing God’s calling, and faithfully facing the evils of the Nazi regime. He understood that Christ was victorious on the cross, and yet Christ’s second coming has not yet arrived, thus believers were to remain faithful during the dark and evil days, hoping, knowing, and believing that He will make all things right in the end. Bonhoeffer encouraged the pastors at Finkenwalde, “let us look to the cross of Christ: for there is judgment, there reprieve.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 327.

⁵¹ Ibid., 337.

⁵² Ibid., 334.

⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 2*, 183.

Christ's redemptive work on the cross was not only God's judgement of mankind's sin, but it also provided hope for the future of all believers.

Bonhoeffer did not prescribe a pseudo-escapism, where one tries to escape from one's own current context and is solely focused on the eternal destiny in glory serving and worshiping God. Instead, he explained that one must maintain a healthy optimism informed by the hope that God can, and will, bring about redemptive work in the current and future ages, even if the believer cannot see it or recognize it.⁵⁴ While in prison, he wrote, "I believe God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil."⁵⁵ He was confident that, regardless of the evil which existed in the world, God was working towards His own good plans. Bonhoeffer's hopeful outlook was grounded in God's work within history.

He believed that God places believers in community with each other as a way of providing hope and perseverance. Bonhoeffer said, "the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth."⁵⁶ Chapter four will delve deeper into Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and how he developed his own special biblical community of believers at Finkenwalde, but for the current discussion it is important to note that Bonhoeffer taught that the biblical community was part of God's plan to encourage and edify one another. He personally

⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers*, 15-16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954), 23.

sought refuge within his own believer community and suffered great emotional turmoil when deprived of their fellowship.

While in prison in 1943, Bonhoeffer wrote, “in me, there is darkness, but with you there is light; I am lonely, but you do not leave me.”⁵⁷ The isolation of prison caused him great stress and strain.⁵⁸ He sought refuge in writing and in his relationship with the Lord, when he had to wait indefinite periods of time to enjoy the fellowship of a visitor.⁵⁹ The spiritual disciplines became a daily routine as a way of connecting with his God and maintaining hope.⁶⁰ In the worst of times he became overwhelmed with melancholy and despair, which he confronted by singing hymns of worship and praise.⁶¹ He knew the only solace, joy, peace, and hope were found in YHWH. While in prison, he wrote, “[a] faith such as this should allay all our fears for the future.”⁶² Bonhoeffer practiced utilizing hope as a tool, a spiritual weapon, against the attacks of his enemies, and maintained worshipful focus upon God.

Prophetic Leadership Juxtaposed to Modern Leadership Theories

The first characteristic of prophetic leadership juxtaposes it with many modern leadership theories because it grounds leadership decisively within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Henry and Richard Blackaby discovered the ignorance of the divine in

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers*, 139.

⁵⁸ Bethge, 741.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 743.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 755-56.

⁶¹ Marsh, 352.

⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers*, 10.

leadership studies stating that most modern leadership theories, “do not take God and his purposes into account.”⁶³ This is not surprising, since most leadership theories are secular in nature and are not concerned with spiritual or religious concepts. Gene Wilkes noted that he had to disregard many modern leadership theories and approaches in order to discover the biblical concepts of leadership.⁶⁴ He noted how many leaders have, “gravitated toward the self-serving forms of leadership.”⁶⁵ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges noted, “[o]ur sophisticated culture encourages us to draw lines and keep our spiritual lives separate from our secular lives.”⁶⁶ Yet, not only does God demand His followers to be fully submitted to Him, but there are also effective and beneficial leadership practices that can be drawn from the Scriptures.⁶⁷

Morality

Northouse explained that morality is a central component to many leadership theories, which helps to delineate between morally good leaders and merely effective leaders, such as Hitler.⁶⁸ Morality helps to determine if a leader who accomplishes goals is good or bad. Hitler, although he was effective at turning around Germany’s economy,

⁶³ Blackaby and Blackaby, 33.

⁶⁴ Wilkes, 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁶ Kenneth H. Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead like Jesus: Lessons for Everyone from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), ix.

⁶⁷ Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 1.

⁶⁸ Northouse, 13-15.

was an evil leader who killed millions of Jews and started a war with the world. Burns, when he discussed moral leadership, noted, “I mean less the Ten Commandments than the Golden Rule.”⁶⁹ By situating moral leadership under the Golden Rule rather than the Ten Commandments, he subtly shifted from absolute moral values to moral relativism. Stogdill expanded on Burns’ work, suggesting that these leaders help followers achieve self-transcendence, attain higher levels of interests and goals, and mobilize towards greater objectives.⁷⁰ While this sounds like an outstanding promise, these goals are all subjective and could change day to day. Northouse noted that a moral leader needs to understand, “the morals, values, and goals of followers to make more principled judgments.”⁷¹ Thus, the followers’ moral codes dictate the leader’s moral leadership. From this perspective, moral leadership will never be definitive, but will be subject to change based upon the values of the follower community.

Prophetic leadership rejects moral relativism, as the first characteristic of prophetic leadership is recognizing God as the ultimate authority. With God as the authority, morality is rooted in His moral system as outlined in the Scriptures. The prophetic leader is committed to Judeo-Christian morality regardless of the value system of the broader community. Brueggemann explained, “the shaping of Israel took place from inside its own experience and confession of faith and not through external appropriation from somewhere else.”⁷² The prophetic leader seeks to lead the prophetic

⁶⁹ Burns, 4.

⁷⁰ Stogdill, 610-11.

⁷¹ Northouse, 16.

⁷² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 5.

community through biblical standards, rooted in their faith tradition, rather than allowing the subjectivity of the dominant culture to redefine what they consider right or wrong. Bonhoeffer contrasted the dominant ungodly culture of Germany with the alternative biblical community of the Confessing Church, saying, “Babylon, the enemy of God...which on its own power defies Christ, the crucified Lord, which intoxicates people with its glittering and tempting vices, as a prostitute intoxicates her lovers with heavy wine.”⁷³ Bonhoeffer compared Nazi Germany with the archetypal, archenemy of Israel, Babylon who defies Christ, and thus the Christian community. He saw the dominant culture as a siren leveraging the lusts of Germans to heed its sickening songs. Bonhoeffer called the Confessing Church to reject these seductive calls and cling to the Word of God.

Success

Prophetic leadership varies from other leadership paradigms in regards to how success is recognized and achieved. Stogdill described success for a leader as career growth and advancement to higher levels of management.⁷⁴ He also examined success through the lens of accomplishing tasks and driving compliance.⁷⁵ Boleman and Deal depicted success as the achievement of goals that a leader planned to accomplish.⁷⁶ Burns linked success with a leader’s deep-seated desire for self-esteem.⁷⁷ While each of these explanations for success would warrant its own individual study, what is obvious when

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 2*, 164.

⁷⁴ Stogdill, 136-137.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁶ Boleman and Deal, 215-14.

⁷⁷ Burns, 95.

viewed together is the subjective nature of how success is understood through a modern leadership lens.

When leadership success is seen through a materialistic and subjective paradigm, then success equals increased dividends, larger organizations, greater influence, more widgets; an insatiable hunger for more. As previously noted, Henry and Richard Blackaby defined spiritual leadership as “moving people on to God’s agenda.”⁷⁸ From this perspective, success is much easier to gauge by measuring a process rather than a product; if a leader influences people towards God’s will, they are successful. Wilkes understood leadership as service as exemplified by Jesus.⁷⁹ He taught that service-oriented leadership is the best way to lead, not because it is effective, even though it is, but because he understood service as the biblical model of leadership.⁸⁰ The Blackabys and Wilkes reveal the weakness of theologically agnostic and morally subjective modern leadership theories: success cannot be definitively determined because relativism does not allow it.

The biblical prophets have a more nuanced view of success which does not take into account the reaction or response of the follower community, which frequently changes. A great example is the Prophet Jeremiah. Brueggemann noted that Jeremiah, the grieving prophet, faithfully spoke to the people and royalty through tears and brokenness,

⁷⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby, 36.

⁷⁹ Wilkes, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

yet his message was not heeded.⁸¹ F. B. Huey considered Jeremiah's success as a leader, saying,

An evaluation of Jeremiah by most standards of success would brand him an abysmal failure. He preached for forty years without convincing the people that he was God's prophet. He was threatened, ridiculed, and physically abused by his own people. Jerusalem was finally destroyed, and Judah ceased to exist as a nation because the people refused to accept Jeremiah's remedy for deliverance—turn back to God and submit to the Babylonians. However, Jeremiah must not be judged by human standards. God has a different measuring stick by which he judges a person's life. His is the test of obedience.⁸²

Huey's analysis of Jeremiah's leadership reveals the prophet's orientation towards God, specifically his obedience. A prophetic leader is viewed as successful when he or she is obedient to God, first and foremost. All other forms of success are secondary.

Prophetic Leadership and Modern Secular Leadership

Prophetic leadership and other modern leadership theories need not be mutually exclusive.⁸³ Northouse noted how effective leadership is often accomplished through a combination of multiple leadership theories and approaches.⁸⁴ Prophetic leadership can be practiced alongside a number of other leadership theories. This study's argument is not to prescribe prophetic leadership at the exclusion of all other approaches, but to add another perspective to the literature on leadership, as is evidenced with Bonhoeffer. Prophetic leadership offers a new vantage point of both ancient and modern leaders; individuals who lead from the presupposition that God has divinely called them to a

⁸¹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 55.

⁸² F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 24.

⁸³ Chapter six will review a number of leadership theories which work well along with prophetic leadership and the practical overlaps within leadership scenarios.

⁸⁴ Northouse, 196-97.

specific purpose, and whether or not they see the fruits of their actions, they have faith that He will bring that good work to completion in His timing.⁸⁵ Prophetic leadership offers the grounding to lead while also submitting to God. Faith and leadership are not ignorant of each other, but are found as helpful companions within prophetic leadership.

Conclusion

The first characteristic of prophetic leadership is recognizing YHWH as ultimate authority, which reorients the entire leadership paradigm. Brueggemann saw this as an essential aspect of the prophets, and Bonhoeffer grounded his life and leadership upon this principle. He ordered his whole life and activity under God's sovereignty, whether he was preaching, serving a local community of believers, teaching the pastors at Finkenwalde, or confronting the evils of the Nazi empire. He understood God to be the one around whom his entire life was oriented. While some might believe that one's religion should be privatized and not influence the greater society around them, this concept is inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian concept of living in a covenantal relationship with God and within community. The prophetic leader lives under the Shema, submitting all to the one God of the Scriptures, YHWH. When a leader takes up this commitment, they begin to walk the path of the biblical prophets, take up the first characteristic of prophetic leadership, and slowly become influenced towards leading as the ancient prophets led.

⁸⁵ Phil. 1:6.

CHAPTER 4: SECOND CHARACTERISTIC OF PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP -
ALTERNATIVE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

Introduction

Peter Northouse suggested that, “[l]eadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”¹ Based upon this definition, the second characteristic of prophetic leadership is where the heart of the leadership process occurs. Bonhoeffer noted, “[t]he physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”² He saw the Christian community as the center of divine meaning in the believer’s life and part of divine activity in the world.³ This chapter will analyze the special nature of the prophetic community, specifically how the prophetic leader develops and nurtures the community. Brueggeman’s work on alternative biblical communities will be reviewed, along with the prophets Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus and how each cultivated alternative communities. Finally, Bonhoeffer’s theology on Christian community and his monastic project at Finkenwalde will be analyzed through the lens of the second characteristic of prophetic leadership.

The Second Characteristic – Alternative Prophetic Community

Brueggemann articulated the prophetic community as a counter-cultural group of YHWH followers who gathered together and participated in odd, confusing, and

¹ Northouse, 6.

² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 19.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 6.

evocative worship practices and beliefs.⁴ For Brueggemann, wherever there is a prophetic community, they are surrounded by a dominant culture with differing values, morals, and practices. Yet, when one speaks of the premise of a counter-culture, it raises questions:

Thus, alternative to what? In what ways alternative? How radically alternative? Finally, is there a thinkable alternative that will avoid domestication? And, quite concretely, how does one present and act out alternatives in a community of faith which on the whole does not understand that there are any alternatives or is not prepared to embrace such if they come along?⁵

Brueggemann used the word *alternative* to distinguish between the dominant culture, which is not committed to YHWH's statutes or practices, and the community of YHWH followers who take God seriously and are in a covenantal relationship with Him. He described the dominant culture as having a royal consciousness because it is an empirical culture defined by the ruler in such a pervasive way that it redefines the culture's worldview.⁶

The royal consciousness is defined by three dimensions: affluence, oppressive social policies, and static religion where governing authorities are viewed as gods.⁷ The alternative consciousness is categorically opposed to these concepts, and is upheld by the economics of equality, the politics of justice, and the religion of YHWH's freedom.⁸

Brueggemann described a dualistic world where the dominant culture is ruled by empirical decree, and the alternative culture is ruled by God's redemption and salvation.

⁴ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

The empire cannot understand the alternative community because its paradigm is so vastly different. Brueggemann wrote much about the socio-political dimensions of these two communities, but the current study will focus primarily upon the counter-culture and how the prophetic leader nurtures it.⁹

Recovering the Faith Tradition

Brueggemann noted, “[t]he church will not have power to act or believe until it recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the primal way out of enculturation.”¹⁰ Rediscovering the roots of the Judeo-Christian faith, celebrating the traditions, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and connecting with YHWH through worship is central to the prophetic community. Some may find these practices to be archaic or mundane, but they are essential to recovering the biblical traditions. As God said in the book of Isaiah, “[f]or My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord.”¹¹ Seeking YHWH through the Judeo-Christian faith practices redefines the community to God’s standards, while reframing the followers’ paradigm to the alternative biblical consciousness.¹²

Worship

Brueggemann prescribed worship as the ultimate way of breaking from the

⁹ Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination* is profound and deserves its own study, but much of it lays beyond the scope of the current study. The primary concepts from *Prophetic Imagination* are the three characteristics being utilized in this study: recognizing YHWH as ultimate authority, nurturing a counter-cultural community, and respectfully confronting errant authorities.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ Isaiah 55:8 (New American Standard Bible), 2020.

¹² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

dominant culture.¹³ Doxology is integral to the prophetic community and is a distinguishing characteristic. Worship is a way of celebrating the rule and reign of Jesus, even in the midst of oppression, slavery, and mockery.¹⁴ Brueggemann suggested that worship has a way of “cutting through the royal despair and hopelessness.”¹⁵ Certainly, God deserves worship, but God also uses worship to conform his community to His ways. A life devoted to adoration of YHWH rejects worship of the emperor and what the empire stands for. Thus, worship, for the prophetic community, is a counter-cultural, paradigm shifting, transformational activity.¹⁶

A worshipful community does not just stand for itself, but stands in contrast to, and as an indictment of, the dominant culture. A.W. Tozer suggested that the prophet, “confronts earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear upon time. The messenger of Christ, though he speaks from God, must also, as the Quakers used to say, ‘speak to the condition’ of his hearers.”¹⁷ The prophetic leader, through worship, will use doxology to reveal the fallen nature of the world around him or her. Thus, when a YHWH worshipper comes in contact with the dominant culture, their worshipful way of life is threatening to the royal consciousness.¹⁸ Brueggemann explained, “doxology is the faithful embrace of

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship: Playground, Battleground, or Holy Ground?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 29.

¹⁷ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God, Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2022), ix.

¹⁸ Wiersbe, 35.

the true king and the rejection of all the phony ones.”¹⁹ Worship will inevitably set the prophetic community at odds with the dominant culture because it recognizes God as the ultimate authority and rejects any other pseudo-deity placed upon the divine throne.

Lament

The expressed grief of Israel is a constant refrain of the prophetic voice in the Scriptures. Lament is an emotive expression which proclaims that the empire cannot fulfill the deep-seated desires that YHWH puts in the hearts of His creation.²⁰ This prophetic sorrow and anguish is not a selfish pity; it is identifying with the brokenness of the world and a longing for God’s reconciliation.²¹ Lament is a cry to God, recognizing that only He can hear, understand, and answer the grief and sorrow of His people. Kandy Queen-Sutherland explained that lament is a “desperate, wailing up from the darkest side of human existence....Lament harasses those who oppress and calls all to justice.”²² Brueggemann taught that prophetic lament is an empowering and energizing activity.²³ It is the rallying cry of the alternative community to mobilize back to God, leaning on His promises, and trusting in His deliverance.

Lamentation was the prophets’ way of communicating that the sin of the society is leading to its own destruction, that God’s previous blessings are not an assurance that

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² Kandy Queen-Sutherland, “Teaching/Preaching the Theology of Lamentations,” *Interpretation* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 184.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

He will withhold punishment for current sin, and that the only hope for salvation is whole-hearted repentance and return to covenant relationship with YHWH.²⁴ It is a public expression, not a private indulgence, that “penetrates the numbness of the royal consciousness by articulating the grief it so much wants to deny.”²⁵ Lament is a Judeo-Christian theocentric communal practice that focuses the community’s attention upon God, who is beyond the current order of earthly life and dominating governments.²⁶ The expressed grief is the prophetic community’s announcement that the dominant culture’s paradigm has failed and is bringing death and destruction.²⁷ Lament takes that pain seriously. It is only when the prophetic community grieves that God’s newness, freedom, and salvation can be experienced. Thus, lament is not final, nor is it defeating; it is the welcome recognition of the state of the world and the hope for God’s salvation.²⁸

Energizing

Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination* identified energizing as an important ministry of the prophetic leader. The term *energizing* is used to explain how the prophet motivates, empowers, and inspires the prophetic community to walk in God’s newness through the spiritual disciplines.²⁹ Energizing activities are highly symbolic, engaging,

²⁴ Huey, 446-47.

²⁵ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 49.

²⁶ Peter Nagel, “In Reference to a Hebrew Deity: Some Remarks on Lamentations,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (July 2022): 5.

²⁷ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

²⁹ Marius Nel, “An Attempt to Define the Constitutive Elements of a Pentecostal Spirituality: Original Research,” *In die Skriflig* 49, no. 1 (May 2015): 3.

artistic, exciting, and spiritual.³⁰ The prophet's energizing ministry promotes faith in, acceptance of, and welcoming into God's new reality, the Kingdom of God. Brueggemann suggested that prophetic energizing leads, "the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality."³¹ It is through these activities that the prophetic leader empowers the alternative community to envision a new future based upon God's promises.³² Brueggemann further explained, "[i]t is the task of the prophet to bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the old order. Energizing is closely linked to hope. We are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given."³³ Energizing leads to dreaming, hope, and anticipation for the future, which then leads to the followers stepping into God's promises through faith.

Brueggemann saw Israel leaving Egypt as the perfect exemplar of this new community, as he explained, "[t]he participants in the Exodus found themselves, undoubtedly surprisingly to them, involved in the intentional formation of a *new social community* to match the vision of *God's freedom*."³⁴ Israel's desire to worship God, their disengagement with Pharaoh as ultimate authority, and their lament brought about this new reality of God's people living in unprecedented freedom.³⁵ Moses, the prophetic

³⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 63-64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

³² *Ibid.*, 59-60.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 (emphasis original).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

leader, led the Hebrew enslaved community through the energizing activities of worship, devotion, and commitment to YHWH, and God in turn transformed them into His new alternative community.

Richard Foster explained that the spiritual disciplines are not to be dull, oppressive, or legalistic rituals but pathways to joy, peace, and freedom in God.³⁶ Prophetic leaders call upon, and energize, their followers to join in their song of new beginnings and their worship of the God of freedom. This worship process evokes an internal transformation resulting in outward changes, setting the counter-culture apart from the dominant culture.³⁷ The community experiences a metamorphosis as the result of true worship; the biblical community engaging with God through the spiritual disciplines, reshaping and reforming their worldviews.³⁸ The prophetic leader's energizing activities are a redefining feature of the prophetic community and are used by God to bring about His newness, freedom, and peace for the alternative community.

Biblical Examples of Prophetic Leaders

The biblical principles of prophetic leaders building alternative communities can be applied to Bonhoeffer's life, leadership, and teachings. Yet, the Scriptures do not just offer theological principals, but practical examples of how the prophets actually led. With this in mind, this chapter will now turn to analyze three examples of biblical prophets who developed and nurtured prophetic communities as concrete examples to

³⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁸ Wiersbe, 29-30.

compare to Bonhoeffer. As mentioned in the first chapter, no two biblical prophets led the same, so this study is not seeking to find a formula to compare against the German theologian. Instead, the principles of counter-cultural community centered around worship, lament, and energizing activities will be the foci of prophetic leadership's community development.

Brueggemann analyzed a number of biblical Prophets, but he centered his attention upon the three who most clearly exemplified his thesis: Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus. As previously noted, Brueggemann claimed, "[t]he task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."³⁹ He suggested that the biblical prophets cultivated a worldview that served to energize the alternative community towards God's promises and actualize the biblical faith community.⁴⁰ The following section will analyze the practical examples of how Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus deployed these principles in developing their prophetic communities.

Moses

Brueggemann recognized Moses as the prophetic example for all future biblical prophets.⁴¹ He became the prototype of the man called by God to confront an enslaving empire, criticize unjust practices, petition on behalf of the captive population, liberate the slaves, and articulate the new divine-freedom community under God's standards. When God called Moses to challenge Pharaoh to release the Hebrews so they could worship

³⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

YHWH, God asserted that Moses would walk in divine authority as His mouthpiece.⁴² Moses became the mediator between God and the Hebrew people, taking upon himself their grief, leading them in a charge to worship freely, and making their plight known to the ruler of the day.⁴³ He confronted Pharaoh out of a desire for the health, wellness, and religious freedom of his people.

Moses was no anarchic insurrectionist; he was the reluctantly obedient instrument God chose to lead His people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. He saw the abuse of his Hebrew kinsfolk and sought to take action against an Egyptian attacker.⁴⁴ God heard the cries of, and had a passion for, this enslaved people, and He mobilized that passion through Moses. Norman Cohen explained, “Moses’s leadership stems directly from his relationship with God, as the framer and keeper of the covenant that represents the destiny of his people.”⁴⁵ God’s plan and Moses’s obedience converged at the particular time that the Hebrew people needed salvation, and just as Mordecai told Esther, God had Moses in place, “for such a time as this.”⁴⁶

YHWH heard the cries of the Hebrews and sent Moses to communicate the hope and future that He had planned for them.⁴⁷ This message was meant to energize and

⁴² Norman J. Cohen, *Moses and the Journey to Leadership: Timeless Lessons of Effective Management from the Bible and Today’s Leaders* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 23.

⁴³ Honeycutt, 305.

⁴⁴ Cohen, 9-10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶ Esther, 4:14 (New American Standard Bible).

⁴⁷ Exod. 6:5-8.

excite the exploited population, yet they were so burdened with their heavy hearts that they did not listen.⁴⁸ As the plagues continued and their lament arose, they ceased crying out to Pharaoh for any relief, disengaging from the royal consciousness, turning away from Egypt and towards the only one who could offer real and lasting relief.⁴⁹ As Brueggeman notes, this shift in perspective is essential for any and all in covenant relationship with YHWH, and it was here that the cries of Israel ceased to Pharaoh.⁵⁰ Yet the cries of the Egyptians were raised at the end of the plague cycle when they felt the results of their burdensome politics and exploitative industry.⁵¹ Israel's lament was at the core of Pharaoh losing control, and thus losing his slave force.

Moses led the Hebrews in worship while still in Egypt as God instituted the Passover meal. Honeycutt suggested the Passover marked a new era, a new year, and a new paradigm for the YHWH followers.⁵² As the Hebrews obediently worshipped God via the Passover meal and the application of the lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels, they participated in a new energizing ritual. The slaves cried out in worship to God, yet Pharaoh and all of Egypt cried out in terror.⁵³ Brueggemann explained, "[t]he cry of Israel becomes an empowering cry; the cry of Egypt is one of dismantling

⁴⁸ Cohen, 33.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 12-13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Honeycutt, 371.

⁵³ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 13.

helplessness.”⁵⁴ Moses and Miriam both led the Hebrews in the liberating *Song of the Sea* and *Song of Miriam*, celebrating what God had accomplished and the energized new beginnings.⁵⁵ The Jews saw the end of a four-hundred yearlong captivity and the beginning of a new national existence which is still celebrated by modern Jewry today.⁵⁶

The Hebrews’ new-found freedom was certainly not the ending of their troubles, but it marked the beginning of a new worldview and a new reality for the whole community. They were held together by their shared experience of lament, worship, and the energizing exodus experience. Moses continued to lead the Israelites throughout the rest of his life, pointing them back to God when they sinned, reminding them of their history, stressing the importance of worship, and energizing them through the wilderness.⁵⁷ They experienced numerous challenges throughout the exodus and into the wilderness, yet they overcame each resulting in more celebration, worship, and an energizing spirit.⁵⁸ Their trek was not one of perfection, but they continued to follow Moses, and he continued to follow YHWH. Moses is remembered for his boldness before Pharaoh, walking in God’s power, and leading a strong liberation movement out of Egypt into a new reality of God's freedom.⁵⁹ Modern prophetic leaders should take note of the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Wilson, 241.

⁵⁷ Howell, 38.

⁵⁸ Honeycutt, 315.

⁵⁹ Paul David Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel principles for leadership in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 28.

importance of worship, lament, and energizing as exemplified by Moses.

Jeremiah

Brueggemann saw in Jeremiah the clearest example of the effectiveness of lament in the alternative community.⁶⁰ He was a prophet at the end of the kingdom of Judah and was brokenhearted over their ignorance, arrogance, and numbness.⁶¹ He was, as VanGemeran noted, much like Moses, God's spokesman calling for repentance, lamenting over sin, and communicating the end of one era and the coming of a new covenant.⁶² Jeremiah woefully stared into the darkness of exile and, through tears, predicted a coming new covenant and a wonderful and hopeful future.⁶³ As Judah continued to adhere to the royal consciousness, rejecting God's words from the prophet, Jeremiah lamented in order to pierce through their calloused hearts.⁶⁴

The prophet communicated what his people could not see: ritualistic ceremonies, adherence to religious rites, and knowledge of God's law are no substitute for a real faith-relationship with God.⁶⁵ Brueggemann stated, "Jeremiah knew long before the others that the end was coming and that God had had enough of indifferent affluence, cynical

⁶⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

⁶¹ Samuel L. Schultz, *The Prophets Speak: Law of Love – the Essence of Israel's Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 119.

⁶² VanGemeran, 295-96.

⁶³ Howell, 9.

⁶⁴ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 47.

⁶⁵ Schultz, 120.

oppression, and presumptive religion.”⁶⁶ As Wilson observed, the true sign of belonging to God is circumcision of the heart, a spiritual connection, and faithful obedience, not empty rituals.⁶⁷ The people would not listen to Jeremiah’s words, so he grieved as a form of social criticism.⁶⁸

A cursory review of Jeremiah’s ministry might reveal him to be a pathetic failure. He faithfully communicated God’s message for forty years with no real changes, all the while he received ridicule, intimidation, and abuse.⁶⁹ Jeremiah called his people to grieve along with him for the death of Israel, yet they blatantly ignored his warnings.⁷⁰

Ultimately, Judah was taken into captivity by Babylon, Jerusalem was ransacked, the Temple destroyed, the king left in exile, and Jeremiah was taken to Egypt away from the land he loved.⁷¹ Yet Jeremiah never ceased from his messaging that God would bring about a new era and a new covenant. The prophet had nothing tangible to show for his arduous and painful ministry at the end of his life.

Jeremiah’s grief did not penetrate the numbed hearts of his contemporaries, but God used it to bring about a future community of YHWH followers who took God’s laws and promises seriously.⁷² Divine punishment was leveled against Judah, but God still had

⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 47.

⁶⁷ Wilson, 21.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 47.

⁶⁹ Huey, 24.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 52.

⁷¹ VanGemenen, 308.

⁷² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 55.

plans for her. YHWH's powerful promise in the book of Jeremiah becomes clear when viewed through this historical lens:

‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.’⁷³

Jeremiah's follower community would eventually listen to his words, heed his warning, and seek YHWH with all their hearts. Yet, his follower community was not his contemporaries, but a future generation. Jeremiah's ministry is now considered successful, not because he garnered much contemporary influence, but because of his obedience that God used to influence countless future generations.⁷⁴ Jeremiah is still leading YHWH followers in lament and repentance thousands of years after his death.

Jesus

Jesus cannot, and should not, be considered just a prophet. He is much more than a prophet; He is Messiah, the sacrificial lamb, the High Priest, the Son of Man, the second person of the Trinity. Yet, Jesus is the archetypal prophet that the Old Testament prophets were only glimpses of and were pointing towards.⁷⁵ His ministry should be studied alongside the prophets to understand how Jesus set the mold of the ultimate perfect representation of prophetic leadership. Bruggemann suggested that Jesus' purpose through the prophetic community He created was, “to enable a new human being to be

⁷³ Jer. 29:10-13 (New American Standard Bible).

⁷⁴ Huey, 24.

⁷⁵ Bruggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 81.

made.”⁷⁶ Jesus Christ established the new covenant through His death on the cross, which was foretold by Jeremiah.⁷⁷ Jesus brings Jeremiah’s anticipation of the new covenant into being.⁷⁸ He was the final, ultimate, and perfect prophet. Thus, as Brueggemann stated, “Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment and quintessence of the prophetic tradition.”⁷⁹

The Lukan account of the announcement of Christ’s birth reveals how the Jesus followers perceived and remembered the incarnation. Luke recounts how Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist leapt in his mother’s womb, Mary sang worship, Zechariah prophesied, the angels sang, and the shepherds were awestruck.⁸⁰ Jesus, the prophetic leader, was bringing people to worship before he even spoke a word of His earthly ministry. Brueggemann expounded, “[t]he birth of Jesus is presented, especially by Luke, as decisive energizing toward a new social reality.”⁸¹ They were unaware of what the Christ would do and how He would soon change the world, yet God was mobilizing the early community of YHWH followers and that momentum would not soon slow down.

The birth was a wonderful fulfillment of hope, but Christ’s real work began after He was baptized. He had an active itinerate ministry; building community, healing the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁷ Huey, 283.

⁷⁸ Schultz, 144-45. Some of His contemporaries thought Jesus was one of the prophets, including John the Baptist, Jeremiah, or even possibly Elijah. Yet, He was so much more, and He came to fulfill the law and the prophets.

⁷⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 102.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 102-4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 102.

sick, and sharing His paradigm-shifting teachings. Brueggeman explained, “the focus of the work of Jesus, was not dismantling but the inauguration of a new thing.”⁸² He brought about this new reality by putting God first, developing a worshipful mindset, not just in action, but in His heart and in the hearts of His followers.⁸³ Agosto claimed Jesus was the leader of the wandering charismatics, a group of people who worshipped God with everything they had, lived counter-cultural lives, and were willing to die for their cause.⁸⁴ Jesus’ influence penetrated His group of followers and permeated the culture in Galilee.⁸⁵

Jesus modeled the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, solitude, lament, and celebration.⁸⁶ The disciplines were a way of leading His counter-cultural community into liberation from the royal consciousness and an embracing of God’s paradigm of freedom.⁸⁷ Furthermore, He energized His community to step into God’s new reality with a new and enigmatic worldview which He taught through the Beatitudes.⁸⁸ This alternative community was already spiritually hungry, poor, and grieved, thus they received Jesus’ promises of blessings with open and grateful hearts. Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount that He was the fulfillment of the law and prophets, everything

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Blanchard and Hodges, 63.

⁸⁴ Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus & Paul* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 19-20.

⁸⁵ Agosto, 21.

⁸⁶ Foster, 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁸ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 109.

which had been promised to the Jews in their sacred Scriptures found fulfillment in Him. He was not overturning everything they knew, but redefining it in accordance with God's will.⁸⁹

Jesus cultivated an energizing atmosphere of worship in His ministry, as exemplified by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.⁹⁰ He entered the great city, as her true king, to the praise and adulation of the crowds.⁹¹ Craig Blomberg noted, "Jesus is acknowledged by the crowds of Galilean pilgrims in a manner reminiscent of the greetings for rulers in Old Testament and intertestamental times."⁹² Yet, this worshipful event did not proceed without protest. The Pharisees challenged Jesus for the praise He received, as they deemed Him unworthy of such praise.⁹³ They cried out, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!"⁹⁴ Instead, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and supported the praise He received, exclaiming, "I tell you, if these stop speaking, the stones will cry out!"⁹⁵ The worship was so appropriate that even if the voices ceased, God would cause the stones to worship the true king as He came into Jerusalem.⁹⁶ While certainly a polarizing

⁸⁹ Schultz, 145-46.

⁹⁰ Agosto, 78.

⁹¹ Malcom O. Tolbert, "Luke," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 9*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 150.

⁹² Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 366.

⁹³ Agosto, 78.

⁹⁴ Luke 19:39 (New American Standard Bible).

⁹⁵ Luke 19:40 (New American Standard Bible).

⁹⁶ Tolbert, 151.

event, Jesus recognized the importance and energizing nature of worship and leveraged it within His earthly ministry.

Jesus also understood how powerful and energizing grief could be and He used it masterfully. When He received news that His friend Lazarus was dying, He saw it as an opportunity to glorify God and reveal the nature of this new community to those around Him.⁹⁷ Jesus delayed His trip to heal His friend, understanding that Lazarus was truly dead and not just ill. When He arrived and spoke with Mary and Martha, Lazarus's sisters, He was troubled and wept.⁹⁸ He was not grieved over the finality of death, He already had a plan for resurrection, but of the gravity of sin and death and the need for His atoning work.⁹⁹ Brueggemann explained, "Jesus is engaged not in social control but in dismantling the power of death, and he does so by submitting himself to the pain and grief present in the situation."¹⁰⁰ After submitting Himself to grief and public lamentation, He miraculously called Lazarus forth from death and the grave, with the full knowledge that God's glory would be revealed as would this new and unfathomable kingdom community.¹⁰¹

Lazarus' resurrection was only a prelude for what was to come. Jesus revealed the impossible after a Friday of beatings and accusations, and a Saturday of silence and

⁹⁷ William E. Hull, "John," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 9*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 313.

⁹⁸ John 11:30-35.

⁹⁹ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2000), 218-19.

¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 92.

¹⁰¹ Hull, 316.

devastation: death had been defeated, king Jesus had won, and now was the time to share this good news with the world.¹⁰² Brueggemann called the resurrection “the ultimate act of prophetic energizing in which a new history is initiated.”¹⁰³ The very act of resurrection proved that Jesus could resurrect the bodies of His followers and anyone who would enter into the new covenant with Him.¹⁰⁴ Now came the time when the ultimate prophet would call upon His follower community to become prophetic leaders themselves and create various prophetic communities around the world with the assurance that He would be with them even after He ascended to His Father in Heaven.¹⁰⁵

The Jesus followers, far from perfect, would spend the next two thousand years determined to follow in His footsteps, lamenting sin, worshiping YHWH, energizing new communities, sharing this novel covenantal faith, and creating both an institution and a spiritual movement.¹⁰⁶ Often times the history of the church reveals an ignorance, failure, or rejection of the prophetic elements of ministry.¹⁰⁷ Yet, the faithful, including Bonhoeffer, have always come back to the energizing aspects of the Judeo-Christian faith. Brueggemann noted that Jesus “practiced the energizing of the new future given by

¹⁰² Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017), 351-52.

¹⁰³ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 113.

¹⁰⁴ Grudem, 633.

¹⁰⁵ Matt. 28:16-20.

¹⁰⁶ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), xvi.

¹⁰⁷ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 116.

God. This energizing was fully manifested in His resurrection, in which He embodied the new future given by God.”¹⁰⁸ The Jesus followers are still tasked with the same energizing of the Kingdom of God.

Bonhoeffer and the Alternative Prophetic Community

Bonhoeffer understood that the community of Jesus followers was essential, irreplaceable, and unequalled in the world due to its grounding in Jesus Christ. He said, “[t]his community itself is one of the forms of God's revelation. God is with us as long as there is community...Jesus Christ is the breadth of our life and of our community.”¹⁰⁹ For the German theologian, the church was not just a gathering place of like-minded individuals focused upon maintaining a longstanding tradition. The church was the spiritual group of believers who claimed Christ as Lord, walked in obedience to Him, served those around them, and was sustained and authorized by God himself, not by any earthly institution.¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer explained, “[g]enuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out.”¹¹¹ The church, then, was a community of Jesus followers whom He authorized to act on His behalf in the world, not isolated individual communities, and not governed by any earthly authority, but by Jesus Christ Himself.¹¹²

As the church struggle continued in Nazi Germany, and the Confessing Church

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328.

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 108.

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 151.

had need to train its pastors in unadulterated Christian theology, Bonhoeffer answered a call to lead the Confessing Church's seminary at Finkenwalde.¹¹³ Finkenwalde was one of five underground seminaries and began its first summer term in 1935.¹¹⁴ It became a proving ground for many ideas which had been germinating in Bonhoeffer's heart and mind for years. He had previously written on ecclesiology in his dissertation titled *Sanctorum Communio*, analyzing the individual, church, and society.¹¹⁵ As he grew in ministerial experience, his understanding of Christian community developed and matured beyond a strictly theological concept and into a practical theology for how believers are to obediently submit to God and live within a world unreconciled to YHWH.¹¹⁶ Finkenwalde was the perfect place for Bonhoeffer to cultivate a monastic community rooted in his exceptional theological ideas.¹¹⁷

Bonhoeffer Recovering the Faith Tradition

Bonhoeffer's view of the church did not fit within a systematized theology as he did not live long enough to develop a full theological system. Instead, his ecclesiology was practical, recognizing that the church was Christ's body existing within a hostile world which it was called to serve and evangelize.¹¹⁸ The obvious tension of how and

¹¹³ Marsh, 227.

¹¹⁴ Bethge, 344.

¹¹⁵ John Wilcken, "The Ecclesiology of Ethics and the Prison Writings," in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, ed. A. J. Klassen, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 195.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 196-97.

¹¹⁷ Zimmermann, 107.

¹¹⁸ Wilcken, 202.

when Bonhoeffer believed the Christian community should confront, challenge, or resist worldly authorities will be analyzed in chapter five. For the present chapter's discussion, it should be noted that Bonhoeffer taught that the church's responsibility in Christ is to call the world to repentance. He explained "[t]he Church has the task of summoning the whole world to submit to the dominion of Jesus Christ."¹¹⁹ The church, then, has comprehensive spiritual authority on behalf of Christ to share the Gospel message, to serve the world, and to uphold God's statutes. This task requires the training of pastors to meet the church's divine calling.¹²⁰

Finkenwalde went beyond pure pedantic theological training; the seminary focused on the spiritual disciplines, including silence, prayer, meditation, private Bible study, and communal worship in addition to theological lectures.¹²¹ Bonhoeffer taught that Christians should live a "common life under the Word."¹²² The facilities were humble, causing the brethren to share rooms, furniture, and texts.¹²³ The furnishings were gifted by few who were sympathetic to the Confessing Church's cause, while Bonhoeffer provided the theological books for study from his own private library.¹²⁴ The worn and ramshackle seminary set the tone for the modest monastic community.

¹¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 342.

¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 201.

¹²¹ Marsh, 232.

¹²² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

¹²³ Zimmermann, 107.

¹²⁴ Bethge, 348.

Bonhoeffer sought to recover the spiritual realities presented in the Sermon on the Mount, which he considered the pinnacle of Jesus' teachings. Sifton and Stern suggested "the spiritual practice of meditating on this impossible, sublime text greatly strengthened and deepened him. He rightly believed that it was being forgotten or ignored in the conventions of modern Christian practice...and it remained at the core of his religious study for the rest of his short life, at the core of his spiritual being."¹²⁵ He daily led the young pastors through the basics of the Christian faith, rooted in the Beatitudes, teaching a practical and grounded faith not an ivory tower religion.¹²⁶ He wanted to immerse the pastors in a culture where they could learn the depth of the Christian faith in community in order to be fully prepared to be sent out to minister in a hostile world which opposed them. Bonhoeffer noted, "[t]he goal is not monastic isolation but rather the most intensive concentration for ministry to the world."¹²⁷ Finkenwalde was designed to empower, enable, and energize the seminarians to engage in the *Kirchenkampf*, the church struggle.¹²⁸

Worship

Bonhoeffer unsurprisingly placed much emphasis upon worship in community, specifically the importance of singing songs together. He suggested "[t]he more we sing, the more joy will we derive from it, but, above all, the more devotion and discipline and joy we put into our singing, the richer will be the blessing that will come to the whole life

¹²⁵ Sifton and Stern, 43.

¹²⁶ Haggard, *Pastors Against Hitler*, 126.

¹²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Finkenwalde*, 96.

¹²⁸ Tietz, 57.

of the fellowship from singing together.”¹²⁹ His emphasis was the shared experience of the community lifting up worshipful song in obedience to God. He continued, “[i]t is the voice of the Church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song.”¹³⁰ Thus, the focus is less upon the individual connecting with YHWH in worship, lifting up a song of praise and adoration, and more about choosing to connect with a community of likeminded believers who are actively worshipping God and choosing to share in that worship experience. Bonhoeffer’s concern was regarding the spiritual activity of corporate worship rather than musicality, emotivism, or personal entertainment.

Bonhoeffer taught that the spirituality of worship was a way that God formed the Christian into a new kind of person, one who is a new man in Christ.¹³¹ Thus, the spiritual disciplines were part of the believing community’s worship to God, as everything in daily life should be centered around worship.¹³² He cautioned the Finkenwaldian community against falling into ritualistic piety for the sake of legalism. He taught that the brotherly fellowship of communal monastic life will guard against such legalism and help to remain focused upon true faith-based commitment and obedience to YHWH. He warned “[w]here the heart is not singing there is no melody, there is only the dreadful medley of human self-praise. Where the singing is not to the Lord, it is singing to the honor of the

¹²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 61.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 169-170.

¹³² Bonhoeffer, *Finkenwalde*, 97.

self or the music, and the new song becomes a song to the idols.”¹³³ He always kept God at the center of life.

Bonhoeffer saw the counter-cultural community in its worshipful state of being as a way that God redefines and reforms the individual believers.¹³⁴ He knew that each person brings influences from the unreconciled world into the covenant community, and thus obediently following the spiritual disciplines, as a worshipful activity, is how God brings about transformation in the life of the individual believer and in the community as a whole.¹³⁵ Yet, he did not reject individualism completely, nor did he remove personal responsibility. Bonhoeffer explained that Christians are “autonomous members of the church.”¹³⁶ But, every individual must willingly submit to the community in mutual submission.

Worship was of the utmost importance to Bonhoeffer, yet a proper understanding of worship was necessary. He taught devout, communal, obedient submission to God through the daily spiritual disciplines. When one submitted to these spiritual disciplines, they would become more like Christ. While the prospect of such a lifestyle could seem daunting at first, he assured the believer that this life was the most rewarding, blessed, and fulfilling life possible. Bonhoeffer declared, “let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing

¹³³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 58-59.

¹³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 170.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 203.

but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”¹³⁷

Bonhoeffer insisted God’s alternative community is the peak of human existence and worth celebration.

Lament

Bonhoeffer taught that lamentation was a characteristic trait for Jesus followers. Jesus said, “[b]lessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”¹³⁸ Bonhoeffer saw in the Beatitudes a call for Christians to recognize the sin, brokenness, separation, and sickness of the world, and thus bear the sorrow which the world cannot grasp.¹³⁹ He explained,

The disciple-community does not shake off sorrow as though it were no concern of its own, but willingly bears it...Sorrow cannot tire them or wear them down, it cannot embitter them or cause them to break down under the strain; far from it, for they bear their sorrow in the strength of him who bears them up, who bore the whole suffering of the world upon the cross.¹⁴⁰

To Bonhoeffer, mourning was the purposeful pathway to peace in Christ. It was the full recognition of the human condition and the dire need of a savior. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer taught that the Christian does not bear the weight of lament on their own, but through Christ. Thus, the alternative community must take sin seriously and grieve the divinely prescribed grief for sin along with Christ. Bonhoeffer suggested that in response

¹³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20.

¹³⁸ Matt. 5:4 (New American Standard Bible).

¹³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 108.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

to the grief of the world, the church “must have something *special* to say.”¹⁴¹ It is only after the Christian community laments that they find solace and rest in Jesus Christ.¹⁴²

Bonhoeffer noted that the Christian should respond to persecution, insults, and abuse through the Beatitudes, including lament.¹⁴³ His immediate audience would have understood this prescription as a reference to the *Kirchenkampf*. He received this teaching from Jesus, who ended the Beatitudes saying, “[b]lessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”¹⁴⁴ While Bonhoeffer had to be cautious how much he directly referenced the immediate Nazi threat, his teachings reveal how his true thoughts: the true Christian community will always be at odds with the dominant culture, and must respond with a Christlike beatifically informed attitude.¹⁴⁵

Bonhoeffer’s view of Christian grief, informed by the Sermon on the Mount, was pointed toward the antidote of sin: Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. He noted, “exactly there where the cross stands, the resurrection is near.”¹⁴⁶ Lament prepared one’s heart to receive Christ’s gift of salvation. Bonhoeffer did not see lament as despair, but a necessary step towards redemption and salvation. He preached at his grandmother’s

¹⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 15.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 114.

¹⁴⁴ Matt. 5:11-12 (New American Standard Bible).

¹⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 151.

¹⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 17.

funeral, Julie Bonhoeffer, how the family should approach such grief, with an eternal perspective and a joyful heart, recognizing God has provided eternity for those who have received His salvific gift.¹⁴⁷ He viewed suffering and sorrow through the lens of the prophet Jeremiah who taught hope for a bright future, saying the prophet gave “a sign of trust in the future. This is where faith belongs.”¹⁴⁸ His positive view of future things is no mere optimistic perspective, but is a faith and trust in God’s divine plan and promise.

The intentional act of lament is submission to Christ. What is more, those who obediently submit to Jesus’ counter-intuitive beatific teachings, will find redemption, comfort, peace, and salvation in Him.¹⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, expanding on the Sermon on the Mount, explained, “[f]ellowship with Jesus and obedience to his commandment come first, and all else follows. Worldly cares are not a part of our discipleship, but distinct and subordinate concerns...God will help us in the hour of need, and he knows our needs.”¹⁵⁰ For Bonhoeffer, the Christian is to mourn because Jesus prescribed mourning. The blessing and transformation in Christ is God’s responsibility; the disciple does his part and trusts God to respond in kind, not out of transactional duty but out of a loving and covenantal promise.

¹⁴⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, trans. David McI Gracie (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 71.

¹⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, 415.

¹⁴⁹ Rasmussen, 35.

¹⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 180-81.

Energizing

Bonhoeffer did not use the term energizing, but he demonstrated the importance of motivating, empowering, and inspiring the community of faith. He believed that one's submission to Jesus' teachings would set him or her apart from the broader society and put them on a path of divine empowerment.¹⁵¹ Energizing was an issue of motivation, authority, and adherence to God's standards, not a political agenda. Bonhoeffer did not adhere to a political scheme for social criticism, political activism, or social justice. He drew distinct lines between politics, government, and humanitarian concerns and the Christian focus of complete submission to God.¹⁵² The issue of when a prophetic leader should engage with political action will be discussed further in chapter five.

Bonhoeffer saw the Christian community as an empowered organism living in the midst of enemy territory, proclaiming and exemplifying a radical message of salvation, hope, love, and joy in Christ; the Kingdom of God.¹⁵³ He found this to be an exhilarating divinely inspired call, explaining, "God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man."¹⁵⁴ His ecclesiological teachings affirmed that the church was the body of Christ, alive, active, and dwelling in the world.¹⁵⁵ The Christian had the wonderful privilege of obediently following God's calling on his or her life and participating in the divine activity in the world. The life of

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵² Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 218-19.

¹⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17-18.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 243.

obedience is one that God is working within, as Bonhoeffer explained, “[t]he life of the faithful in the Church is indeed the *Life of Christ in them*.”¹⁵⁶

For Bonhoeffer, there was no energizing, motivation, or inspiration apart from complete submission to God. Yet, it is in total submission that the Christian community finds their calling within the divine kingdom.¹⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer explained that the Christian community, through obedience, will “become partakers in the heavenly treasure for which they pray. Furthermore, God uses their prayers to hasten the coming of the End.”¹⁵⁸ Christians are ambassadors of God, sent on His behalf, with His authority, to implore the world to be reconciled to God through the work of Christ and enter into this new kingdom.¹⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer saw this calling as an empowering reality which he taught to his students at Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer always carried with him a sense of awe at the physical and spiritual institution of the church. He explained, “life in the human community acquires its divine meaning. This community itself is one of the forms of God's revelation. God is with us as long as there is community.”¹⁶⁰ With God dwelling in the midst of the Christian community, it was ontologically a new creation. He suggested, “[s]ince the ascension, Christ’s place on the earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The church is the real presence of Christ... We should think of the Church not as an institution but as a *person*,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 244.

¹⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 166.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ 2 Cor. 5:20.

¹⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 1*, 6.

though of course a person in a unique sense.”¹⁶¹ God uses the body of Christ, the church, to bring the message of a fresh, new worldview, a hope and a future, where a new reality is established upon His justice and laws.¹⁶²

When Bonhoeffer recognized that the broader culture within his context had become antichristian, both in theology and in practice, he decided to energize his follower community with a counter-cultural Christian practice.¹⁶³ Finkenwalde was a new experiment developed out of classical Christian monasticism, designed to reform the students’ worldviews, and reveal how far the German Lutheran Church had wandered from biblical Christianity.¹⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer explained, “monasticism became a living protest against the secularization of Christianity and the cheapening of grace.”¹⁶⁵ He believed “the hall-mark of Christianity is our separation from the world, our transcendence of its standards, and our extraordinariness.”¹⁶⁶ He developed an excitement from the challenge of complete submission and obedience to God’s standards, and the students soon followed.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 241.

¹⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, 15.

¹⁶³ Marsh, 235.

¹⁶⁴ Robertson, 110-11.

¹⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 46.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁶⁷ Marsh, 229.

The daily adherence to monastic life was not an aim at legalistic piety, but an intentional response to the broader culture and customs which surrounded them and permeated their own lifestyles. Bonhoeffer suggested that the spiritual disciplines

...have only one purpose —to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done. Fasting helps to discipline the self-indulgent and slothful will which is so reluctant to serve the Lord, and it helps to humiliate and chasten the flesh. By practicing abstemiousness we show the world how different the Christian life is from its own.”¹⁶⁸

The spiritual disciplines were preparation, spiritual training, for engaging the dominant culture outside of Finkenwalde. The process took time, and the students did not immediately understand or even willingly accept life at Finkenwalde, but persisted out of a sense of duty.¹⁶⁹ Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, a student at the seminary, recalled, “gradually we became ready to fall in with him and to do with zest what we were asked to do.”¹⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer brought a patient and holistic approach to discipleship, marrying both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, submitting all of life to the lordship of Jesus Christ in personal transformation as preparation for how God would use them to engage with Nazi Germany.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Bonhoeffer gleaned the principals of discipleship, submission, and obedience from the Scriptures and recognized an urgent need to put them into practice. He had broken away from the state sponsored Lutheran Church and became disillusioned with

¹⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 168.

¹⁶⁹ Robertson, 111.

¹⁷⁰ Zimmermann, 108.

¹⁷¹ Glenthøj, 174-75.

the German academic system, recognizing no biblically accurate response from either. Thus, he took matters into his own hands, responding to the Confessing Church's urgent need to train their young pastors, and developed a counter-cultural community rooted in complete surrender to YHWH. Finkenwalde became a bootcamp for a spiritually lean and powerful taskforce designed to confront the errors of the dominant culture and share the Gospel message of salvation and transformation, with the goal of further developing the paradoxical Kingdom of God.

Bonhoeffer's experiment at Finkenwalde, opened in 1935 and shut down by the Gestapo in 1937, was short lived, leaving one to wonder if Bonhoeffer's experimentation was successful or not.¹⁷² If one uses the lens of prophetic leadership to view success, then Finkenwalde must be recognized as a success: a community wholly dedicated to the training of students in the ways of complete submission and obedience to God. Furthermore, according to prophetic leadership, obedience is the measure of success, and Bonhoeffer remains an example of a successful modern prophetic leader. Both Bonhoeffer and Brueggemann found inspiration for their theology and practice within the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, as is evidenced by this study. While there is certainly much that lays outside the area of overlap, the two theologians find agreement within the realm of prophetic leadership, even if they did not have the vocabulary to articulate it as such.

¹⁷² Bethge, 387.

CHAPTER 5: THIRD CHARACTERISTIC OF PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP -
CONFRONTING ERRANT, IMMORAL, AND AMORAL GOVERNING
AUTHORITIES

Introduction – Church and Government

Prophetic leadership views Jesus Christ’s comprehensive lordship as an essential characteristic, which, by definition, includes His authoritative lordship over the church and earthly authorities, as established in chapter three. Bonhoeffer held to this view, as well, seeing both church and government as created by, and subject to, God.¹ While church and government need not be in tension, they are quite often in a struggle for power, control, and authority.² Throughout history there has been a tendency among governments towards totalitarian control, standing in stark contrast to a New Testament worldview.³ The church, although called to show deference to government, must maintain Christ as the supreme authoritative voice over and above any other. When a government oversteps God’s mandated limits, it sets itself against the will of God.⁴ Such was the case within Bonhoeffer’s context of Nazi Germany and the *Kirchenkampf*, or church struggle. The German theologian held strong convictions regarding the nature of the church and the state, both separately and how they should engage together. This

¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 105.

² Carl H. Esbeck, “Five Views of Church-State Relations in Contemporary American Thought,” *BYU Law Review* 2, no. 5 (1986): 371.

³ Wolters, 83.

⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 257.

chapter will analyze the nature of these two entities, what Brueggemann taught regarding prophetic engagement with the government, and what Bonhoeffer taught and modeled regarding prophetic confrontation. Bonhoeffer's example of respectful, yet adamant, confrontation will be analyzed as consistent with prophetic leadership's third characteristic.

The Third Characteristic – Confronting Errant, Immoral, and Amoral Governing Authorities

The prophetic leader's initial intentions should not be to subvert, overthrow, or disrupt governing authorities. The Apostle Paul explained, "whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."⁵ Yet, a biblical ordering of authority places YHWH above all earthly authorities. Thus, Christians should not obey laws that are against God's laws.⁶ The Apostle Peter concisely summed up the concept in the book of Acts when he stated "[w]e must obey God rather than men."⁷ The prophetic leader must be cautious not to blindly follow all government mandated rules, and must also ensure he or she is not automatically rejecting everything an authority dictates. Wisdom and discernment are required for prophetic leaders who would seek a balanced and biblical approach to leadership.

⁵ Rom. 13:2 (New American Standard Bible).

⁶ Grudem, 437.

⁷ Acts 5:29 (New American Standard Bible).

Government Overreaches

Governments have habitually overreached and restricted human liberty claiming more control than necessary, rarely relinquishing liberties back once taken.⁸ These incremental claims over freedom and imposition of laws are a way of training a society to reshape its morality.⁹ The tendency to reshape society is not a new phenomenon. History is replete with examples from antiquity to the modern era. A recent example of government overreach was the suppression of religious freedom in South Korea as evidenced in Covid-19 restrictions, closing the doors on churches and limiting physical gatherings.¹⁰ In extreme cases, governments obtain totalitarian control and implement amoral laws and legislation using extreme powers, exclusionist ideologies, secret police, terrorism, propaganda, and political self-importance over and above individual citizens.¹¹ While totalitarian governments are the extreme, there is no reason to believe these behaviors will cease in the future. Thus, it is important for leaders to consider the appropriate response to governments that fall into similar errors, leading to immoral or amoral legislations.

⁸ Grudem, 444.

⁹ Ibid., 447.

¹⁰ Daeho Choi and Taesoo Kim, "Governmental Response to 'Covid-19' and Religious Freedom in Korea As Compared to the United States," *Religions*, 14, no. 173 (2023): 11.

¹¹ Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini: Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century* (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 1.

Biblical Support to Defy Government Evils

Brueggemann noted that governments' abuses of power tend towards removal of religious freedoms, controlling the religions and gods of the people, and setting themselves up as gods, whether overtly or covertly.¹² It is in these times where the prophetic community is confronted with whom they will obey. Grudem noted that "God requires his people to disobey the civil government if obedience would mean directly disobeying God."¹³ Yet, the biblical prophets were not primarily concerned with disobeying evil governments, but with the proclamation of YHWH and His ways. Consequently, obedience to God required the prophets to disobey errant governing authorities and stand upon God's laws and promises. Brueggemann clarified the prophetic goal in criticizing evil authorities, stating, "[c]riticism is not carping and denouncing. It is asserting that false claims to authority and power cannot keep their promises, which they could not in the face of a free God."¹⁴ The biblical prophets were not participating in partisan politics, but were holding the governing authorities to God's divine standard. The goal was not regime change, but changing the underlying paradigm that supported such an evil regime in the first place.¹⁵ The goal was divine transformation.

¹² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 7.

¹³ Grudem, 437.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21

Moses and Pharaoh

Brueggemann explained that the Exodus was a two-fold prophetic project. One aspect was the breaking from the religious triumphalism of Pharaoh as god, and another aspect was the breaking from the politics of exploitation and oppression.¹⁶ While previously Moses' worshipful activities were analyzed as a way of separation from Pharaoh's religious grasp, the scope of the current chapter seeks to analyze how prophetic leadership confronts errant, immoral, or amoral governments. Thus, Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh will be analyzed, including how the prophetic leader faced the Egyptian tyrant and broke from abusive and corrupt captivity. Brueggemann clarified, "[t]he alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness."¹⁷ Moses, commanded by God, confronted Pharaoh, demanding justice and religious freedom.¹⁸ Honeycutt suggested that "[t]he request of Moses was incredulous. Pharaoh did not know Yahweh. Why should he respond positively to Moses' request?"¹⁹ Yet, the prophet was not concerned with what was likely or practical, but of obedience to the task God had set before him.²⁰ Moses was reluctant, yet compliant, to God's calling to face Pharaoh and demand the release of the Hebrews.²¹

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3 (emphasis original).

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Honeycutt, 339.

²⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 39.

²¹ Howell, 28.

Moses, along with his brother and prophetic partner Aaron, brought an abrupt, imperative, and divine message to Pharaoh without the polite pleasantries normative for addressing royalty.²² Albeit bold, Moses was not typically violent in his confrontation with Pharaoh. He was a messenger of God, bringing an audacious demand.²³ The repercussions of Pharaoh's hardened heart, and thus rejection of Moses' request, was not a humanly designed plan to picket, riot, or overthrow a government. God brought the plagues as punishment, not Moses.²⁴ YHWH was ultimately responsible for the punishment wrought upon Egypt, while at the same time He was responsible for creating and maintaining the new prophetic community of the Hebrews.²⁵ Brueggemann explained that the "prophetic insistence affirms the freedom of God to act outside of, beyond, and in contradiction to the totalism."²⁶ Moses, while the messenger, was not the one responsible for the plagues.

Pharaoh knew not of the Hebrew God, so he punished the Hebrews for the demands and consequences imparted by YHWH.²⁷ The prophetic criticism of Moses brought harder oppression upon all Hebrews.²⁸ Herein lies a harrowing truth of prophetic

²² Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1, The Five Books of Moses* (New York: WW Norton, 2019), 230.

²³ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 12.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 128.

²⁷ Alter, 231-32.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 9.

leadership; the burden of the prophetic leader is knowing the follower community may be held responsible and punished for confronting errant authorities. Still, the prophetic leader should be concerned first and foremost with obedience to YHWH, and not with the potential fallout of his or her prophetic stand. The increasingly harsh punishment of Pharaoh upon the Hebrews caused them to quickly turn on Moses, saying, “[m]ay the Lord look upon you and judge you, because you have made us repulsive in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants.”²⁹ Moses returned to God, confused, frustrated, and lost, questioning why He would allow such evil to come upon the Hebrew people and why Moses was sent in the first place.³⁰ While some may question the prophet’s faith or resilience, it must be recognized that Moses did indeed return to God even after he perceived himself as a failure.

Moses obediently continued to confront Pharaoh throughout the plague cycles, while God promised deliverance. Howell noted, “[w]hat stands out in the narrative is, above all, the relentless obedience of Moses in the face of Pharaoh’s broken promises of conditional release, Pharaoh’s hollow words of feigned remorse, and his repeated hardenings.”³¹ Moses did not trust in the promises of Pharaoh, but the promises of God. Throughout the plagues, God was working within the heart of Pharaoh in a way that Moses never could.³² The real work, the dismantling of an empirical tyrant, the breaking

²⁹ Exod. 5:21 (New American Standard Bible).

³⁰ Honeycutt, 340.

³¹ Howell, 29.

³² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 14.

of bondage, and deliverance were accomplished by the hand of God.³³ Honeycutt explained, “[t]he final plague rests upon the action of God, apart from mediation by either Moses or Aaron.”³⁴ God punished Pharaoh by killing the firstborn of all Egypt, including Pharaoh’s own heir. In a crushing defeat, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, saying, “[r]ise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the Lord, as you have said.”³⁵ Egypt’s punishment and the Hebrews’ salvation was solely at the hands of YHWH.

Moses was only successful because he was obedient to God. The consequences and the victory were truly YHWH’s. The rest of the Exodus narrative recounts numerous other struggles, including Pharaoh’s immediate pursuit of Moses and the Hebrews to the Red Sea, leading to yet another humiliating Egyptian defeat.³⁶ The Hebrews’ newfound freedom afforded them new opportunities, which they continued to stumble and struggle through.³⁷ Their path toward the Promised Land became a long and hard journey, but the miraculous nature of their departure from Egypt and God’s faithfulness continued to shape the nature of the Hebrew people throughout history. The Passover is still celebrated today as a remembrance of what YHWH accomplished thousands of years ago, and Moses remains the emblematic prophet who confronted the errant and immoral king of Egypt out of obedience to the King of the Universe.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Honeycutt, 363.

³⁵ Exod. 12:31 (New American Standard Bible).

³⁶ Howell, 29.

³⁷ Cohen, 111.

Daniel

One of the most profound biblical personalities to stand against evil and defy a rule which would cause someone to sin is the Prophet Daniel. Through faith and wisdom at a young age, he respectfully requested an amended diet so as not to sin by partaking of the unclean food.³⁸ He did not challenge the authority of the chief of the eunuchs or the steward, instead he recognized their authority by asking permission and offered an alternative trial period. When God showed His favor in Daniel's healthy physical appearance, Daniel was permitted to continue his diet.³⁹ This obedient stand in his youth was just the beginning of his obedience in the face of dangerous authority.

Daniel and Darius

Daniel was faced with a more menacing challenge later in life under a different governmental regime; this time he would most assuredly lose his life if he disobeyed.⁴⁰ King Darius signed a law stating that anyone who petitioned any god or man other than Darius would be thrown into the lions' den.⁴¹ This was a political scheme thought up by other jealous officials.⁴² The king favored Daniel as a man of character; thus, Daniel's adversaries used Daniel's faith against him and trapped him.⁴³ Howell noted, "Daniel

³⁸ Howell, 113.

³⁹ John Joseph Owens, "Daniel," In *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 6, Jeremiah – Daniel*, ed. Clifton Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 384.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁴¹ Dan. 6:6-7.

⁴² Owens, 414.

⁴³ Howell, 118.

refused to compromise his convictions, even temporarily, with full awareness of the consequences.”⁴⁴ God protected Daniel in the midst of the deathly punishment and King Darius, in turn, gave God the glory for the miraculous act.⁴⁵ Daniel’s example reveals how prophetic leaders are to face tough scenarios: with obedience, poise, grace, respect, and above all, steadfast faithfulness. He did not withdraw from the culture which was counter to his own, instead, he balanced his convictions and service faithfully without compromising his principles. He maintained his authority and influence within the kingdom even while disobeying Darius. Howell explained Daniel’s successful obedience, stating,

In the famous lion’s den incident we see the array of qualities that enabled Daniel to balance faith and work in the secular world of his day. First, he was an exceptional administrator (6:3) who carried out his duties diligently and without a trace of corruption (6:4). Second, the regular practice of prayer was a first priority (6:10-11). Third, he could maintain calm in the midst of accusations, leaving his vindication to God (6:12-18). Fourth, he experienced and humbly acknowledged God’s powerful intervention (6:22). Fifth, his trust in God was not shaken even under threats of death (6:23).⁴⁶

In the end, Daniel received favor in the eyes of Darius, rather than condemnation. His prophetic leadership reveals that not all prophetic stands will end in loss of life, loss of status, or continued persecution.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Owens, 417-18. It should be noted that Darius did not convert to Judaism, nor did he claim YHWH as the one and only true God. His decree elevated Daniel and his God to allow for religious toleration, but was not evidence of a spiritual transformation, nor of a personal faith-based relationship with YHWH as exemplified in Daniel’s faith.

⁴⁶ Howell, 121.

Daniel, and his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, faced many trials which tested their faith and obedience. Daniel spoke to governing officials with discretion, wisdom, and discernment.⁴⁷ The other three maintained faithful resolve when confronting Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁸ The book of Daniel offers numerous examples of God's power being revealed to governing officials while the four YHWH followers—primarily Daniel—are utilized as examples of faithful servants.⁴⁹ These examples of prophetic leadership are vital to understanding the importance of prophetic confrontation, while maintaining respect for government as a divinely established authority.

Jesus and Pilate

The biblical record is abundant with examples, from Moses to the Apostles, of God's people defying official decrees and facing punishment from governments while at the same time receiving God's approval. This principle is most evident in Jesus' interaction with Pilate in the Praetorium.⁵⁰ The Jewish religious leaders arrested Jesus and sent him to Pilate under false pretense. They hoped that Rome would put Jesus to death, and thus end His audacious claims, religiously defiant miracles, and—most importantly—cease His expanding influence.⁵¹ Jesus was caught up within the politically complex machine of Palestine where tensions were high and the Romans and Jewish

⁴⁷ Dan. 2:14.

⁴⁸ Dan. 3:16-18.

⁴⁹ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 3, The Writings* (New York: WW Norton, 2019), 749-50.

⁵⁰ John 19:8-11.

⁵¹ Tolbert, 175.

leaders were stuck in a standoff.⁵² After being questioned regarding the validity of the charges, Jesus respectfully refused to be drawn into the political crossfire between Pilate, Herod, and the religious leaders.⁵³

Pilate asked Jesus, “So You are the King of the Jews?”⁵⁴ Tolbert explained, “[w]hen he asks Jesus if he is king of the Jews, he really means: ‘Are you a revolutionary seeking to establish an independent Jewish state?’ *You have said so*. That is, ‘You are using the terminology with its political implications, not I.’⁵⁵ The Roman Governor found no evidence of a crime to punish Jesus.⁵⁶ The Jewish leaders replied, “He is stirring up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, as far as this place!”⁵⁷ Pilate sent Him to Herod upon finding out Jesus was a Galilean. Jesus, being passed around, was received gleefully by the tetrarch in hopes of seeing some of the miracles which he had heard so much about. Yet, Jesus did not perform for the puppet-ruler and refused to be a willing participant in the political pretense.⁵⁸ He was sent back to Pilate, this time dressed in the mockery of an elegant robe.

⁵² Agosto, 90.

⁵³ Gangel, 335.

⁵⁴ Luke 23:3 (New American Standard Bible).

⁵⁵ Tolbert, 175 (emphasis original).

⁵⁶ Luke 23:4.

⁵⁷ Luke 23:5 (New American Standard Bible).

⁵⁸ John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1969), 129.

Jesus made no defense for Himself and refused to be co-opted for political purposes, thus His silence spoke for Him.⁵⁹ Efrain Agosto suggested, “[s]ilence continues when Jesus faces imperial power directly in the person of Rome’s representative in Judea, the proconsul Pilate.”⁶⁰ Jesus did not beg, lie, filibuster, or explain away His accusations. He fulfilled Isaiah’s words, “He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth.”⁶¹ Isaiah understood the Messiah was to be silent before His accusers just like a lamb is silent before it is slaughtered.⁶² Pilate offered to have Jesus beaten and released since neither he nor Herod found any basis for execution, yet the Roman ruler ultimately had Jesus crucified due to the demands for His death.⁶³

Jesus, provided with ample opportunity to distance Himself from the cross and the punishment of the government, willingly submitted Himself to the unjust punishment of both the Romans and the Jews.⁶⁴ The crucifixion was necessary in order to fulfill Jesus’ own predictions of His death.⁶⁵ Hindsight reveals that Jesus was in control of the whole situation. When Pilate was frustrated at Jesus’ silence, he reminded Jesus that he had the authority to crucify Him. Jesus responded, “You would have no authority over Me at all,

⁵⁹ Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” In *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 8, Matthew – Mark*, ed. Clifton Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 242.

⁶⁰ Agosto, 89.

⁶¹ Isaiah, 53:7, New American Standard Bible, 2020.

⁶² Walvoord, 91.

⁶³ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁴ John 10:17-18, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 5:25, Heb. 7:27; 9:14.

⁶⁵ John 18:32.

if it had not been given to you from above.”⁶⁶ Jesus chose to submit to the authority of YHWH and understood that Pilate was under God’s sovereignty even if the Roman ruler was ignorant of it.⁶⁷ His silence was yet another way Jesus confronted an errant governmental machine and pointed to God as the ultimate authority. Jesus’ prophetic example reveals that maintaining a sober, respectful, and humble attitude while acting defiantly before government is the biblical standard.

Not every prophetic voice is protected by God in the moment; in fact, this was never a promise given to the prophets.⁶⁸ Jesus warned his followers of how difficult a life of faith would be.⁶⁹ Yet, in Jesus’ counter-intuitive wisdom, He reassured believers that they would be blessed when persecuted and they would be counted among the long history of faithful prophets.⁷⁰ The warnings and prescriptions remain the same in the modern era. Yet, the context of the modern era is vastly different in many ways than the various contexts within the biblical narrative. Thus, an analysis of Bonhoeffer’s respectful, yet defiant, stance against the Nazi government is necessary to understand how he fulfilled the third characteristic of prophetic leadership.

⁶⁶ John 19:11 (New American Standard Bible).

⁶⁷ Gangel, 348.

⁶⁸ Owens, 414.

⁶⁹ John 16:33.

⁷⁰ Matt. 5:11-12.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Prophetic Criticism

Two days after Hitler was named Reich Chancellor, Bonhoeffer gave a radio address titled *The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation* where he warned of the dangers of idolizing the Führer.⁷¹ In the speech, he said,

The Leader will have to be conscious of this clear limitation of his authority....If he allows himself to surrender to the wishes of his followers, who would always make him their idol—then the image of the Leader will pass over into the image of the misleader, and he will be acting in a criminal way not only towards those he leads, but also towards himself.⁷²

Bonhoeffer recognized the potentially dangerous nature of unbridled authority and unwavering allegiance.⁷³ He favored leaders who were stewards of their position that wanted to serve their followers, rather than a leader who was motivated by selfish ambition.⁷⁴ The radio address was abruptly shut off, although there are various reasons given for the abrupt ending.⁷⁵ Regardless, Bonhoeffer was a vocal critic early on in Hitler's career which set the trajectory for his continual prophetic criticism.

By April 1933 Bonhoeffer had begun to recognize the implications of Hitler's antisemitism upon the German Church and wrote an essay titled *The Church and the Jewish Question* to address what lay ahead.⁷⁶ He predicted that the Jews would quickly

⁷¹ Bethge, 193.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 198.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁵ Tietz, 36.

⁷⁶ Bethge, 206.

be removed from ecclesial positions and was troubled by his anticipations.⁷⁷ He discussed the recent Aryan clauses which refused to allow Jews to work in government positions, including positions within the church.⁷⁸ He began the essay by stating the clear separation of church and state spheres of influence, and how the church should not be involving itself within state matters, and vice versa.⁷⁹ But, then he noted that the church should respond to government overreach. He explained that, “[t]he church must reject this encroachment of the order of the state precisely because of its better knowledge of the state and of the limitations of its action. The state which endangers the Christian proclamation negates itself.”⁸⁰ He offered three ways for the church to respond to government encroachment: directly ask government if its actions are right or wrong, aid the victims of the government, and—in extreme cases—“put a spoke in the wheel itself.”⁸¹ These words of Bonhoeffer have been interpreted in numerous ways, but his main point was that the church should take more direct action when a government begins to take away rights of its citizens.⁸²

Bonhoeffer was continually troubled by the hateful rhetoric and disturbing changes early on in Adolf Hitler’s rise to power. Hitler’s Nazification of the ecclesial

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Marsh, 165.

⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 218-19.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 221.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tietz, 39.

structure was well underway in late 1933 through the raising up of Ludwig Müller as Reich Bishop and gaining comprehensive control of the *Reichskirche*.⁸³ Goodyear suggested that “[t]he Christian church set aside its ethical questions concerning the practices of the Third Reich in exchange for stability and a promised future for German society, valuing temporal security and political efficiency over theological faithfulness.”⁸⁴ As discussed in chapter two, the *Reichskirche* adopted the Aryan Paragraph, perverted orthodox Christian theology, and began to ‘purify’ the church with its new Nazi standards.⁸⁵ The expectation was to rid the *Reichskirche* of anything Jewish: theology, history, and people. Hitler utilized Martin Luther’s call to eradicate the Jews from Germany, as was the great Protestant Reformer’s prescription in his troubling pamphlet *Against The Jews and Their Lies*.⁸⁶ Hitler blended nationalism with Christianity, blurring the lines between faith and national pride.⁸⁷ The Führer expected respect and worship. Blind obedience and submission were due to the Führer alone and his antisemitism.

Some within the church were compelled to resist the evil abomination of Nazi theology in the hopes of not just saving the historic Lutheran Church, but also the entire German Nation.⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, one of these concerned pastors, recognized the importance

⁸³ Bergen, 15.

⁸⁴ Goodyear, 74.

⁸⁵ Bergen, 158-59.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁸ Glenthøj, 173.

of theology and how it guides individuals and societies, developing worldviews and morals, connecting concepts with concrete reality.⁸⁹ He helped to create the Pastors' Emergency League under the leadership of Martin Niemöller, assisted by other concerned German pastors in order to support the non-Aryan clergy effected by the Aryan Paragraph.⁹⁰ They authored the Barmen Declaration as an official creedal statement to resist the Nazi influence and authority within German Christendom.⁹¹ Bethge noted that the Barmen Declaration "did at least formulate a comprehensive catalogue of essential grievances couched in unequivocal terms: leadership principle, regime of force, disciplinary measures and racial discrimination 'without precedent in the history of the Church....incompatible [*sic*] with the Christian principle.'"⁹² Bonhoeffer attached his name to the list of others who willfully stood against Müller, and thus Hitler.

The Confessing Church was birthed from the Emergency League and was an alternative confessional community, free from the tyranny of the government, as opposed to the state sponsored *Reichskirche*.⁹³ Tensions within the Confessing Church grew as some leaders—Martin Niemöller for instance—seemed to capitulate to the Nazi agenda, whereas Bonhoeffer wanted a stronger and bolder resistance effort.⁹⁴ Yet, freedom from

⁸⁹ Henry Mottu, "Bonhoeffer and our Theological Existence Today," in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, ed. A. J. Klassen, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 204-05.

⁹⁰ Gerlach and Barnett, 45.

⁹¹ Marsh, 198-99.

⁹² Bethge, 296-97.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

Nazi theological influence did not mean freedom from Nazi persecution. In fact, it meant quite the opposite. Bethge noted that “1935 saw the early phase of the legislation that would ultimately bring about the destruction both from within and from without of the newly created Confessing Church.”⁹⁵

While pressure was building within Germany, the rest of the world seemed to ignore the escalating tensions despite the work of Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church.⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer had struggled for years to make their plight known to the world outside of Germany, but his association with the Confessing Church, and their lack of official recognition as a legitimate church, left him with no audience, like a voice crying in the wilderness, reminiscent of a biblical prophet.⁹⁷ With his efforts failing to produce sufficient results, he changed his focus from protesting outside the national border to dissenting within the Nazi’s authoritative territory, choosing confrontation as a conscientious objector through pacifism and the underground prophetic community at Finkenwalde.⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer recognized theological support for dissent modeled in Jesus’ silence before Pilate and sought to mirror it in his life and ministry.⁹⁹ In his Christology lectures, he explained,

Human beings destroy the Who standing over against them. Who are you? People ask Jesus. Silence is his reply. Human beings cannot wait for the answer. They kill him. The logos cannot bear the presence of the counter Logos, because it

⁹⁵ Ibid., 343.

⁹⁶ Gerlach and Barnett, 50-51.

⁹⁷ Marsh, 272-73.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 215.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 171.

knows that one of them must die. So the human logos kills the Jesus Christ Logos who has appeared before it and challenged it, and goes on living with the unanswered question of existence and transcendence.¹⁰⁰

Packed into this lecture was a critique of both humanity and governments. Bonhoeffer understood Pilate's frustration with Jesus' silence as the normal response of governing officials who are frustrated by a conscientious objector. Instead of patience and understanding, Pilate wanted to kill Jesus, the *Logos*, and be rid of Him and His troubles. Yet, Pilate was left with no real answers and unchanged by his interchange with the Logos, Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer believed the logical and theological conclusion of such a direct confrontation between a prophetic leader and a ruler is death; death of the ruler's ways or death of the prophet. He continued, "[t]here are only two possibilities when a human being confronts Jesus: the human being must either die or kill Jesus."¹⁰¹ The government, or governing official, must give way to Jesus, His church, and His ways, or crush them as the opposition. He understood that by participating in prophetic criticism he created a dire situation with high stakes: either dramatic transformation of the German government—destroying the Nazi state and overhauling it with a radically different governing body—or sacrificing his own life for the prophetic cause. He sought to embody his theological beliefs in concrete and practical ways, even though it set him on a collision course with the Nazi death machine.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," In *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 267.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁰² *Bethge*, 336.

He took a step in the bold theological direction of developing the illegal seminary at Finkenwalde based upon Jesus' counter-intuitive Sermon on the Mount. Bonhoeffer designed the seminary to focus on a communal life of worship, servitude, spiritual discipline, meekness, and Christian obedience, but also a life of prophetic resistance. Finkenwalde's worshipful community developed while surrounded by the popular Nietzschean might-is-right ethic in the contemporary German worldview of the day.¹⁰³ This counter-cultural community celebrated everything the Nazi ideology hated as it taught an ethic rooted in the Jewish Rabbi who laid down his life for his enemies. It is almost impossible to overstate the confrontational boldness of Bonhoeffer's strategy.

Unsurprisingly, the Gestapo began to take notice of the underground seminary and its divergent worldview and ideology.¹⁰⁴ They conducted "interrogations, house searches, confiscations and arrests."¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer's personal convictions had begun to affect the students at Finkenwalde. This is one of the hazards of following a prophetic leader in the midst of an unethical society and government. A prophetic leader will lead followers towards obedience to YHWH, even if it means standing against, and being punished by, an errant government. The Finkenwaldian community acted as prophetic criticism of the oppressive regime, and one the Nazis would suffer no longer.¹⁰⁶ It was officially closed in the Fall of 1937, shutting the doors on Bonhoeffer's theological dream

¹⁰³ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰⁴ Robertson, 125.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 9-10.

of communal life and his defiant actions to educate young pastors in opposition to Nazi ideology.¹⁰⁷

During his tenure at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer co-authored a memorandum to Hitler detailing the errors of the Nazi government and its effect upon the church.¹⁰⁸ Far from being an accusatory treatise on the evils of the Nazis, the tone of the memorandum was pointed but respectful, open, and questioning.¹⁰⁹ It was designed to open a dialogue with the Nazi government. It listed seven main concerns the authors had, primarily the dechristianization of Germany, the perversion of Christian theology, the prevalent antisemitism, and the constant and pervasive spying on Germans. Hitler gave no reply, but the pastors who signed, including Bonhoeffer, certainly placed themselves in opposition to Hitler. The authors intended the letter to be a private correspondence, but international ecumenical contacts shared it widely and the *New York Herald Tribune* published it, setting the authors apart as vocal dissidents.¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer was exercising direct confrontation based upon the continual amorality of the Nazi government, even though it did not bring the desired result.

Bonhoeffer's Divergence from Prophetic Leadership

With his options dwindling, and yet committed to ending the terrors of the Third Reich, Bonhoeffer received an opportunity to join a conspiracy with the military

¹⁰⁷ Bethge, 387.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Kyle Jantzen, *Faith and Fatherland: Parish Politics in Hitler's Germany* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 7.

intelligence community called the *Abwehr*.¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer's work with the *Abwehr* will not be considered through the lens of prophetic leadership. That is not to suggest that he sinned or erred while participating in conspiratorial activities, but that he leveraged a different set of leadership characteristics as he delved further into the conspiracy. Chapter six will discuss more about the different leadership theories that dovetail well with prophetic leadership and how a prophetic leader can leverage various practices and characteristics. For the purposes of the current chapter, it should be noted that Bonhoeffer did not relent on his commitment to bring about the new reality of the kingdom of God within Germany when all of his options had seemingly expired. Yet, he understood what would likely happen to him, and he stayed committed to his convictions, as he wrote,

It is the urgent duty of every Christian soul to prepare itself for it. The time is coming when the confession of the living God will incur not only the hatred and the fury of the world, for on the whole it has come to that already, but complete ostracism from 'human society,' as they call it. The Christians will be hounded from place to place, subjected to physical assault, maltreatment and death of every kind. We are approaching an age of widespread persecution.¹¹²

He would not be dissuaded, but accepted his role as an obedient and defiant Jesus-follower within Nazi Germany and the consequences thereof.¹¹³ He knew of what was to come and was committed to facing it unapologetically with boldness of heart and conviction.

Allowed to travel under the auspices of official *Abwehr* counter-intelligence work, Bonhoeffer used his ecumenical experience and contacts as a guise for this

¹¹¹ Marsh, 267.

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 151.

¹¹³ Goodyear, 81.

work.¹¹⁴ Utilizing this newfound mobility, he began illegal activity as part of *Operation 7*, a covert plan to smuggle seven Jews safely outside of Nazi Germany.¹¹⁵ Originally a party of seven Jews, it doubled in size to fourteen.¹¹⁶ The covert and active non-violent mission of resistance took over a year to plan and execute, safely delivering the fourteen into politically neutral Switzerland.¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer believed it was his responsibility to protect those that the state had oppressed.¹¹⁸

Bonhoeffer's work with the *Abwehr* also consisted of a conspiracy to overthrow Hitler, which eventually evolved into a conspiracy to assassinate the Führer.¹¹⁹ Charles Marsh explained,

Bonhoeffer moved within an inescapable paradox; he gave his blessings to those who conspired to murder the Führer while affirming the essential nonviolence of the gospel. Responsible action meant killing the madman, even though such action violated God's commandment not to kill. How could it be otherwise? In the face of Hitler's atrocities, the way of nonviolence would bring inevitable guilt.¹²⁰

Bonhoeffer noted in a letter to his friend Bethge that this work with the *Abwehr*, "may prevent me from taking up my ministry again later on."¹²¹ This did not stop him from

¹¹⁴ Robertson, 178.

¹¹⁵ Bethge, 651.

¹¹⁶ Marsh, 317.

¹¹⁷ Bethge, 651.

¹¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 221.

¹¹⁹ Robertson, 139-40.

¹²⁰ Marsh, 345.

¹²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, 162.

conspiratorial activities, though, as he was committed to doing what was right rather than maintaining his ministerial authority.¹²² Bonhoeffer was never a central person in the conspiracy, nor was ever considered to be the assassin, as has been insinuated throughout the years since his death.¹²³ He primarily served the conspiracy by providing theological and spiritual support for the conspirators.¹²⁴

Bonhoeffer was arrested on March 13, 1943, for his various subversive activities, like evading military conscription.¹²⁵ He was taken to Tegel prison as a political prisoner and spent most of his imprisonment reading, writing, and concealing the *Abwehr*'s conspiratorial efforts.¹²⁶ The Nazis moved him to various detention centers after his involvement with the broader assassination attempts were discovered: the Gestapo prison in Berlin, then to Buchenwald concentration camp, and finally to Flossenbürg concentration camp.¹²⁷ He was killed at Flossenbürg on April 9, 1945 for his connection to the conspiracy to kill Hitler.¹²⁸ His body was burned in the open air with a pile of other bodies, as the crematorium at Flossenbürg had recently broken down. While the Nazis sought to silence the German theologian, his prophetic words continue to echo through the corridor of history.

¹²² Bethge, 586.

¹²³ Marsh, 326.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 344-45.

¹²⁶ Bethge, 703.

¹²⁷ Tietz, 130.

¹²⁸ Glenthøj, 170.

He lived the end of his life as a prophet to an errant king, and when the king took his life, he suffered death but for a moment. Jesus' words of blessing still ring true in the wake of his death: "[b]lessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."¹²⁹ The Apostle Paul noted the glorious reality of eternity for those who suffer for the sake of Christ, united in His suffering, and heirs of eternity with Him.¹³⁰ The Nazis would suggest Bonhoeffer's life meant nothing by their treatment of his death and cremation, however, the Scriptures promise he was precious in the eyes of God.¹³¹ Bonhoeffer's life was cut short, but his legacy of boldness and courage remains a beacon of hope to the would-be prophets of the modern world. He respectfully, yet adamantly, confronted the Nazi government, even co-authoring a memorandum to Hitler himself. Bonhoeffer's legacy reveals his adherence to the third characteristic of prophetic leadership.

¹²⁹ Matt. 5:11-12 (New American Standard Bible).

¹³⁰ Rom. 8:17.

¹³¹ Ps. 116:15.

CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS OF BONHOEFFER'S PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The current study has analyzed Bonhoeffer's leadership style through the lens of prophetic leadership utilizing Brueggeman's *Prophetic Imagination* to identify the three characteristics of prophetic leadership. The first characteristic is recognizing YHWH as the ultimate authority, and thus grounding leadership in a Judeo-Christian paradigm and providing a theological framework for morality. The second characteristic is nurturing a counter-cultural community based upon biblical standards. The third characteristic is to respectfully confront errant governments, holding them accountable for their errors, yet maintaining a level of respect for the government position which was established ultimately by God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer fulfilled these characteristics, modeling the lives of the biblical prophets—and more importantly—modeling the prophetic leadership qualities of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer overtly claimed to adhere to these three characteristics, but also concretely practiced them in his own life and leadership. For this reason, the current study asserts the German theologian was a paragon of modern prophetic leadership in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Synthesis of Bonhoeffer's Prophetic Leadership

Bonhoeffer's prophetic leadership is most apparent in the development of Finkenwalde where he nurtured a counter-cultural community of Jesus-followers, and his respectful confrontations with the Nazi government through speeches, memorandums, writings, and his radio address. Yet, he never would have been involved in Finkenwalde or confronted the Nazis with a Judeo-Christian ethic if he had not first recognized, and

submitted to, YHWH as the ultimate authority. The first characteristic of prophetic leadership provided a grounding for how Bonhoeffer led. In July 1926 Bonhoeffer preached on the very topic of God's authority and obedience to Him, stating,

If God requires something of me, should I really only say, 'I have heard it,' and have that be the end of it? No, that will not do at all if I know that *God* has said it. In this case there is only one answer. Obedience! *Bow down* beneath God's almighty hand. Belief that hears but does not obey can certainly not be called belief!

Yes, actual obedience—we can't let anyone diminish this. Obedience is a word that we don't like to hear very much today and whose meaning we don't want to understand. It is a word that, since the time of Nietzsche, we have contemptuously driven out from ethics and especially from religion....Wherever there is obedience, there is authority.¹

It should be noted that Bonhoeffer was thinking through the concepts of authority and obedience prior to Hitler's ascendance to the position of Chancellor. His theology did not need to be worked out in the midst of the Third Reich implementing its hateful worldview. He was already grounded in a strong theological system and paradigm which recognized the errors early on. Bonhoeffer was proactively warning the German people and when the Nazis began to encroach upon his immediate realm of influence, he was ready to take action.

Bonhoeffer developed a high view of Christian community early in his academic career, even to the point of writing a dissertation on the sociology of the church titled *Sanctorum Communio*.² He was further influenced of the church's unique and dynamic nature through his various international travels, visiting local churches and ministers, and

¹ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 2*, 5-6 (emphasis original).

² Wilken, 195.

his extensive ecumenical work.³ He developed a beautiful, yet chilling, perspective of the Christian community living as the body of Christ within a broader enemy culture.⁴ He prescribed the Beatitudes as the way to live out the communal life of Christ, even though it would incur the hatred and wrath of the world.⁵ He explained,

Having reached the end of the beatitudes, we naturally ask if there is any place on this earth for the community which they described. Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the poorest, meekest, and most sorely tried of all men is to be found—on the cross at Golgotha. The fellowship of the beatitudes is the fellowship of the Crucified. With him it has lost all, and with him it has found all.⁶

Bonhoeffer understood the church to be the embodiment of Christ on this earth, the organization that God was actively working through to bring about miraculous changes in the world, and thus it was a community that needed to be nurtured, nourished, and protected.⁷ He believed his existence, and the church's existence, was for the benefit of others, as Rasmussen explains, “[f]or Bonhoeffer, then, the essence of Christ's being and man's is being-for-others. The same is true of the Church.”⁸

Bonhoeffer was keenly aware of the pressures on the church, both theologically and politically, and was poised to speak out in its support. He was cautious not to disrespectfully confront the government, but to speak to the government much like the

³ Ibid., 201.

⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17.

⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 106.

⁶ Ibid., 113-14.

⁷ Ibid., 241.

⁸ Rasmussen, 20.

biblical prophets in a direct, unambiguous, and deferential manner. Bonhoeffer first confronted the government with its errors, then aided those who were affected by the wrongs of the Nazis in the church, and finally took more direct action to stop the wrongs.⁹ His actions were not designed to destroy the entire government, but to restore the government to God's good design of defending the people.¹⁰ He explained God's design for government:

It was sin that made necessary the divine institution of government. The sword which God has given to government is to be used by it in order to protect men against the chaos which is caused by sin. Government is to punish the criminal and to safeguard life. Thus a reason is provided for the existence of government both as a coercive power and as the protector of an outward justice.¹¹

Bonhoeffer was not opposed to government using the sword—coercive punishment—but when the Nazis overstepped their divinely designed authority and began taking away people's rights, redefining theology, and removing clergy from their ecclesiological ranks, he would not stand by silently. He spoke out through his sermons, his radio address, his essays, his work in the Confessing Church, his work at Finkenwalde, and finally his participation in the memorandum to Hitler. All of these efforts were bold stances aimed at holding the Nazis accountable to God's standard for government and to protect his community as a prophetic leader.¹² Bonhoeffer viewed success not as

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 221.

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 330.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 124.

completing an agenda, nor by accomplishing great feats, but by obedience to God regardless of how people respond.¹³

Prophetic Leadership as a Distinctly Judeo-Christian Leadership Paradigm

Prophetic leadership has been established in the current study as a leadership paradigm firmly within the Judeo-Christian faith. Each characteristic is rooted within the biblical faith tradition and exemplified by the biblical prophets. This approach is distinctly set apart as Judeo-Christian because it establishes divine authority as the basis of authority within the leadership process, maintains objective morality rooted within the Scriptures, seeks to establish and nurture counter-cultural community with biblical standards, and confronts immoral and amoral governments.¹⁴ Prophetic leaders view success through the lens of biblical obedience first and foremost, trusting that YHWH will bring about His will within the leadership scenario.¹⁵ The goal is not to begin inaugurating or installing new prophets, but to emulate the characteristics of how the prophets led within the biblical narrative.

The three characteristics which Brueggemann discussed in *Prophetic Imagination* are relevant and practical for modern leaders. Yet, a prophetic leader need not confront authority if there is no encroachment upon the people's God-given freedoms. Prophetic leaders should be focused upon the first two characteristics of prophetic leadership, surrendered to God's authority and cultivating a community of followers based upon

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 211-12.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 105.

¹⁵ Huey, 24.

biblical standards.¹⁶ The prophetic leader only exerts the third characteristic whenever government overreach begins to occur.¹⁷ Prophetic leadership does not intend to institute an anarchic reality, but to call authority back to its divinely prescribed role within God's ordered creation.

Each of the characteristics of prophetic leadership work in tandem with the others and cannot be disentangled from each other. Prophetic leaders fulfill the second and third characteristics, serving their community and confronting errant government, specifically because of the first characteristic: being committed to God's authority and His divine standards.¹⁸ The prophetic leader approaches the governing authority out of respect due to his or her belief that God has established the earthly authority systems. Thus, Bonhoeffer claimed that governing authorities are servants of God.¹⁹ Bonhoeffer explained that government should not "pursue a Christian policy, enact Christian laws, etc., but that it should be true government in accordance with its own special task. Only the Church brings government to an understanding of itself."²⁰ Thus, church and government should maintain their own unique responsibilities without encroaching upon each other. The first characteristic of prophetic leadership upholds the second and third.

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328.

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 221.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 202.

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 342.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The prophetic leader seeks to serve and support the Christian community and promote God's standards as normative within that community.²¹ Bonhoeffer noted how there is an urgent need for good leaders in the world, leaders who have a heart for Jesus and a compassion for the lost communities of the world.²² He said, "[w]hat they need is good shepherds, good 'pastors.' 'Feed my lambs' was the last charge Jesus gave to Peter."²³ He exemplified how the first characteristic is the grounding for why he led in the first place. The third characteristic establishes the protective element of prophetic leadership and should only be leveraged as a defensive tool for the YHWH followers. Bonhoeffer explained that the church should take "direct political action...when it sees the state unrestrainedly bring about too much or too little law and order."²⁴ Although he was vague regarding his prescribed political action and what constituted too much or too little government legislation, he established a prophetic need to exert the third characteristic of political confrontation when the governed people suffer under government rule. Bonhoeffer's life and leadership reveal the interdependent nature of the three characteristics of prophetic leadership.

Distinctive Attributes of Prophetic Leadership

Prophetic leaders need not be recognized as prophetic while they are alive.²⁵ Jeremiah is a biblical example of a prophet who was rejected by his contemporaries and

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 202.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 221.

²⁵ Schultz, 24.

only recognized later by the broader community of YHWH followers as a true prophet. His harsh message that God's people had turned their hearts away from Him was not received by the religious leaders and he was rejected by king.²⁶ VanGemerer noted, "Jeremiah functioned in his historical context as Jesus did in his. Both were sent by the Lord, lived in absolute devotion to God, spoke out against human institutions, and announced the fall of Jerusalem, including her temple. Both were misunderstood, reviled, and disgraced."²⁷ Even though he was not immediately recognized as a prophet, future generations did recognize him as such. Daniel is biblical example of a prophetic leader who was familiar with Jeremiah's prophetic leadership and heeded his message, incorporating it into his own.²⁸ Finally, Jesus was rejected by the religious establishment, governmental authorities, and by the mass of Jews in Jerusalem, and was crucified as a result.²⁹ Both Jeremiah and Jesus are recognized as successful prophets, even though they received much criticism and abuse in their own time.

Brueggemann explained that throughout history the royal response to prophets is often either heavy-handed punishment or calmly ignoring their warnings.³⁰ Brueggemann suggested that this was a way to "develop a natural immunity and remain totally impervious to criticism."³¹ This rejection of the prophetic leader and the prophetic

²⁶ Ibid., 119.

²⁷ VanGemerer, 309-10.

²⁸ Ibid., 349.

²⁹ Gangel, 336.

³⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 32.

³¹ Ibid.

message is evident in Jeremiah, Jesus, and in Bonhoeffer himself. Not only did the Nazis reject Bonhoeffer's message, but his own home church rejected him as a martyr. The Berlin-Brandenburg church did not recognize Bonhoeffer as a martyr due to his political involvement immediately after his death.³² Yet, prophetic leaders need not be immediately concerned with their reputations, but with obedience to YHWH and His call on their life. Bonhoeffer decisively declared in his sermon on authority and obedience, "Decide, act! Believe and obey!"³³ Obedience is the simple standard for prophetic leaders.

Another aspect of prophetic leadership is the danger associated with the prophetic message. Many prophets have not only been rejected, but have also been punished and killed due to their prophetic ministry. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her young under her wings, and you were unwilling!"³⁴ The path of the Jesus-follower will often position the believer in a scenario that brings rejection and persecution.³⁵ Jesus explained that such is the wisdom of God's counter-intuitive kingdom, yet they will be blessed when they are persecuted for His sake.³⁶ The path of the prophet and the prophetic community is one of persecution, as warned by the Lord. The prophetic leader should not try to riot, destroy, or tear down, but

³² Bethge, 834.

³³ Bonhoeffer, *Sermons: Volume 2*, 10.

³⁴ Luke 13:34 (New American Standard Bible).

³⁵ John 16:33.

³⁶ Matt. 5:11-12.

trust that YHWH is in control and He, not the prophet, will take vengeance if He so desires.³⁷

Prophetic Leadership and Other Leadership Paradigms

Northouse suggested that various leadership scenarios will require different, even overlapping, leadership approaches. He noted, “[a]ll approaches to leadership have strengths and weakness, and because leading effectively means consistently surveying follower, task, and environmental needs and pressures, oftentimes the best approach is a combination of leadership approaches.”³⁸ Prophetic leadership is not purported to trump any and all other leadership theories, but to be leveraged alongside other paradigms, adding a more dynamic and nuanced approach to one’s leadership practice. Yet, prophetic leadership has been distinguished as a Judeo-Christian leadership paradigm with an ethic based upon the holy Scriptures, thus other leadership approaches that align with the Judeo-Christian tradition can work with prophet leadership.

Prophetic Leadership and Ethical Leadership

Prophetic leadership would work well with other leadership theories that emphasize ethical components to the leadership practice. Northouse highlighted five attributes “of sound ethical leadership: *respect, service, justice, honesty, and community*.”³⁹ Each of these domains are important to prophetic leadership, and from this perspective, prophetic leadership should be considered an ethical leadership style. Yet, ethical leadership is not a distinct leadership approach, but a multifaceted and

³⁷ Rom. 12:19.

³⁸ Northouse, 196-97.

³⁹ Ibid., 433 (emphasis original).

overarching understanding of leadership practice. Any leadership theory that promotes ethics, the health and protection of the follower community, could work in tandem with prophetic leadership, as long as it is consistent with the Judeo-Christian worldview.

Prophetic Leadership and Servant Leadership

A specific ethical style of leadership that overlaps well is servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf suggested, “[t]he servant leader *is* servant first....It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then the conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”⁴⁰ Prophetic leadership shares an emphasis upon the health and wellness of the follower community which coincides with this paradigm.⁴¹ Northouse noted that servant leadership has a cascading effect upon an organization, developing other servant leaders within the organization.⁴² A goal of prophetic leadership is also to develop other prophetic leaders, as well. While the Great Commission goes beyond the specific calling to be a prophetic witness in the world, Jesus—the perfect prophet—called and empowered His followers to go into all the world and teach others how and what He taught them, this would include His prophetic leadership practices.⁴³ Thus, prophetic leaders who seek fully to obey Jesus as their authority should also seek to develop prophetic leaders within their own follower communities.

⁴⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 27 (emphasis original).

⁴¹ Northouse, 264.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 265.

⁴³ Matt. 28:16-20.

Prophetic Leadership and Spiritual Leadership

Henry and Richard Blackaby articulated spiritual leadership as a Christian leadership approach that is focused upon “moving people on to God’s agenda.”⁴⁴ Spiritual leadership shares a common concern with prophetic leadership’s recognition of God as the grounding of leadership and upon obedience. The Blackabys suggested that spiritual leadership should not be segregated or isolated from political and economic concerns.⁴⁵ Prophetic leadership, as has already been established, is acutely aware of political and economic concerns as it relates to the wellbeing of the follower community. A prophetic leader should also be a spiritual leader, seeking to influence the follower community to understand and obey God’s will in their community.

Prophetic Leadership and Other Leadership Theories

There are a number of other leadership styles which could be effective alongside prophetic leadership, but are more generic in nature. Authentic leadership has a focus upon interpersonal, intrapersonal, and developmental relationships as well as an emphasis upon the leader’s authenticity, which is compatible with prophetic leadership. Inclusive leadership emphasizes follower connectedness, uniqueness, and individuality which all bring value to the follower.⁴⁶ Prophetic leadership certainly finds agreement with inclusive leadership’s concerns and focus upon inclusivity. Finally, transformational leadership is a leadership style concerned with raising “the level of motivation and

⁴⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, 36.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁶ Northouse, 327.

morality in both the leader and the follower.”⁴⁷ With prophetic leadership’s heavy focus upon morality and engagement with followers, it would dovetail well with transformational leadership. This is not an exhaustive list, but a cursory overview of how prophetic leadership could be utilized within multiple leadership scenarios and not a leadership approach which excludes other comparable approaches.

Prophetic Leadership in a Modern Context

As previously noted, prophetic leadership does not seek to create modern prophets. Instead, the goal of prophetic leadership is to model how the biblical prophets led in their various contexts. Prophetic leaders exhibit the three characteristics within their communities regardless of culture, politics, or region of the world. Prophetic leadership is also not isolated to only religious contexts, but can be appropriate for any leadership context. A leader needs to first understand that God is the creator and sustainer of the world around him or her and recognize that God has established all earthly authorities, thus all are accountable to Him. Secondly, the prophetic leader should begin to nurture their follower community according to the biblical standards. If the leadership context is non-religious then the prophetic leader need not try to convert their followers to Christianity, instead the leader should find ways to support, uplift, and promote a biblically consistent worldview within their context. Finally, if an authority seeks to encroach upon the follower community, the prophetic leader should stand in between the authority and the follower community. Prophetic confrontation would be appropriate; respecting the authority figure, while confronting the errors of the authority is consistent with prophetic leadership.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 186.

Limits of Prophetic Leadership

A study of Bonhoeffer's life reveals that he did not always live a life consistent with the prophetic leadership paradigm. That is not to suggest that Bonhoeffer was in error when he ceased to lead within the prophetic leadership approach, but that he chose to operate within a different framework at different times of his life. Bonhoeffer's entrance into the *Abwehr* was discussed in chapter five and it was noted that this was a departure from prophetic leadership. When he moved into the intelligence arm of the German military, he also began to become acquainted, and eventually participated, with a plot to assassinate Hitler. This aspect of his life remains outside the area of prophetic leadership, as the biblical prophets did not typically actively seek to kill or usurp governing authorities.⁴⁸ This area of Bonhoeffer's life might be more appropriately viewed through the lens of the biblical judges or military leaders, such as Joshua, Gideon, or Samson. These leaders led with a different set of characteristics, and might be more appropriate for the latter part of Bonhoeffer's life.

Areas of Future Study

Prophetic leadership has been discussed by a number of people within the academic literature, yet the concepts remain scattered and incoherent. The leadership field would benefit from a more cohesive approach to prophetic leadership, leveraging the definition provided by this study and applying it to other modern prophetic leaders. Leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero, and Frederick Douglass

⁴⁸ 1 Kings 18:40. The prophet Samuel is an outlier, as he killed Agag the Amalekite king. 1 Sam. 15:32-33. Furthermore, the prophet Elijah killed the prophets of Baal. While not governing authorities, this action is another outlier that is more inline with the biblical judges than the prophets.

should be analyzed through the lens of prophetic leadership as a way of both establishing prophetic leadership as an important leadership approach and as a way of revisiting these leaders and revealing the importance of their examples to modern audiences. Also, a study of how these prophetic leaders leveraged other leadership approaches in conjunction with prophetic leadership would be beneficial to leadership studies.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues to be a wealth of information to many fields of study, including leadership. Future research should continue to analyze Bonhoeffer through various leadership lenses, including the lens of the biblical judges and military leaders. While Bonhoeffer did not spend extensive time in the *Abwehr*, audiences are consistently shocked by his movement within the conspiracy, thus a study of his conspiratorial actions and associations would be beneficial to understand the theological limits of conspiracy and assassination.

Conclusion

The life of Bonhoeffer, albeit short, was full of theological and political depth and complexity. This man lived and led in such a way that modern audiences are still drawn to his story. Prophetic leadership should not be the end of how he is evaluated, but should continue to provide clarity into the complexity of this dynamic theologian. He was adored by many in his lifetime and he has been revered by even more after his martyrdom. Modern leaders, especially Judeo-Christian leaders, should study his life and prophetic leadership and understand how he can influence their own leadership practices. Although the Nazis ended his earthly life, YHWH has continued to use his legacy to lead generations after his death, much like the biblical prophets.

Brueggemann recognized Bonhoeffer as a modern prophet and suggested audiences to study his life and emulate his prophetic attributes.⁴⁹ Brueggemann provides clarity into the life of Bonhoeffer and how prophetic leadership should be studied through the three characteristics. This study has defined prophetic leadership as the process by which a leader develops and nurtures a counter-cultural biblical community of followers with God as the ultimate authority and respectfully, yet assertively, confronts immoral and amoral earthly authorities and systems which would lay claim over the community. From this perspective, prophetic leadership is triangulated through the study of leadership, Bonhoeffer's life, and Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination*. This overlap of fields provides a more robust understanding of all three areas of interest.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 124.

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