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BONHOEFFER AS EXEMPLAR OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: CONFESSING BY WAY OF RESISTANCE

Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Leadership

Writing about Bonhoeffer and spiritual leadership seems only natural in this volume of „Theologica Wratislaviensia”, which is entitled *Faces of Leadership*. Among Christians who approach leadership from a spiritual perspective, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who counted and paid the cost of following Christ in his life as well as by his death, comes readily to mind as a noteworthy example of a spiritual leader. Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, two long-time Bonhoeffer scholars, named their book, which Stanley Hauerwas has described as „one of the best introductions to Bonhoeffer available”, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*¹. More recently, Patrick Nullens has written, *Towards a Spirituality of Public Leadership: Engaging Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, which we will discuss in some depth below². In Poland, Anna Morawska, in *Chrześcijanin w Trzeciej Rzeszy*³ (*A Christian in the Third Reich*), her 1970 biography of Bonhoeffer, called him a „non-political

¹ G. Kelly, F.B. Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership. The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Grand Rapids 2003.

² P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality of Public Leadership: Engaging Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. „International Journal of Public Theology” 2013, vol. 6, p. 1–23.

³ A. Morawska, *Chrześcijanin w Trzeciej Rzeszy*. Kraków 1970.

politician", who practiced „metapolitics", a phrase which the late Tadeusz Mazowiecki would later define as representing „the moral presuppositions that [...] lie beneath and determine every political program"⁴. Together with *Wybór pism*⁵ (*Selected Works*; a translation of selected Bonhoeffer texts edited by Morawska), the influence of *Chrześcijanin w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, on the Polish opposition movement clearly demonstrates the impact of Bonhoeffer's life and legacy as a spiritual leader⁶.

Bonhoeffer modeled leadership spirituality in many contexts, not the least of which was the illegal preachers' seminary in Finkenwalde (today's Szczecin-Zdroje), where he taught and mentored young Lutheran pastors-to-be. His well-known classic *Discipleship* was based on lectures he prepared for his students. Wesley Hill, in a recent review of Charles Marsh's new biography of Bonhoeffer, *A Strange Glory*⁷, writes:

Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* was a call to interpret the Lutheran *sola fide* [...] as necessitating ethical action. Or perhaps that's putting it too pacifically; Marsh describes the book as „a polemic against the Lutheran tendency to portray faith as a refuge from obedience". It was a collection of „exercises actualizing the Sermon on the Mount" for dark times. Bonhoeffer was calling his students not only to denounce Nazi ideology but to steel themselves for prophetic actions of opposition to Hitler's regime to which they would all, eventually, be driven⁸.

Bonhoeffer's spirituality led him encourage his students to engage, as he himself did, in the ecclesial and political opposition movement to the German Nazi regime, where as we will see later in this paper, „resisting by way of confession" came to require „confessing by way of resistance".

Before we begin in earnest, however, it is important to ask what we can and cannot expect to learn about leadership from a study of Bonhoeffer's life and legacy. Bonhoeffer did not propose an instrumental, use of religion to promote one's person, party or cause. He offered neither casuistic answers to the moral dilemmas of leadership, nor a pragmatic program for leaders to follow on the road to success. As Nullens declares, „Bonhoeffer would be reluctant to [...] provide the Christian professional with all kinds of specific moral directions and concrete advice; rather,

⁴ T. Mazowiecki, *Nauczył się wierzyć wśród tęgich razów*. „Więź" 1971, vol. 12, p. 5–21.

⁵ D. Bonhoeffer, *Wybór pism*. Ed. A. Morawska. Kraków 1970.

⁶ For more on this subject, cf.: J. Burnell, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Polish Opposition (1968–1989)*. In: *Bonhoeffer and Interpretive Theory*. Ed. P. Frick. Frankfurt am Main 2013.

⁷ C. Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. New York 2014.

⁸ W. Hill, *The Full This-Worldliness of Life*. „Books and Culture" 2014, September–October http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2014/sep/oct/full-this-worldliness-of-life.html?utm=gallireport&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=13334349&utm_content=300571632&utm_campaign=2013 [accessed 12.09.2014].

the more important issue for him would be to embed the Christian professional in the Christ-reality⁹. Instead, he taught a principled ethos, which guides a leader's attitudes and actions, and exemplified an authentic spirituality, which motivates a leader in all areas of life. The standard of his life, and hence of his leadership spirituality, was truly an „embodied obedience to the person of Jesus“¹⁰.

Bonhoeffer and a Christian Paradigm for Leadership Spirituality

Writing on spiritual leadership faces two challenges from the outset, how to define „spiritual“ and how to define „leadership“. Patrick Nullens observes that even Burton and Nelson, authors of *The Cost of Spiritual Leadership*, seem to struggle on both accounts¹¹. Nullens writes, „spirituality overlaps with religion but is still distinct: spirituality is a personal life principle with a transcendent dimension; religion is a collective system of organized belief and worship“¹². His choice to discuss leadership spirituality instead of spiritual leadership points to a fundamental truth; spirituality always has an existential component that goes beyond worldview issues¹³.

Nullens proposes a „Christian paradigm for leadership spirituality“, which following Schneiders¹⁴ is characterized by four major components: „a leader's sense of reality, sense of a higher calling, a sense of belonging, and a sense of morality“¹⁵. While this is a promising approach for leadership spirituality in general, and research has indeed shown that „leaders who engage in spiritual practices are both more ethical and more effective“¹⁶, Nullens argues that, „one cannot expect the discipline of leadership studies to provide content for authentic spirituality“¹⁷. Concerned to move beyond generalities to craft a Christian paradigm for leadership spirituality, he turns therefore to Bonhoeffer, who as he argues provides each of these components with an „explicitly Christocentric content“. We will first examine that content, before applying Nullens' model of spiritual leadership to Bonhoeffer's engagement in ecclesial and political opposition movement to the Hitler's Nazi regime.

⁹ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 5, fn. 18.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

¹⁴ S.M. Schneiders, *Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum*. „*Spiritus: A Journal of Christians Spirituality*“ 2003, vol. 3, fasc. 2, p. 163–185.

¹⁵ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

The Four Components of Leadership Spirituality: Bonhoeffer's „explicitly Christocentric content“

A sense of reality: Following Schneiders, Nullens declares that spirituality is „fleshed out reality in relation to the reality of God as a transcendent being acting in the world“¹⁸. Bonhoeffer consistently fought against the error of dualistic thinking, which separates the world into sacred and secular spheres, for God in Christ has entered into the world and reconciled it to Himself. As Mazowiecki writes, Christ is revealed in the gospel not as a mere „hypothesis“, but „as reality uniting division, as the redeeming and reconciling Word. The world is of age, but only through entering into the reality of the Cross of Christ is it freed from the ever renewed tendency to self-deification: worldliness as a value becomes Christian through the measure of humanity which Christ is for the world“¹⁹. Jan Kłoczowski adds,

In Christ the world and humanity have been called into existence and in Him they have been once again reconciled with God. Only in Him does nature regain its naturalness, beauty and spontaneity. It is faith that causes us with all our strength to engage in the worldly sphere, in the world, not on its borders in the intimacy of a pietistic heart, but in its full glory; [it is faith that] causes us to enter into the whirlwind of life²⁰.

Bonhoeffer's dialectic of incarnation and crucifixion, the dialectic of God revealed in Christ, both affirms human dignity and guards it from the danger of self-deification. Yet the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ is himself the reality that overcomes the division between secular and sacred, and who reconciles humanity with God. One implication of this Christocentric view of reality is that all our relationships with other human beings are mediated through Christ. Nullens brings out the significance of this for leadership spirituality.

Of course, each person, each employee has a value in themselves as human beings created in God's image, but from our Christian spirituality we can take it even further: we relate to them through Christ who was there for the other. Servant leadership is more than just a moral option or an inspiring model of leadership, it is an inevitable consequence of the one reality in which we as Christians live²¹.

A sense of higher calling: Nullens argues that leadership spirituality does not arise from a career choice but rather from „a sense of calling for

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁹ T. Mazowiecki, *Nauczył się wierzyć...*, p. 19–20.

²⁰ J. Kłoczowski, *Lekcja Bonhoeffera*. „Znak“ 1971, vol. 4, p. 517.

²¹ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 15.

a higher purpose [which] generates an intrinsic motivation for leading others towards a common goal"²². The radicalism of Christ's call to „come and follow“ does not distance us from this world but instead thrusts us headlong into life in the here and now. If, as Bonhoeffer declared, Christ is „God-for-us“ and „the man-for-others“, then Christ's followers are called to live for others, freely and responsibly. In *History and Good*, Bonhoeffer declares that the Christian, no longer torn between the „Christian“ and the „worldly“, which are reconciled in Christ, joyously responds to God's revelation in Christ, which is addressed to the total person and provides a Christological foundation for responsibility towards others²³. Bonhoeffer defines such responsibility as, „vicarious representative action“ (*Stellvertretung*), which is based on freedom and the social bonds that tie one to God and to other human beings²⁴, and is ultimately grounded in Jesus Christ²⁵.

As Chapman notes, Bonhoeffer's belief that „the world come of age is paradoxically linked with a sense of Providence, in that the Lord of history summons human beings into partnership to fulfill his will in shaping the world“²⁶. De Gruchy, who called this approach Bonhoeffer's „dialogical character of providence“²⁷, holds that by combining belief in providence with human freedom and responsibility, Bonhoeffer avoids both „passive fatalism“ and an all-inclusive view of sovereignty that attributes every event to God's prescriptive will. The Lord of history, who is free to work when and how he chooses, invites human beings to participate in making history. As De Gruchy summarizes: „Man is set free by God to make history *etsi deus non daretur* (i.e., as if God were not involved). There is no guarantee of success; it is rather a calling to accountability and deputyship“²⁸. This matches Bonhoeffer's own experience of providence and God's guiding hand, expressed in his moving declaration: „It may be that the day of final judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we shall gladly stop working for a better future. But not before“²⁹.

For Bonhoeffer, Christ's call to discipleship and costly grace leads inexorably to an ethic of responsibility, which includes a spiritual leader's responsibility to-

²² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

²³ Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition [further DBWE] 6. Minneapolis 2005, p. 252–253.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 258.

²⁶ G.C. Chapman, *Hope and the Ethics of Formation: Moltmann as an Interpreter of Bonhoeffer*. „Studies in Religion“/„Sciences Religieuses“ 1983, vol. 12, fasc. 4 Fall, p. 453.

²⁷ J. de Gruchy, *Providence and the Shapers of History*. In: idem, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa*. Grand Rapids 1984, p. 60.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

²⁹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York 1971, p. 15–16.

wards his or her own community, but towards the world as well. As Nullens summarizes:

From a leadership perspective „responsibility“ becomes a key term. Companies are responsible to many stakeholders, politicians not only have a commitment to their constituency but to whole nations and beyond. Christian leaders need courage as they take tough decisions, as for instance in the war against terrorism or closing a whole branch of a multinational corporation. An ethic of responsibility is one that measures carefully the consequences of our actions, even beyond our own generation³⁰.

A sense of belonging: Leadership spirituality also requires a deep sense of belonging; as Nullens writes „it is a spirituality of community“³¹. Contrary to the popular hymn, which declares, „this world is not my home“, Christian leaders belong to two worlds, which have nevertheless been reconciled in Christ. Among secular writers, there is a lively interest in and discussion of spiritual leadership, yet, in keeping with the spirit of the age, more often than not this focuses on a leader’s own spiritual practices, personal „authenticity“, and self-realization. To counter such individualistic (private) and other-worldly (escapist) spirituality, Bonhoeffer argued that to be in Christ is to belong to his body. As he wrote in *Eight Theses on Youth Work in the Church*, „Being in the church-community means being in Christ; being in Christ means being in the church-community“³². And those who aspire to the example and teaching of Christ must also to live in the world as he lived, i.e. for-others.

Nullens declares that Bonhoeffer, „through his Christological ethics and spirituality [...] provides a theological grounding for an introverted as well as an extraverted dimension of Christian social engagement: one identifies with the church internally and with God’s world externally, yet both forms of identification are spiritual acts“³³. He goes on to suggest at least two ways in which Bonhoeffer can help Christian leaders navigate life in the Church and in society. The first applies Bonhoeffer’s comments on „the discipline of the secret“ to life in the church community, where „spirituality is taught and formed“, and to quiet witness in the workplace, where „sobriety in the use of religious language and humility and respect for ethical but secular colleagues fit Bonhoeffer’s view of Christian spirituality“³⁴.

³⁰ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 16.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³² D. Bonhoeffer, *Eight Theses on Youth Work in the Church*. DBWE 12. Minneapolis 2009, p. 516.

³³ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 18.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

Secondly, although Bonhoeffer was also a man of prayer, he „disliked the notion of prayers as a *Deus ex machina*, a stop-gap God that intervenes on our request and when we need it”³⁵. In both the incarnation and the cross, God is revealed not in power but in weakness. Yet God’s „weakness” is neither passive nor helpless. Christ willingly suffered and bore our suffering in free responsibility and *Stel- lvertretung*. By allowing himself to be „pushed out of the world onto the cross”, Christ became again the center of history, who reconciled human beings to each other, to creation, and to God. Abuse of religious position and authority takes many forms, from the presumption that God is at our beck and call, to „spiritual” coercion of the faithful. Bonhoeffer’s Christological approach thus provides a necessary corrective to a theology of glory and power. For Christian leaders, it supplies the resources needed to resist temptations to abuse power and defend privilege, and to avoid manipulating and exploiting the very ones they are called to serve. Nullens writes:

Bonhoeffer’s critique of false pietism and stopgap faith is important for every Christian leader. Our prayers should be, in the first place, an expression of relationship and belonging. In our prayers we profess our faith and trust in God, but God does not answer us at a whim. [...] Leaders tend to exaggerate their own importance and often use coercive power with their followers. In the same sense prayers can degenerate to mere faith claims, attempts to persuade God to fulfill one’s own purposes; yet, we have to learn the humble lesson that God is the other, the different one, who in divine sovereignty fulfills divine plans for this world³⁶.

A sense of morality: Leadership spirituality also has a moral component, namely a „deeply rooted understanding of purpose, goodness and evil”³⁷. Bonhoeffer had a front-row view of the thoroughgoing, systemic evil of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer’s theology and ethics begin with Christ, not with the ethical challenges of his day, which he considered merely the extreme expression of the general crisis of Western civilization³⁸.

If Bonhoeffer had a deeply rooted sense of evil, he had an even deeper sense of good and where to find it. In *Christ, Reality and Good*, he declared, „The source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one’s own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁸ As Plant writes, „For Bonhoeffer the moral crisis that met the eye so appallingly in Nazi Germany was an outcrop of a more disturbing crisis in Human ethics [that] would not dissipate when the Nazis were consigned to the dustbin of history. S. Plant, *Bonhoeffer*. London 2004, p. 111.

Christ"³⁹. His sense of morality goes far beyond a mere intellectual understanding of good and evil. Nor does he understand morality as conforming to Christian principles or implementing a Christian ethical system. Instead, it is the result of the process by which Christ forms us into His image; it is becoming more like Christ in this life.

For the Christian leader, spirituality is rooted in Christ the source, who shapes us in His image. This formation, however, requires active engagement on our part. „What matters“, Bonhoeffer asserts, „is participation in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today“⁴⁰. This means that Christ’s followers are to engage in what he is doing in their lives, community, and world. As Nullens declares, „Bonhoeffer’s ethics are ethics of confrontation, resistance and responsibility [...] Christian discipleship as concrete obedience to God’s call is the response par excellence to systemic evil in society“⁴¹. Nullens draws the following conclusions:

Christian leaders have a prophetic role in this world; as they deal with the orders of creation and use their management skills they announce the kingdom of God. Hence, everything we have to say regarding the orders of the world can only have the effect of preparing the way. Therefore, we should be interested in issues of this world like economic justice, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, immigration issues, fair trade and so on⁴².

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Spiritual Leadership: A Case Study

Our discussion of Nullens’ proposal for a „Christian Paradigm for Leadership Spirituality“ supports his argument that Bonhoeffer provides „explicit Christological content“ to each of the various aspects of leadership, and hence to leadership spirituality as a whole. Though it would be anachronistic to call this model „Bonhoeffer’s paradigm“ of leadership, we are allowed to ask how well this paradigm applies to Bonhoeffer’s own practice of leadership, as a leader of the Confessing Church and the fledgling ecumenical movement, as the director of the seminary in Finkenwalde, and as a member of the conspiracy to kill Hitler. It was in 1933, following the issuance of the „Aryan Clause“, that Bonhoeffer first broached the possibility of active resistance to the Nazis. In *The Church and the Jewish Question*, he wrote:

There are three possible ways in which the church can act towards the state: in the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate. [...]

³⁹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

⁴¹ P. Nullens, *Towards a Spirituality...*, p. 21.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Secondly it can aid the victims of state action. [...] The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action⁴³.

From the beginning of the church struggle Bonhoeffer, still calling for peace, left open the possibility of political resistance, the „third way“ in which the church can act towards the state. Bonhoeffer’s later involvement in the conspiracy would seem to follow naturally from this early position, had he not continued to be an outspoken advocate of non-violence. At the Ecumenical Conference in Fanö in 1934, he called on the Church to proclaim Christ’s command of peace, declaring that Christ’s word binds Christians of all nations together „more inseparably than people are bound by all the ties of common history, of blood, of class and language“⁴⁴.

Bonhoeffer drew his pacifism from Scripture, in particular his reflections on the Sermon on the Mount, published in 1937 as *Discipleship*. There he argues that to break the cycle of violence, someone must bear evil without retaliation⁴⁵. Jesus, by instructing the disciples to give up the „right“ of retribution, „releases his community from the political and legal order [...] and makes it into what it truly is, the community of the faithful that is not bound by political or national ties“⁴⁶. Bonhoeffer appeals to the cross to affirm non-resistance and place commitment to Christ above loyalty to one’s country: „Only those who there, in the cross of Jesus, find faith in the victory over evil can obey his command“⁴⁷. Whereas non-resistance foregoes retaliation, Christ’s imperative, „Love your enemies“ means to act positively in blessing⁴⁸. Bonhoeffer reaffirms Christ as the source of vicarious, representative action, which by blessing, doing good, and praying, brings the enemy „closer to reconciliation with God“⁴⁹. Cultural Protestantism had diluted this extraordinary love for one’s enemies into „loving one’s native country, or friendship or profession“⁵⁰, which are expected even of non-believers. These values, shared by non-Christians and Christians alike, are not denied, but rather surpassed by the extraordinary love of Christ’s disciples.

In both the Fanö address and *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer appeals for obedience to Christ’s command of peace, and consistently places membership in the commu-

⁴³ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Church and the Jewish Question*. In: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*. Ed. J. de Gruchy. Minneapolis 1988, p. 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁴⁵ D. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*. DBWE 4. Minneapolis 2001, p. 133.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

nity of Christ over national ties. From the early 1930's, Bonhoeffer argued consistently for a responsible „peace-ethic“, while refusing to make non-violence into an absolute principle, which functions apart from obedience to Christ. Instead, he called on the church community and individual Christians alike to discern Jesus' word of command in their concrete historical context. What led him then to „obey Christ“ by taking part in a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler?

Clements argues that the question Bonhoeffer faced in joining the conspiracy was „what possible grounds there were for not becoming involved with his close relatives, friends and others who seemed to represent the last possibility of retrieving Germany's name from total ruin“⁵¹. Bethge affirms that Bonhoeffer's disappointment with the Confessing Church also played a major role in this decision⁵². Lovin agrees, adding that this influenced Bonhoeffer's move to make responsibility for others rather than obedience to authority the fundamental description of a Christian's life in this world⁵³. Pursuing this theme, Lovin argues that Bonhoeffer recognized that in states such as Nazi Germany, which base their claims to authority on the „the will of the people“, the issue is no longer one of obedience to legitimate authority but consent, either tacit or explicit, that legitimizes authority⁵⁴. In such a situation, „not obedience, but deputyship, characterizes Christian life in the modern world“⁵⁵.

Bethge shows that Bonhoeffer's based his understanding of the church-for-others on Christ's role as reconciler, thus making it, like vicarious representative action, imperative for Christ's followers. Tracing the transition from confession to resistance, Bethge notes that he and his comrades initially defended the integrity and freedom of the church against Nazi inroads⁵⁶. Only gradually did they realize that the *status confessionis* might propel them into political action. As Bethge writes, „none of our leaders, including Niemöller and Barth⁵⁷ had said anything in public about co-responsibility that might involve changing the political system. Who at the time, in the face of the pogroms against the Jews, dared to appeal to our political co-responsibility?“⁵⁸ As Bethge relates, it was Bonhoeffer who taught the

⁵¹ K. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Bristol 1984, p. 37.

⁵² Cf. E. Bethge, *One of the Silent Bystanders?* In: idem, *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Grand Rapids 1995, p. 58–71.

⁵³ Cf. R.W. Lovin, *The Christian and the Authority of the State: Bonhoeffer's Reluctant Revisions*. „Journal of Theology for Southern Africa“ 1981, vol. 34 March, p. 39–41.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ E. Bethge, *One of the Silent Bystanders?*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Barth's 1938 pamphlet, *Justice and Justification*, justified resistance theologically by identifying National Socialism as a religion. Few in Germany besides Bonhoeffer saw it until after the war. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 29, fn. 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

students at Zingst-Finkenwalde that speaking for the helpless, the powerless, the persecuted, and the disenfranchised is a necessary result of „our belief in Christ”, and an obligation that may lead to political involvement⁵⁹. Gradually it dawned on Bethge and others that „mere confession [...] meant complicity with the murders”. He thus confesses, „And so it became clear where the problem lay for the Confessing Church: We were resisting by way of confession, but we were not confessing by way of resistance”⁶⁰. His conclusion is chilling:

Between Barmen and Stuttgart the nameless millions lie buried. By leaving out the steps from confession to resistance, one ends up tolerating crimes, turning confession into an alibi and, in view of the injustice committed, an indictment of the confessors⁶¹.

The choice to engage in active resistance leaves open the question regarding the means of resistance. Bethge’s biography of Bonhoeffer raised some major ethical issues concerning one who had previously been seen as morally unambiguous. Did Bonhoeffer’s „involvement in the „great masquerade of evil”⁶² compromise the integrity of this modern „Christian martyr”? Few leaders are asked to make such difficult choices in such dark times. Bonhoeffer, who asked himself and his fellow conspirators, „Are we still of any use?”, defended the need to make concrete choices, which cannot be determined casuistically, and which often require choosing between good and best, or even between bad and worse. For his part Stanisław Barańczak, commenting on Bonhoeffer’s willingness to „dirty” his hands, considered this even more heroic than his defense of the independence and purity of the church community during the period of the „Church Struggle”⁶³.

Conclusion

Nullens „Christian paradigm for leadership spirituality” is characterized by „the leader’s sense of reality, a sense of a higher calling, a sense of belonging, and a sense of morality”, which arises from and embodies „explicitly Christocentric content” Bonhoeffer’s own example of leadership in the church, the ecumenical movement, the underground preachers’ seminary in Finkenwalde, and in the conspiracy against Hitler, holds up well when measured by this paradigm.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁶² K. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today...*, p. 19. This is a reference to Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the conspiracy, centered in the Abwehr, against Hitler and the Nazi regime, and which required dissemblance and deceit on the part of its members, who played the part of serving the Third Reich while in reality trying to overthrow it.

⁶³ S. Barańczak, *Notatki na marginesach Bonhoeffera*. In: idem, *Etyka i poetyka*. Paris 1979, p. 25.

Bonhoeffer staked his life on the reality of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and it is this reality that provides „explicit Christological content” to a paradigm of leadership spirituality. His call to responsible action „reckons with the world as world, while at the same time never forgetting that the world is loved, judged, and reconciled in Jesus Christ by God”⁶⁴. God in Christ has overcome the conflict between the „worldly” and the „Christian”, thus his followers live responsibly in the world, neither abandoning it to cultivate private virtue, nor seeking to establish the Kingdom of God in the place of fallen and redeemed creation⁶⁵.

Bonhoeffer demonstrated „a sense of higher calling”. He declared Christ to be Lord of the whole World, not just the Christian ghetto⁶⁶, and refused all attempts to separate reality into sacred and secular spheres. He urged Christians, both individually and corporately, to obey Christ’s command to peace, which binds all nations together. Perhaps hardest for his contemporaries to understand and accept, he believed that participation in political resistance could be undertaken in faith and obedience to Christ.

Bonhoeffer’s strong sense of belonging is witnessed to by his placing membership in the church community above national ties, and by his extension of one’s responsibility towards other human beings to those outside the Church community. He argued that responsible action is directed towards real people in the real world⁶⁷. His decision to join his family members and friends in the conspiracy against Hitler is a specific application of this sense of belonging, which reveals his strong sense of family ties. Christ’s followers are no longer torn between the „Christian” and the „worldly”, which are reconciled in Christ, but joyously respond to God’s revelation in Christ, which is addressed to the total person and provides a Christological foundation for responsibility towards others⁶⁸. As noted above, Bonhoeffer defines such responsibility as „vicarious representative action”, which is based on freedom and the social bonds that tie one to God and to other human beings⁶⁹, and is ultimately grounded in Jesus Christ⁷⁰.

Bonhoeffer’s sense of „morality” (not a term he himself would likely have used) was characterized by his living faith in Jesus Christ, and expressed in obedience to His will and command. As mentioned above, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, in his 1971 review of *A Christian in the Third Reich*, developed Morawska’s descrip-

⁶⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 264.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 264–267.

⁶⁶ *Idem*, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ *Idem*, *Ethics*, p. 261.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 252–253.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 258.

tion of Bonhoeffer as a „non-political politician”, who exerted influence through *metapolitics*, that is through representing „the moral presuppositions that [...] lie beneath and determine every political program”. As a non-political politician, wrote Morawska, Bonhoeffer insisted that the Church remains the Church, not by defending its own rights, but by speaking and acting in defense of others. Later, in the conspiracy, his unwavering commitment to his metapolitical worldview made him act to stop the Nazi madness. As Mazowiecki comments:

„Nonpolitical politics” [...] is that kind of involvement in a given situation that defends the imponderables, and avoids accepting certain rules of the game, trying [instead] to mark them out in another dimension and on a different level. It is therefore a policy that must find a way out of the imposed situation, [that] must find its own way, [that] must be born from one’s own brand of faithfulness to basic moral principles and from one’s own manner of serving. And it must maintain the ability to act, accepting that events of the moment will not be gracious to it⁷¹.

Rejecting casuistry and abstract ethical theories, Bonhoeffer defined good as the „genuine decision in which the whole person, with both understanding and will, seeks and finds what is good only in the very risk of the action itself, within the ambiguity of the historical situation”⁷². The bottom line of his „leadership spirituality”, is found neither in „peace” nor „justice”, nor in choosing between competing legalistic systems of Christian morality, but rather in „obedience to Jesus Christ”. There is more that can be said, both in terms of Christian ethics and leadership. But Bonhoeffer can teach some important truths to Christians who aspire to leadership, i.e. that the essence of Christian leadership is to be found, not in following a system but in cultivating spirituality, not in adopting a blueprint but in answering Christ’s call.

A b s t r a c t

Among Christians who approach leadership from a spiritual perspective, Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes readily to mind as an outstanding example of a „spiritual leader”, who counted and paid the cost of following Christ in his life as well as by his death. This paper first discusses Patrick Nullens’ proposal for a „Christian paradigm for leadership spirituality”, characterized by four major components (a leader’s sense of reality, sense of a higher calling, sense of belonging, and sense of morality), which draws on Dietrich Bonhoeffer to provide each component with an „explicitly Christocentric content”. It then applies this paradigm to Bonhoeffer’s own engagement in the opposition movement to Hitler’s Nazi regime, under the rubric of „confessing by way of resistance”.

⁷¹ T. Mazowiecki, *Nauczyli się wierzyć...*, p. 15.

⁷² D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 248.

