

Week 4: Christology and Practice

- D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London 2001
- Id., *Letters and Papers from Prison* (ed. E. Bethge), London 2001
- E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, London 1970
- Ch. Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Oxford 1994

Christology and the Christian Life

- What practical consequences does belief in Jesus have?
- ‘Ethical aspect of Christology’.
- Not: that Christology is *merely* ethics, but it must have an impact on Christian life.
- Cannot fully be grasped as relation between example and imitator.
- Ethics as a theory of the good life leaves open the transmission from theory to practice.

Christology and the Christian Life II

- How can religion motivate humans to act morally?
- Through reward/punishment? This fails on the ethical and the theological side.
- Through example and imitation?
- → An example does not always motivate.
- The believer must *first* believe he can be like Christ to imitate him effectively.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

- Life dominated by the quest for the relation between theological theory and Christian practice.
- Christological question ('Who is Jesus Christ?') is understood to mean: 'Who is he for us today?'
- Experience of secularisation.
- Answers of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy unsatisfactory.

Bonhoeffer II

- If Christ is central, then the theme for theology is God's coming to the world.
- Theology must reflect God's turn to 'the world' precisely insofar as the world is removed and alienated from him.
- Following Jesus is imperative not least in a world that has turned away from God.
- Concern about relation between faith and works (cheap grace – costly grace).

Bonhoeffer III

- Following Jesus is first of all an act of obedience, acknowledging his authority.
- Through such faith human sinful willing is overcome.
- Imitation of Christ is expectation and hope of the believer.
- It presupposes a change to the self.

3. Jesus Christ Liberator

- L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 1972
- J. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 1976
- Id., *Jesus the Liberator*, 1991
- R. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 2004, ch. 6

Boff II

- Theology (and Christology) must start from practice of following Jesus.
- Sobrino: 'Christian life as a whole can be described as the following of Jesus. That is the most original and all-embracing reality, far more so than cultic worship and orthodoxy.'
- 'Orthopraxis' precedes orthodoxy.
- Fundamental is the 'Kingdom of God' understood as liberating practice.

Boff III

- Jesus brings new freedom (compare with Bonhoeffer's strong notion of authority!)
- This includes social and economic justice.
- Incarnation is seen as process of divine-human unity.
- Boff: 'Religious experience makes everything sacramental, because it is penetrated by and suffused with the presence of the divine.'

Boff IV

1. This incarnational process is practical and therefore requires active participation of believers.
2. Envisaged transformation includes social and economic order.
 - Major problem is the strong immanentist character of the Kingdom.
 - Eschatological hope is hardly maintained.