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*“Sanctorum Communio” Abroad:
Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Vision of a Transnational Church
in Rome, Barcelona, and New York*

ABSTRACT: *This article explores Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s travels abroad to Rome, Barcelona, and New York between 1924 and 1931. It emphasizes his conceptions of and conflicts with the church as a transnational community; it investigates his perception of church diversity, worship, and preaching abroad and provides analyses of these encounters through theories of identity hybridity, historical anthropology, and national narrative storytelling; and it positions Bonhoeffer beyond theological discourse and situates his travels abroad in the larger networks and themes of ecumenicalism, cultural history, and national identity. The author argues that Bonhoeffer’s ideal of a church community conflicted with his own national identity, that the Black spirituals provided him with a language of resistance that he later utilized in Germany, and that the international pulpit converted his message from a national narrative of defense to an international homily of suffering. The article concludes by suggesting Bonhoeffer’s relevance in a time of increasing globalization and national sentiment.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Rome; Barcelona; New York; national identity; transnationalism; ecumenicalism; cultural history; African American history*

Introduction

Between 1930 and 1931, the young theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was absent from his home country of Germany. Following the completion of his doctoral dissertation, he received a fellowship to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York. As a postdoctoral scholar, he explored the bustling streets of New York and the culture of Harlem, and he studied American philosophy and theology. He was bewildered by the local discourse on theology as well as the church in America. He shared his disappointments with American Christianity in a letter to his friend, Helmut Rößler, lamenting the absence of German theology and how Americans annoyingly “grin when you mention Luther.”¹ Rößler’s response from 1931 is insightful. As Bonhoeffer’s intellectual companion and a fellow student of theology, Rößler expressed an interest in his friend’s description of American Christianity and was “moved” by Bonhoeffer’s characterization of the “theologically grotesque nature of the American church.”² But then Rößler reminded Bonhoeffer of the benefits of his international experience: “You are now able to see Germany from the bird’s-eye view of the New World and will see many things differently when you return.”³ According to Rößler, Bonhoeffer’s travels afforded him a unique vantage point to assess Germany, and, indeed, Bonhoeffer’s

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Helmut Rößler, December 11, 1930, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 10, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 261. Abbreviations used in this article: *DBW* = *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. Unless otherwise specified, “Bonhoeffer” refers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

² Helmut Rößler to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, February 22, 1931, in *DBW* 10:281–282.

³ Rößler to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, February 22, 1931, in *DBW* 10:281.

experience on foreign soil likely influenced his rejection of Rößler's eventual commitment to the Nazi ideology of *Blut und Boden* ("blood and soil").

Bonhoeffer's New York experience (1930–1931) not only impacted his view of Germany; it also influenced his perspective on the nature of the church, as had his earlier travels to Rome (1924) and Barcelona (1928–1929). These experiences provided him with opportunities to witness the church in its different manifestations beyond the borders of the German nation, and the respective insights gained abroad likely informed his unique resolve to resist the limitations of state-sanctioned church communities. Bonhoeffer's ability to view Germany on the basis of his stays in Italy, Spain, and the United States later enabled him to recognize the shortcomings of Germany's *Reichskirche* ("Reich church"). His view of the church extended beyond imaginary national restraints. As he later argued from his Finkenwalde seminary, which operated between 1935 and 1937, "the true church can never determine *from its own perspective* those who do not belong to it."⁴ According to Bonhoeffer, the "true" church could never be bound by borders drawn by secular governments or ecclesiastical authorities. In short, the "true" church was and had to be transnational.

This article investigates how Bonhoeffer's travels abroad influenced his perspective on the nature of the church. To do so, I analyze Bonhoeffer's travels in tandem with three broader themes. Based on Bonhoeffer's writings from three specific locations, namely, Rome, Barcelona, and New York, I explore the insights he gained with regard to three particular aspects of the Christian church, namely, its diversity of community, its worship practices, and its attitude toward Scripture (i.e., Bible teaching), and how these insights influenced his concept of the ideal Christian community. In addition to Bonhoeffer's own insights, I engage the people, cultures, identities, and contexts that influenced his thinking. In this regard, it is both a project about Bonhoeffer and a work beyond Bonhoeffer.

This article is a work of history rather than an exploration of theology. The field of Bonhoeffer studies is primarily dominated by theologians. This is neither wrong nor objectionable. Given this legacy of scholarship, however, most research engages his thinking through lenses of theology. But while Bonhoeffer's thought exists within the realm of theology, his life unfolded in the theater of history. He was not merely a theological thinking partner. He was a white German male from the twentieth century who left behind a dense record of rich historical material that is informative and insightful for discussions in history. Thus, this project is situated in the discipline of history, which is by no means a rigid discipline, but it does break from a strictly theological method of viewing Bonhoeffer. In this article, I position Bonhoeffer as a historical person engaging people, cultures, ideas, and nations. While I certainly explore his theology, it is not my primary focus. Instead,

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer's Essay on Church Communion," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 14, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, ed. H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brouck, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 659.

I delve into the networks and travels that influenced and challenged his identity as a white German male who experienced the rapid pace of globalism at the dawn of postcolonialism. In this approach, I suspend the theological optimism often ascribed to him and, at times, withhold the teleological knowledge of his legacy. A case in point: Bonhoeffer expressed a commitment to nationalism and racialized theology in his own sermons and teachings. The historian is not so "shocked" by this but, rather, is curious about the intellectual and cultural influences that shaped this attitude, along with the historical ideas and occurrences that confronted it.

As a historian, I confess my own inadequacies in appreciating and interpreting Bonhoeffer's theology, but I am nonetheless intrigued by the complexities of his life and the larger themes it engages. Victoria J. Barnett, historian and lead editor of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* series, has argued that Bonhoeffer's life is both fragmented and whole.⁵ It is fragmented in the sense that his life is preserved on paper with unfilled gaps – gaps he may have filled with ideas had he survived the violence of the Nazi regime. It is also whole in the sense that his legacy is entirely documented. To the historian, all of history is fragmented, strung together by records, documents, artifacts, and subjective interpretations. The fragmentary wholeness of Bonhoeffer's life and legacy is absorbing, but it also contains traces of other themes, histories, and people on the periphery of Bonhoeffer scholarship. His life, as demonstrated below, participates in broader themes of national and transnational identity, race, politics, post-war bereavement, music history, cultural history, history from below, African American history, church history, and intellectual history. His life helps fill partial gaps in other topics of interest to historians. All of these themes emerge from his experiential and ecclesiological engagement with the church abroad as a young scholar. With this research, I attempt to connect several fragments in Bonhoeffer's life using these historical discussions, but I also approach his life to explore history and historical themes beyond the field of Bonhoeffer studies.

This project aims to expand the scholarship of Bonhoeffer's travels abroad. The most frequent scholarly discussions on this topic can be found in biographical works. In 1967, Eberhard Bethge, a German theologian and close friend of Bonhoeffer, published the first edition of his seminal monograph, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography: Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times* – the earliest and most detailed account of Bonhoeffer's life.⁶ Bethge's work includes a section of Bonhoeffer's travels to Rome, as well as two entire chapters dedicated to the latter's experiences in Barcelona and America. *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2014) by Religious Studies scholar Charles Marsh investigates

⁵ Victoria J. Barnett, "The Bonhoeffer Legacy as Work-in-Progress: Reflections on a Fragmentary Series," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 100.

⁶ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography: Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al., ed. Victoria J. Barnett, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

Bonhoeffer's travels abroad,⁷ as do the early chapters of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God* (2003) by Elizabeth Raum,⁸ as well as the third chapter of *Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2016) by Christiane Tietz, a systematic theologian.⁹ Ferdinand Schlingensiepen's work, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (2012), also offers biographical insights into Bonhoeffer's experiences in Rome, Barcelona, and New York.¹⁰ Schlingensiepen's Bonhoeffer biography, like nearly all such works, is informed by Bethge's extensive scholarship and states in its introduction: "[M]ost of what we know about Bonhoeffer stems from Bethge's long biography of him."¹¹ But Schlingensiepen also argues that we now know considerably more than ever before and that there is much more to be explored, given our access to nearly ten thousand pages of Bonhoeffer's own writings.

Several works have attempted to offer more in-depth explorations of Bonhoeffer's traveling experiences. His time in the United States has received recent attention. Reggie Williams, an ethicist at McCormick Theological Seminary, has produced the insightful work *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance, Theology, and an Ethic of Resistance* (2014),¹² and Joel Looper has contributed *Bonhoeffer's America: A Land Without Reformation* (2021).¹³ These works situate Bonhoeffer in the broader U.S. context, explore his interpretations of American Christianity and theology, and investigate the influence of the Black Church on the young German scholar.

My article further engages Bonhoeffer's developing perception of the church as experienced abroad. Instead of confining Bonhoeffer to one country, I investigate his life in the three aforementioned locations—Rome, Barcelona, and New York. I explore the conflicting identities of German nationalism and Christian transnationalism. I assess how cultures, themes, and ideas from these localities challenged and aggravated his own subjective assumptions about the world, theology, and the church. I argue that the diversity of the church community abroad hybridized Bonhoeffer's identity, that the worship abroad, specifically in the Black spirituals, provided him with a language of resistance, and that the

⁷ Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015; originally published 2014).

⁸ Elizabeth Raum, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

⁹ Christiane Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016; originally published in German 2013).

¹⁰ Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012; originally published in German 2005).

¹¹ Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, xvi.

¹² Reggie Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance, Theology, and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).

¹³ Joel Looper, *Bonhoeffer's America: A Land Without Reformation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021).

sermons abroad – his own and others – converted his message of national defense to a homily of international suffering.

I. The Diversity of Church Community

When he was growing up, Bonhoeffer and his family rarely attended church.¹⁴ Christianity was associated with the home more than with an ecclesiastical institution. But while Bonhoeffer was raised outside of the church, he eventually grew into it, and it became the central point of his life. His education, theological work, and life vocation revolved around the church. It held his attention at every turn. Tom Greggs writes that "Bonhoeffer's theological life was dominated by the questions of the nature, structure, and meaning of the church."¹⁵ Bonhoeffer studied the subject of the church at university, but his real life – beyond theology – was also directed by it. Bonhoeffer was fascinated with the church. Early in his life, he formed initial concepts about the "ideal" church community, and his perspectives demonstrate a line of devoted continuity. But his thoughts and identity were also interrupted by the reality of the church, especially as he witnessed the diversity of the church community abroad as a young scholar. In the following, I examine the insights Bonhoeffer gained from the church while traveling abroad, as well as the unique networks that introduced him to the ecumenical world,¹⁶ and I consider the conflicts between Bonhoeffer's encultured identity and his transnational church ideal.

In this section, I position Bonhoeffer as a transnational actor influenced and transformed by identity hybridity in search of the church community ideal. According to John Hutnyk, "hybridity is an evocative term for the formation of identity."¹⁷ This lens offers insight into the cultures, ideas, networks, and experiences that shape and contribute to one's identity. It is also a concept of borrowing. Hutnyk further explains that "hybridity evokes all manner of creative engagements in cultural exchange."¹⁸ This concept is useful for engaging Bonhoeffer in the historical theater of internationalism as it elevates the interaction with intercultural difference. But beyond mere exchange, I argue that Bonhoeffer's identity as a white German male experienced increasing hybridization and modification through his experiences abroad. Bonhoeffer certainly understood the church as a diverse community. But his own identity, especially as tied to the

¹⁴ Robert P. Ericksen, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer in History: Does Our Bonhoeffer Still Offend?" in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 130.

¹⁵ Tom Greggs, "Ecclesiology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 225.

¹⁶ Ecumenical refers to intradenominational church networks or coalitions. It is the assembly of diverse church communities gathering together for a unified purpose.

¹⁷ John Hutnyk, "Hybridity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 81.

¹⁸ Hutnyk, "Hybridity," 83.

nation, was often confronted, challenged, and changed as he functioned as a participatory actor within the transnational church community.

In April 1924, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his brother Klaus traveled to Rome. His trip lasted three months. He admired the city's art, its ancient edifices, and its landscape, but above all, he gravitated toward its churches. Upon his arrival, Bonhoeffer was entranced by the towering dome of St. Peter's Basilica, and he wrote in his journal: "[B]efore entering the city, one sees St. Peter's standing there, a singularly solemn moment."¹⁹ It was a moment he had long awaited; for years, he had anticipated it with "the brightest colors of the imagination."²⁰ When he finally stepped through the church doors, he observed that it appeared "much more natural in reality," but its grandeur nevertheless captivated him, and he was "immediately overwhelmed."²¹ The same is true of his entire impression of Catholicism in Italy. Bethge claims that Bonhoeffer "succumbed to the spell of Catholic Rome."²² In Rome, he was enamored not merely by the sites of the church but also by their function. He frequented several local churches with a deep curiosity about their meaning, purpose, and importance. After his visit to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, he wrote: "I will probably come to this church more often to observe the life of the church rather than to look at it from an artistic standpoint."²³ Of all the churches he visited, Bonhoeffer mostly attended services at St. Peter's. He grew to love this church. To him, St. Peter's most clearly "epitomized" the entirety of Rome.²⁴ When his trip neared its conclusion, he dreaded parting from St. Peter's, and he wrote that "when I saw St. Peter's for the last time my heart began to ache."²⁵

Rome introduced Bonhoeffer to the universal church community. This later became the primary preoccupation of his life. According to Paul Duane Matheny, in Rome, Bonhoeffer "discovered the church at the heart of the world," and it sent him "searching for a concept of the church consistent with this experience."²⁶ Bonhoeffer's travels through the ancient city helped him arrive at his initial views of the church, and he noted in his diary: "I'm beginning to understand the concept of 'church.'"²⁷ His notion of the church included its universal nature, which he was witnessing firsthand. During a Palm Sunday service at St. Peter's, Bonhoeffer

¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918–1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 83.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:83.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:83.

²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 57.

²³ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:90.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:99.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:108.

²⁶ Paul Duane Matheny, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in *DBW* 9:7.

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:89.

observed a truly diverse image of the ecclesiastical community. He recorded that the cardinal, seminarians, and monks standing at the altar represented "white, black, yellow members of religious orders – everyone was in clerical robes united under the church." He then added: "It truly seems ideal."²⁸ This "ideal" of church diversity surfaced throughout his travels as a young scholar, and it often confronted and contradicted the national ideal of his culture.

In addition to his reflections on the universality of the Catholic Church in Rome, he also ruminated in his journal about the relationship between church and state. In his reflections from Rome, he asserted that German Protestantism's ties to the state weakened its efficacy. For the German church to remain relevant and active, he wrote: "[S]he must completely separate herself from the state."²⁹ His "ideal" of the church community thus questioned any overly close proximity of the church to the state. These two themes emerge in his personal writings as early as 1924, and they are identifiable throughout the rest of his life. But they especially took shape during his years as a young scholar, both at home and abroad. His belief in an ethnically diverse, international church community only grew during his later traveling experiences, and the theme of a multiethnic, transnational people united under the church with autonomy beyond the state would resurface in his writings from both Barcelona and New York. By then, however, it had also been reinforced by the unique context of his university studies.

Between 1924 and 1927, Bonhoeffer studied at Berlin's Humboldt University. The faculty members at this prestigious institution maintained a unique network of international relationships through an ecumenical coalition: the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. This World Alliance had been launched at the beginning of World War I. On July 31, 1914, seventy-six Protestants from across Europe assembled to promote peace.³⁰ The meeting convened in Konstanz, a southern German town near the border of Switzerland. On August 2, 1914, the international gathering—which became known as the Conference of Constance—drafted three resolutions that defined the nature of the alliance.³¹ The third and final resolution states,

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:88.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:105.

³⁰ James Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order: The Ecumenical Movement and the Origins of the League of Nations, 1908–1918" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2015), 1.

³¹ According to Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 223, "the Constance delegates found themselves debating international peace as the First World War broke out around them."

steps should be taken to form in every country councils of either a denominational or interdenominational character...to enlist the Churches, in their corporate capacity, in a joint endeavor to achieve the promotion of international friendship and the avoidance of war.³²

To achieve these "steps," the World Alliance formed an initial committee entrusted with "carrying into effect the resolutions."³³ This committee consisted of seventeen members, representing Britain, France, Germany, and the United States.³⁴ Three of the four German members were based in Berlin, including Dr. Julius Richter, a professor of missions,³⁵ and Dr. Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, a scholar of social pedagogy.³⁶

The German affiliation with the World Alliance eventually expanded, and the University of Berlin emerged as the central hub of ecumenical work.³⁷ By 1920, the German Executive Committee of the World Alliance had expanded to twenty-eight active members, and seventeen of these were based in Berlin,³⁸ with additional faculty members from the University of Berlin joining Richter and Siegmund-Schultze. Germany's national council report from 1919 notes that

³² *Handbook of the World Alliance: Containing Information as to the Constitution and Work of the Alliance Together with Reports of the National Councils*, ed. World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches (London: William Cloves and Sons, Limited, 1920), 1.

³³ *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 18.

³⁴ According to the *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 4-7, by 1920, the organization included affiliates in the United States, Great Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Belgium, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Greece, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State. The alliance was also interdenominational; according to Gorman, *Emergence of International Society*, 230, "the World Alliance was comprised initially of Anglicans, Baptists, Calvinists and members of the Reformed Churches, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Quakers, Unitarians, and Wesleyan Methodists."

³⁵ Richter distanced himself from the overt international commitments of nineteenth-century missionary societies. Prior to World War I, Germany had increasingly participated in networks of international missionary work. Theologians like Gustav Warneck advocated for an international Christian identity that Richter later rejected. Richter and Karl Axenfeld inherited and determined the culture of German missionary work after Warneck. According to Jeremy Best, *Heavenly Fatherland: German Missionary Culture and Globalization in the Age of Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 48, Richter and Axenfeld found "comfort with German national and colonial power," which led them to "accommodate a German national identity within their proscriptions for missionary culture." See Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 68, for further discussion on the mission networks that inspired subsequent networks of ecumenicalism.

³⁶ *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 18.

³⁷ This produced unique drawbacks during the church struggle in the 1930s. As stated by Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 190, "in Germany it was primarily the academics, not church dignitaries, who became the first advocates of the ecumenical idea...which had unfortunate consequences during the church struggle, because the professors seldom really represented the church and, as state civil servants, were disastrously linked with the Third Reich."

³⁸ *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 58-59.

Dr. Adolf Deissmann had joined the International Committee.³⁹ Deissmann was one of the leading figures in the ecumenical movement and was respected internationally. He produced a weekly newsletter, *Evangelische Wochenbriefe* (*Evangelical Weekly Letters*), which had a following of nearly ten thousand leading church figures in eleven countries.⁴⁰ Similar to Deissmann, Siegmund-Schultze maintained an ongoing ecumenical journal titled *Die Eiche* (*The Oak*). The World Alliance endorsed *Die Eiche* as the German publication for international church relations.⁴¹ Additional faculty members from Berlin associated with the World Alliance included Dr. Arthur Titius and Dr. Cajus Fabricus, professors of systematic theology.⁴² These scholars from Berlin participated in the alliance to varying degrees. Among them, Siegmund-Schultze stood out as the "undisputed champion" of Germany's ecumenical movement, and he was recognized as the most committed German voice in the international network of the World Alliance.⁴³ This collection of dedicated World Alliance members positioned the intellectuals who were working and studying at the University of Berlin at the center of German ecumenicalism.⁴⁴

While the World Alliance attracted faculty members from the university, it was itself a direct result of the ecumenical efforts of senior scholars who had secured international networks before World War I. Among the latter, Adolf von Harnack, professor of church history, had long contributed to the ecumenical work at the University of Berlin. In 1908, Harnack, along with Deissmann and Richter, had attended ecumenical meetings in London. Their work established the foundation for the eventual German partnership with the World Alliance, and they became "core" protagonists of German ecumenicalism.⁴⁵ While Harnack associated with the World Alliance during its initial rise, he eventually distanced himself from it in the wake of the strong nationalist sentiments expressed during the early days of the war.⁴⁶ According to James Donahue, Harnack and other early ecumenical leaders certainly advocated that "the gospel bore witness to the transnational

³⁹ *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 55.

⁴⁰ Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order," 477, points out that Deissmann "relentlessly defended the German point of view on the causes and the conduct of the war" in his newsletter, demonstrating that ecumenicalism was strongly tied to nationalism.

⁴¹ In 1920, the World Alliance endorsed "Journals in Association with the Alliance" from the British Empire, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, and the United States; see *Handbook of the World Alliance*, 10.

⁴² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 190–191.

⁴³ Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order," 469.

⁴⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 190, writes that "Berlin became a prominent ecumenical center – perhaps the center in Germany – at a relatively early stage. The theological faculty of the University of Berlin took the lead."

⁴⁵ Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order," 102.

⁴⁶ Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order," 164.

Christ who shatters the pretensions of religious ethnocentrism;"⁴⁷ yet the nationalism brought on by the war (and to which even Harnack succumbed) was felt strongly in the organization's international meetings. In this context, Harnack, Richter, and Deissmann attempted to blend a national identity with international commitments. Richter and Deissmann reconciled their national commitments to their work in the alliance. Harnack, however, decided to part ways with the World Alliance.⁴⁸

Bonhoeffer was studying at the University of Berlin during the heyday of its transnational church involvement after World War I. Thus, his education was intimately tied to a brand of international Protestantism that also espoused national concerns. He received his theological training under respected faculty members with a long history in the ecumenical movement. Between 1924 and 1926, Bonhoeffer took one course with Titius, two courses with Harnack, and three courses with Deissmann.⁴⁹ It is likely that Deissmann, Harnack, and Titius expressed their views and involvement with the transnational church community in their classes. Of these three professors, Bonhoeffer formed an especially close relationship with Harnack. During his 1927 doctoral examinations, he addressed Harnack by stating this: "[W]hat I have learned and understood in your seminar is too closely bound to my entire person for me ever to forget it."⁵⁰ In his time in Barcelona, Bonhoeffer wrote to Harnack:

I think back to those hours in your house and to those afternoons in Grunewald with a certain sense of longing and melancholy, and often wish I could sit again for but a single hour in your seminar circle or have a conversation with you of the unforgettable kind that I remember from seminar celebrations, outings, and various other occasions.⁵¹

Bonhoeffer admired Harnack. It is conceivable that Harnack's ecumenical work, which also propagated a national commitment, influenced the young Bonhoeffer and his conception of the Christian community, framing it as a network of believers existing both within but also beyond national borders.

Bonhoeffer advocated for an international church community, and in doing so, he benefited from his ecumenically minded institution. The University of Berlin employed leading figures in the ecumenical movement, and, as has been shown, Bonhoeffer directly studied under several of these scholars. Bonhoeffer eventually joined the World Alliance as the Youth Secretary, and he later formed a

⁴⁷ Donahue, "In Search of a Global, Godly Order," 61.

⁴⁸ Harnack displayed strong nationalism during the war and was associated with the highest ranks of German society. While he was engaged in drafting the Kaiser's declaration of war with Russia and France on August 4, 1914, Britain declared war with Germany. According to William H. C. Frend, "Church Historians of the Early Twentieth Century: Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930)," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52, no. 1 (2001): 98-99, "he [i.e., Harnack] never forgave Britain for what he regarded as an unprincipled act of aggression."

⁴⁹ "Lectures and Seminars in which Bonhoeffer Participated," in *DBW* 9:585-586.

⁵⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Graduation Theses," in *DBW* 9:439.

⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Adolf von Harnack, July 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:116.

relationship with Siegmund-Schultze, the "champion" of ecumenicalism. But even before Bonhoeffer traveled abroad to Barcelona and New York, and prior to his participation in the ecumenical movement, the legacy of his university and his personal vision for the "ideal" church would become preserved in his university writings. In his doctoral dissertation, he claimed that the church "aims to become universal and has a commission that transcends every nationality."⁵² Bonhoeffer's education granted him the insight to recognize the transnational church, and his time abroad allowed him to witness and participate in it. His travels also confronted the seemingly paradoxical – and rather strong – commitments that he and his Berlin professors held to both the nation and the international church.

Bonhoeffer had learned about the international church from his professors, but he was thrown into the international church by his superintendent, Max Diestel. Diestel actively participated in the World Alliance from Berlin, and he was eager to get Bonhoeffer out of Germany to experience the church abroad. Diestel called on Bonhoeffer when he received news that the High Church Council of the Evangelical Church was looking to send an ordination candidate to Barcelona to serve as vicar in a German congregation under its lead pastor, Fritz Olbricht.⁵³ Diestel presented Bonhoeffer with the offer, and Bonhoeffer accepted it. Bonhoeffer arrived in Barcelona in February 1928, and he worked there in a ministry capacity for a year. The church there was attended by the members of a local expatriate colony of nearly six thousand Germans. Of these, nearly three hundred were affiliated with the Protestant congregation, but attendance on any given Sunday numbered roughly fifty.⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer describes the situation in a letter to his grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer, stating that "the attitude of these people toward the church is just as positive as their attitude toward sports or toward the German National Party, it's just that they are not very active."⁵⁵ However, activity soon increased. For example, Bonhoeffer's children's service grew from being nonexistent to nearly forty students in any given week.⁵⁶ In addition to his work in the children's ministry, he preached to the main congregation. The congregation liked his sermons, and attendance was higher when he, rather than Pastor Olbricht, was preaching.

Bonhoeffer's sermons in Barcelona reflect his commitment to the universal church. In a sermon delivered on July 29, 1928, Bonhoeffer addressed the nature of church community. The sermon's opening lines hint at Bonhoeffer's travels to

⁵² Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 1, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998; originally published in German: Berlin, Trowlitzsch & Sohn, 1930), 231.

⁵³ Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 38.

⁵⁴ Clifford J. Green, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in *DBW* 10:4.

⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Julie Bonhoeffer, February 23, 1928, in *DBW* 10:72.

⁵⁶ Fritz Olbricht, "Report by Fritz Olbricht to the German Evangelical Church Committee," in *DBW* 10:164.

Rome and his experience with the Catholic Church, stating that "there is a word that evokes tremendous feelings of love and bliss among Catholics who hear it."⁵⁷ The sermon goes on to say that this same word, in the context of Protestantism, is failing to "lend wings to our religious feelings." Bonhoeffer then reveals the word in question in a statement of warning: "Woe to us if this word—the word 'church'—does not soon acquire significance for us again." As Bonhoeffer unfolds the meaning of this word—"church"—he defines it through internationalism. He claims that the people of God are categorically distinct from the peoples of the world. According to Bonhoeffer's conception, the people of God include the peoples of the world, but the people of God exist within a broader community of faith—as he puts it: "not Germany and not France and not America, but a people extending over the entire world... This is the people of God; this is the church of Christ."⁵⁸ The church community, according to Bonhoeffer, exists and interacts beyond the imaginary of national boundaries. But even with his enthusiasm and commitment for an international community, Bonhoeffer was still limited by the cultural perspectives of his own "people," who tended to place the peoples of the world into simple national categories.

In his preaching, Bonhoeffer was advocating for an international church community. Yet, he still had strong ties to the German state, and his national sentiments emerged in the lectures that, in addition to his preaching, he delivered to his Barcelona congregation. His lecture on "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic," for example, discloses his views on nationalism, and these seem to contradict his sermon's advocacy for a transnational church community. While he had suggested, in his sermon, that the church was a people of God made up of the peoples of the world, his lecture asserts that God has created distinct peoples defined by nationality and culture, and Bonhoeffer makes sense of this national qualifier through German theology, claiming that "every people... has within itself a call from God to create its history, to enter into the struggle that is the life of nations."⁵⁹ The nation, according to Bonhoeffer, is God's divine construction. Rather than imagined by people, Bonhoeffer argues in Barcelona, the nation is willed by God.⁶⁰ He states:

⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:27, Barcelona, Eighth Sunday after Trinity, July 29, 1928," in *DBW* 10:505.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:27," in *DBW* 10:507.

⁵⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic," in *DBW* 10:373.

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer operated within a nationally curated set of assumptions about the world. His theology, philosophy, and views on culture all stemmed from his existence as a German. Arguably, his views about God's will for the nation emerged from German literature that actively imagined the meaning, scope, and limits of Germanness. Even his ideas about the church and the state, inspired by Luther, were grounded in a national identity. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 1983), 39, for a discussion of Luther's influence on the imagined community.

God gave me my mother, my people [*Volk*]. For what I have, I thank my people; what I am, I am through my people, and so what I have should also belong to my people; that is in the divine order [*Ordnung*] of things, for God created the peoples.⁶¹

Bonhoeffer's reference to "the divine order of things" is an explicit nod to a system of German theology known as the "orders of creation." This position asserts that God has established institutions—or orders—such as marriage, family, government, and, by extension, the nation. This theology eventually emerged as the central argument for the German Christian Faith Movement,⁶² and it became the bedrock of their racist, antisemitic theology in the 1930s.⁶³ Bonhoeffer's affirmation of this theology aligned him with German nationalism. Clifford Green writes that, in his Barcelona lecture, Bonhoeffer shockingly affirms a "*völkisch[e] Lebensraum* theology."⁶⁴ Reggie Williams explains that Bonhoeffer was, at this time, "in step with German nationalism."⁶⁵ In addition to the theme of nationalism in this lecture, Bonhoeffer also defends killing and war for the sake of national defense (a theme explored further below). In any case, while in Barcelona, Bonhoeffer was (still) propagating the ideal of an international church with a qualifier in defense of the nation. In his theology, he asserted the unity of saints abroad; in reality, he was still very much a German.

Bonhoeffer never abandoned his commitment to Germany, but he also continued to promote Christian transnationalism. In 1930, during his study abroad at Union Theological Seminary in New York—which Max Diestel had also secured on his behalf—Bonhoeffer strongly advocated for peace. In a lecture on war, written and delivered in English, Bonhoeffer states that "it must never more happen, that a christian [*sic*] people fights against a christian [*sic*] people, brother against brother, since both have one Father."⁶⁶ This suggests that Bonhoeffer was (now) prioritizing his church ideal above the nation and "orders of creation." Christiane Tietz writes that Bonhoeffer's American lectures contain the initial

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:371.

⁶² The German Christian Faith Movement was a far-right nationalist group that supported the Nazi party. According to Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Faith Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2, these Nazi-affiliating Christians "sang hymns to Jesus but also to Hitler. They denounced their rivals as disloyal and un-German; they fought for control of local church facilities. Through sermons, speeches, and songs they propagated anti-Jewish Christianity and boosted Nazi racial policy."

⁶³ In "Our Struggle" (1933), published in *A Church Undone: Documents from the German Christian Faith Movement, 1932-1940*, ed. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 237-238, the Lutheran pastor Joachim Hossenfelder, who had joined the Nazi party in 1929, asserted that "people cease to see that the *Volk* is one of God's orders [of creation], and that people of one blood, one language, one history form a unity of life feeling." He also derided those who parted from the national people, stating that "one withdraws all the more easily from the destiny of one's *Volk* if one lives in the delusion that one could live better and more securely as part of another *Volk*."

⁶⁴ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:11.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 14.

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:417.

arguments for his "peace ethic."⁶⁷ This ethic was grounded in his view of the church.

Bonhoeffer advocated for peace, but he also defended his own nation, and he viewed himself in light of his national association, attempting to strike a balance between nationalism and Christian faith. In the same lecture on war, he acknowledges: "I stand before you here...not only as a Christian, but as a German."⁶⁸ And not merely a German, but a proud and devoted German. A German, according to Bonhoeffer, "who loves his home best of all, who rejoices with his people and who suffers, when he sees his people suffering, who confesses gratefully" – and here emerges a statement similar to his Barcelona lecture – "that he received from his people all that he has and is."⁶⁹ He moved beyond an ethic of war to an ethic of peace,⁷⁰ but he never abandoned his commitment to Germany. When he arrived in the United States to further experience the transnational church, he still held tightly to his German heritage. His experience in New York, however, revealed and unraveled the more problematic assumptions bound up in German nationalism. His experience in America frustrated his national theology of the "orders of creation." The contradiction between "orders of creation" theology and Christian transnationalism was on full display in America's fractured church.

Bonhoeffer's year-long study abroad in the United States disabused him of the notion that "orders of creation" theology and Christian transnationalism were reconcilable. The inconsistencies of these two positions became evident as a result of Bonhoeffer's interaction with the Black church in America. Bonhoeffer's fellow student, Frank Fisher, introduced him to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. According to Bonhoeffer, his interaction with the Black church was one of his "most important experiences in America."⁷¹ He attended weekly services at Abyssinian, helped Fisher lead a boys' group, and conducted Bible studies. Through this experience, he realized the divisions of race that were prevalent in churches in the United States, and he found this situation rather appalling. According to his interpretation, the white church refused to mingle with Black congregations. In Bonhoeffer's view, the Black church, "the church of the outcasts of America," existed "fairly untouched, indeed, avoided by the white church."⁷² Bonhoeffer not only witnessed this inherent racism in New York, he also saw it firsthand in the South. In a 1931 letter to his brother, he wrote that "the way the

⁶⁷ Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance*, 20–21.

⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:411.

⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:411–412.

⁷⁰ See Clifford J. Green, "Peace Ethic or 'Pacifism'? An Assessment of *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 1 (2015): 201–208.

⁷¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study Prepared for the Church Federation Office," in *DBW* 10:315.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:314.

southerners talk about the Negroes is simply repugnant," adding that "the pastors are no better than the others."⁷³ In addition to witnessing the segregated church, Bonhoeffer was cognizant of the younger Black generation that refused to participate in the racist system exhibited in American Christianity. This led him to the realization that, if the younger generation of Black Americans were to leave the church in mass, "white America will have to take the blame."⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer viewed the church situation from below, and he concluded that it was deeply troubled and uncorrected. The fault, according to his assessment, rested on the shoulders of the white American church.

The explicit racism of the white church toward Black Christians laid bare the inconsistencies between Bonhoeffer's "orders of creation" theology and his advocacy in favor of Christian transnationalism. In America, he witnessed people of the same nation unable to co-mingle in the church due to the structures of racism. Prior to his American experience, Bonhoeffer had apparently existed entirely in a white European context. Even while living in Barcelona, Bonhoeffer had functioned primarily within a community of Germans. America, however, was an entirely new territory for him, both geographically and ethnically. It did not feature a neatly defined national people that existed in unity and harmony. In one single country, Bonhoeffer witnessed disparate peoples, cultures, and classes, and he saw that difference was not celebrated. America was segregated, even its church. Bonhoeffer's ideal of diversity, as witnessed in Rome, failed to play out neatly in America. Churches existed according to class and color. Bonhoeffer even recognized that "the Negro churches are proletarian churches, perhaps the only ones in all America,"⁷⁵ and that "the Spanish population apparently gets along much better with the Negroes than do the Americans."⁷⁶ It is worth noting that even Bonhoeffer succumbed to racialized definitions that held whites as the American "standard." Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer observed the defects of America's national, white ideal. In the American context, his vision of a people of God working for each other was, in reality, the nightmare of white Christians working against ethnic minorities. The disunion was grounded in both race and nation. A theology celebrating race and nationalism was irreconcilable with Bonhoeffer's vision of a transnational church community. The "orders of creation" theology accompanied Bonhoeffer on his travels abroad, but he left it somewhere along the way, perhaps at the door of Abyssinian. It limited the diversity of his imagined ideal community, which included people from every ethnicity, class, and generation.

Bonhoeffer's experience abroad also widened his perception of the church community to include social outcasts. In his writings, he reflects on an impactful

⁷³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

incident that occurred when he was en route to Barcelona in 1928. Before traveling on to Spain to take up his position as vicar, Bonhoeffer enjoyed several days in Paris. As was his usual custom, he visited a local church. He describes the service as "an extremely festive high mass in Sacré-Coeur."⁷⁷ But the mass itself did not nearly impact him as much as did the people attending. In his words, "the people in the church were almost exclusively from Montmartre, prostitutes."⁷⁸ He wrote that these people are close to "the heart of the gospel."⁷⁹ He then added that there was a need for church work in Berlin's own red-light district, Tauentzienstraße, which, in his opinion, "would be an extremely fruitful field for church work."⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer's church vision grew with his international experiences. Rather than a church confined to social categories of representation or ethical notions of moral obligation, he came to view the church as a place for everyone – the priest and the prostitute alike. His vision of the church community also included the sick. In Barcelona, he frequently visited members of the congregation suffering from illness, but he found these visits inspiring. In a letter to his grandmother, he wrote: "I have to visit an extremely sick, old, devout woman. One often learns a great deal from the sick."⁸¹ In a letter to his sister, Sabine, he related that he spent most of his time visiting members of the congregation, both well and sick, and he added that, when visiting the sick, "one often has some very good experiences."⁸² These experiences, no doubt, informed Bonhoeffer's perspective on the Nazi efforts to target the sick and elderly in the late 1930s. These examples, combined with those from New York, demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's church ideal was not merely that of a transnational community but also that of an intersocial, interethnic, interability,⁸³ and intergenerational church.

Bonhoeffer's experience abroad widened the scope of his vision for the church community. The church was not merely a community of dogmas but a community of people. The people he experienced through travel included rich cultures that elevated and revealed Bonhoeffer's limited ideas about the world. These different cultures also challenged his views of the world's people. He realized, through experience, that humanity is not neatly divided into national people with uniform characteristics; humanity is hybridity embodied. And Bonhoeffer's own humanity was confronted and even challenged in the transnational church. He realized that

⁷⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Spanish Diary, January–March 1928," in *DBW* 10:59.

⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Spanish Diary," in *DBW* 10:59.

⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Spanish Diary," in *DBW* 10:59.

⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Spanish Diary," in *DBW* 10:59.

⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Julie Bonhoeffer, August 17, 1928, in *DBW* 10:133.

⁸² Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Sabine Leibholz, April 22, 1928, in *DBW* 10:89.

⁸³ See Michael Mawson, "Creatures Before God: Bonhoeffer, Disability, and Theological Anthropology," in *Christ, Church and the World: New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology and Ethics*, ed. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 129–135, for an exploration of Bonhoeffer and disability theology.

a human church fails to fit the national imagination that even Bonhoeffer had initially subscribed to. His exposure to the idea of ecumenicalism through the networks at the University of Berlin positioned him to think about the church abroad. However, it was not until he left his country that he experienced the complex reality of the church abroad. Nationalism and transnationalism clashed. His German theological training, at times, seemed irrelevant in places like Barcelona, which is explored below in the section on preaching. His theology of "orders of creation" was proven faulty by the American church climate. As he made his way across borders and into new cultures, many of his ideas were jostled. At some points, he appeared noncommittal or even confused. In Barcelona, he advocated for war. Later, in New York, he was ashamed at the thought of it. In some of his earlier sermons, he advocated for the international church, but he also qualified the nation as the central pillar of human identity. He held at once the identity of a Christian but also the identity of a German. But the scales of identity began to tip in the direction of the church, and Bonhoeffer's interaction with the diverse communities of Christians abroad soon hybridized his own identity. He was meeting new people, practicing new languages, experiencing new cultures, and singing new songs – songs that he carried home to Germany.

II. Worship as Resistance

In 1931, Bonhoeffer received a letter from his dissertation advisor, Reinhold Seeberg, affirming his time abroad in New York. Seeberg stated that, "given the generally growing tendency toward internationalism," Bonhoeffer was privileged to practice a resourceful language, "the tongues of angels" – English.⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer certainly practiced the English language abroad, and he worked on his Spanish while in Barcelona. But beyond these formal languages, Bonhoeffer also learned a language of another kind. He learned and rehearsed a language of cultural resistance from below, specifically through the Negro spirituals sung as worship in the Black churches of America. In the following, I examine Bonhoeffer's interaction with the Negro spirituals, the historical context of this music in the 1930s, Bonhoeffer's reception of James Weldon Johnson's edition of the spirituals, the continuities of resistance in the spirituals, and Bonhoeffer's respective theology of worship.

The Negro spirituals arguably functioned as cultural resistance from below. This claim is situated in the broader scholarly discussion of historical anthropology. Robert Darnton's work exploring peasant folktales is especially resourceful for interpreting the spirituals. Darnton argues that anthropology lends insights into how "ordinary people manipulate symbols."⁸⁵ As a historian, Darnton locates this symbolic manipulation in folktales. He states that "tales told

⁸⁴ Reinhold Seeberg to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, April 7, 1931, in *DBW* 10:291.

⁸⁵ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), xviii.

peasants how the world was put together, and they provided a strategy for coping with it."⁸⁶ Historical anthropology positions culture not merely as art but also as a symbolic language for understanding the world. I argue that the spirituals had a similar function. But they offered more than a strategy for coping. They expressed and continue to express a language of resistance. This claim to resistance is also apparent through the lens of anthropology. James C. Scott, in his work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, argues that the oppressor and the oppressed utilize public and private "transcripts" for communication and expression. The former is a public dialogue between the power and the powerless, or power limited; the latter is the private language, expressed apart from public view. But Scott also argues for a third transcript utilized by suppressed groups. He identifies this third transcript as a "politics of disguise," or the "coded version of the hidden transcript" expressed in the public square.⁸⁷ I argue that the Negro spirituals are rooted in this third transcript,⁸⁸ and I explore Bonhoeffer's possible appropriation of this transcript. But before I turn to New York and the Negro spirituals, it is worth noting Bonhoeffer's other worship experiences abroad.

Worship is a central pillar in Bonhoeffer's theology. In his work *Life Together*, which he wrote after the forced closure of the Finkenwalde seminary, Bonhoeffer dedicated several passages to the importance of worship within church community.⁸⁹ His view of worship, no doubt, emerged from studying church history, literature, and theology, but he also benefited from witnessing, participating in, and examining the worship gatherings of churches in Rome, Barcelona, and New York. Worship is explicitly mentioned on several occasions during his trip to Rome, although he describes these instances more as a passive observer than an active participant. For example, he visited the Trinità dei Monti (the church above Rome's famous Spanish Steps) one afternoon and witnessed what he subsequently described as a "solemn procession" of nearly forty women

⁸⁶ Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 53.

⁸⁷ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

⁸⁸ The Black spirituals retain the same code of resistance that was expressed by African songs against the violence of slavery during the slave trade. This code of resistance through music was utilized by enslaved persons on slave ships. According to Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 282–283, captive Africans utilized songs as an "essential means of communication among people who were not meant to communicate;" songs camouflaged a language of shared knowledge of information about "conditions, treatment, resistance, and events, about where the ship was going;" and African songs on the slave ship provided the means of forming "a common base of knowledge" and a "collective identity." This context of violence shaped the further development of African American religious music. According to Flora Wilson Bridges, *Resurrection Song: African-American Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 75, "as with every aspect of early black culture, what the people were singing religiously reflected what was happening to them sociologically."

⁸⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 5, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

dedicating their lives to serving the church by becoming nuns.⁹⁰ He wrote: "[T]he ritual was truly no longer merely ritual. Instead, it was worship in the true sense."⁹¹ Bonhoeffer also attended high mass at St. Peter's, but there he recorded a somewhat disappointing experience: "I can't say that this particular worship service made a strong impression on me."⁹² Despite the relatively brief insights concerning worship in Rome, some scholars suggest that this trip manifested to Bonhoeffer the importance of worship. Tietz, for example, asserts that Bonhoeffer first realized in Rome that "the visible church and communal worship are essential to Christian life."⁹³ While this may be true, Bonhoeffer appears to have been more of an observer than an actual worshipper during his stay in Rome.

Bonhoeffer's reflections on worship in Rome are few, and there is even less insight on the topic from his pastorate in Barcelona: a Christmas letter to his parents mentions the topic of worship in reference to the success of a Christmas pageant. Bonhoeffer had arranged the play in partnership with the children attending the church. He had begun the preparations for the Christmas production in August.⁹⁴ By October, he was receiving an influx of children attendants in the children's ministry who readily joined the efforts of the Christmas play.⁹⁵ His Christmas letter details that the play "went wonderfully and elicited joy all around"⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer noted that the lead roles had "beautiful singing voices."⁹⁷ But he viewed the entire production as a worshipful expression, writing that "after the final song everyone was quiet in the church for a while," and he concluded his reflections by stating that "the whole undertaking really did acquire the character of a service of worship."⁹⁸ The Barcelona congregation congratulated Bonhoeffer on his efforts, but his superior later voiced displeasure. In a diary entry, Bonhoeffer recorded that "the success of the nativity play annoyed [Fritz Olbricht] such that we had a clash."⁹⁹ In his report to the church council, Olbricht later praised Bonhoeffer's efforts.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of the play's outcome, Bonhoeffer viewed the

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:88.

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:89.

⁹² Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:93.

⁹³ Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance*, 9.

⁹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, August 14, 1928, in *DBW* 10:131.

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, October 11, 1928, in *DBW* 10:144.

⁹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, December 25, 1928, in *DBW* 10:161.

⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer to his parents, December 25, 1928, in *DBW* 10:161.

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer to his parents, December 25, 1928, in *DBW* 10:161-162.

⁹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Diary Entry concerning Fritz Olbricht," in *DBW* 10:175.

¹⁰⁰ Olbricht, "Report," in *DBW* 10:172, states that Bonhoeffer, "in a truly exemplary fashion...produced a nativity play in the church with the children on the Sunday before Christmas, a project whose endless rehearsals and practice demanded a great deal of hard work." And he adds that the "play was performed to great satisfaction."

entire project—the rehearsals, the music, and the final performance—as an act of worship.

New York provided a worship setting that was rather different from Rome and Barcelona, and it made a lasting impression on the young German. During his stay in the United States, Bonhoeffer regularly attended the city's Abyssinian Baptist Church. In his year-end report to the Church Federation Office, Bonhoeffer described his weekly participation in "one of the large Baptist churches in Harlem."¹⁰¹ Scholars who highlight Bonhoeffer's relationship with Abyssinian often cite his receptiveness to its worship music. Steve Bezner asserts that Abyssinian "exposed" Bonhoeffer to the unique African American culture of Black spirituals.¹⁰² Elizabeth Raum writes that Bonhoeffer "discovered" the "vibrant, meaningful worship" in Harlem.¹⁰³ Clifford Green suggests that the worship at Abyssinian, along with the preaching, impacted Bonhoeffer more than any other experience in New York.¹⁰⁴ Reinhart Staats claims that Bonhoeffer was "deeply moved" by the worship in Harlem.¹⁰⁵ Reggie Williams, the most versed authority on the subject, proposes that Bonhoeffer "loved," admired, and displayed "great fondness" for Harlem's Black spirituals.¹⁰⁶ His love for the music apparently led him to acquire a personal collection of Black worship songs. Bethge documents that Bonhoeffer purchased gramophone recordings of the music.¹⁰⁷ Charles Marsh relates a lively version of Bonhoeffer's music purchasing exploits, stating that he and Fisher "scoured Harlem's record shops for recordings of Negro spirituals."¹⁰⁸

Scholars recognize Bonhoeffer's interest in this specific culture and rich history of Black spirituals, but Bonhoeffer's reflections on this music are minimal. In fact, he explicitly mentioned this music during his stay in New York on just a few occasions, and he failed to offer any extensive reflections at the time. In his report to the Church Federation Office, he wrote that "anyone who has heard and understood the Negro spirituals knows about the strange mixture of reserved melancholy and eruptive joy in the soul of the Negro."¹⁰⁹ In a letter to his brother, he stated that "I still believe that the spiritual songs of the southern Negroes represent some of the greatest artistic achievements in America."¹¹⁰ In another letter to his brother, Karl-Friedrich, and to his sister-in-law, Margarethe, he wrote

¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:314.

¹⁰² Steve M. Bezner, "Understanding the World Better than It Understands Itself: The Theological Hermeneutics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2008), 91.

¹⁰³ Raum, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:30.

¹⁰⁵ Reinhart Staats, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," in *DBW* 10:616.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 28, 89, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 118.

¹⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

¹¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 2 and 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

that "I do believe that the Negroes will still give the whites here considerably more than merely their folksongs."¹¹¹ Despite these minimal reflections on the spirituals, the music did influence Bonhoeffer's thinking, it traveled with him back to Germany, and he later shared it with his seminary students at Finkenwalde.¹¹²

While Bonhoeffer offered few remarks on the spirituals, he experienced this cultural and religious music amidst a complex and contested narrative over its authenticity, origins, and ownership. When he eventually arrived home with his own samples of this culture, his collection went beyond mere exoticism. He traveled home with a decided opinion on the nature and background of the spirituals, and there are traces of its influence in his own views on worship.

In addition to his gramophone collection, Bonhoeffer carried home a copy of James Weldon Johnson's recently published *Book of American Negro Spirituals*. Fisher gifted the book to Bonhoeffer on New Year's Day in 1931, and it still survives in Bonhoeffer's library.¹¹³ In addition to this work, Bonhoeffer also received Johnson's *God's Trombones*¹¹⁴ as a parting gift from several friends.¹¹⁵ By the conclusion of his New York fellowship, Bonhoeffer was well acquainted with Johnson's work. In fact, he read Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* while studying at Union, and he wrote a short analysis of works by Johnson, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Johnson was a towering figure in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. He stood out as a successful Black literary figure and advocated for Black cultural production. In 1920, he began serving as the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),¹¹⁶ an organization that Bonhoeffer closely followed during his time in the United States.¹¹⁷

In 1925, Johnson and his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, edited *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, a collection of sixty-one songs published by Viking Press, and in the following year, they assembled a second volume that included the first book as well as a second book with sixty-one added songs.¹¹⁸ The public offered a mixed response to these works. A 1925 article from *The Chicago Defender*, for example, states that the United States' thirtieth President, Calvin Coolidge, congratulated Johnson in a personal letter for his editorial efforts, writing that "it

¹¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich and Margarethe Bonhoeffer, April 12, 1931, in *DBW* 10:293.

¹¹² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 150.

¹¹³ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:30.

¹¹⁴ James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008; originally published 1927).

¹¹⁵ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:30n141.

¹¹⁶ Robert E. Fleming, *James Weldon Johnson* (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1986), xiii.

¹¹⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 150.

¹¹⁸ James Weldon Johnson and J[ohn] Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals: Including The Book of American Negro Spirituals and the Second Book of Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press Publishers, 1940; two vols. originally published separately in 1925 and 1926).

seems to me you have performed a real service in putting these melodies in permanent form."¹¹⁹ Yet, while some praised these works, others questioned them. A *New York Times* author commended the collection but then added: "I think the editor makes rather exaggerated claims."¹²⁰ The songs themselves were not a matter of controversy. Rather, some took issue with Johnson's lengthy introduction contextualizing the spirituals.

In the introduction to *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, Johnson asserts that the spirituals resulted from enslaved persons responding to the horrifying realities of American slavery. This claim was contested or even ignored after the publication of his edited work on the spirituals. A 1925 article from *The New York Amsterdam News* praised Johnson's work but also romanticized the spirituals by muting their ties to slavery. According to the reviewer, through reading these songs,

[o]ne is transported back to half remembered things: a countryside at twilight, a little Negro church back in the pines, and floating over the stillness a haunting chant which goes on unceasingly until far into the night.¹²¹

These "half remembered things" idealized a history of half-forgotten things—namely, the entire slave trade and slave life. The author went on to write that "poetry like this...touches the stars" and added that "to the white ear it has an irresistible charm."¹²² Some writers ventured even further and claimed that the spirituals actually resulted from white influence, thus disconnecting them not only from slavery but also from African American culture. In 1929, the *Philadelphia Tribune* published an article titled "Are Negro Spirituals Really Negro," in which the author, the African American journalist Orrin C. Evans, discussed the racialized debates about the origins of the spirituals. According to Evans, some "critics" were arguing that the spirituals were actually "mulatto" and that Africans had introduced new melodies but, according to these "critics," "lacked what white musicians call form."¹²³ Thus, to such "critics," Black art had seemingly been rescued by white musical structures and tastes.

White choirs were already appropriating the Black spirituals. In 1927, for example, Shaw University (a historically Black institution in Raleigh, North Carolina) partnered with singers from A & T College (a historically Black

¹¹⁹ "New Book on Spirituals Wins Praise: President Coolidge Commends Author," *The Chicago Defender*, October 24, 1925, ProQuest.

¹²⁰ Dorothy Scarborough, "From Cotton Field and Levee to the Streets of Harlem: Negro Work Songs Spirituals and New Negro Ways," *New York Times*, December 20, 1925, ProQuest.

¹²¹ "New Book of Negro Spirituals," *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 14, 1925, ProQuest.

¹²² "New Book of Negro Spirituals," *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 14, 1925.

¹²³ Orrin C. Evans, "Are Negro Spirituals Really Negro? Critics Divided as to Whether Negroes Actually Made Contribution: Mencken, Mercury Editor, Insists That Negro Spirituals Only Genuine American Contribution to Music," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 24, 1929, ProQuest.

institution in Greensboro, North Carolina) and formed a Black choir to share the spirituals on local airwaves. According to an article from the *Raleigh Evening Times*, subsequently reproduced in the *New Journal and Guide*, "it happened that on the same night the Shaw singers had competition on the air from white choruses singing identical numbers."¹²⁴ The spirituals were not just a "niche" artistic expression or worship. They had gained the attention of many white listeners, and some were claiming this genre and Black culture as their own.

In addition to such musical appropriation, the spirituals also interested a growing European audience. A 1924 article from the *Philadelphia Tribune* shared that the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, while visiting the United States, showed a devoted interest in "American popular music as played by colored musicians."¹²⁵ The article describes that, of all the many and elaborate items taken home by the prince, "his most prized collection was a group of racial songs."¹²⁶ The exporting of the spirituals continued throughout the 1920s. On May 2, 1929, the Westminster Choir from Dayton, Ohio, broadcast live performances of Black spirituals in Vienna.¹²⁷ The European market for the spirituals expanded, and as Bonhoeffer was traveling west across the Atlantic to the United States in 1930, the Hampton Choir, a group of forty Black singers, was traveling east in the same year to complete a performance circuit that included London, Antwerp, Brussels, Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, and Switzerland.¹²⁸ The *New York Times* recorded that the Berlin performance was well received, with "calls for a dozen encores."¹²⁹ The extent and reception of the Hampton Choir's 1930 tour exemplifies the influx of Black spirituals into Europe. But while the voices were celebrated, Europe experienced the music detached from its history.

Unlike the audiences who passively enjoyed the spirituals in Europe, Bonhoeffer intimately encountered the culture that produced and preserved the Black spirituals. His collection of music was thus not merely an exotic tokenism of fascinating art. For one, he took home with him the words of Johnson that placed the spirituals into their proper context. Johnson's introduction includes a poem, written by the author and titled "O Black and Unknown Bards." The second stanza asserts some of the most popular spirituals as the creation of the enslaved:

Heart of what slave poured out such melody
As "Steal away to Jesus"? On its strains

¹²⁴ "Spirit of the Press: Negro Spirituals True Expression Race Music," *New Journal and Guide*, February 12, 1927, ProQuest.

¹²⁵ "Prince of Wales Charmed With Negro Spirituals, Gives Gift to Musicians," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 2, 1924, ProQuest.

¹²⁶ "Prince of Wales Charmed With Negro Spirituals," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 2, 1924.

¹²⁷ "Negro Spirituals on Air in Vienna," *New York Times*, May 3, 1929, ProQuest.

¹²⁸ "Hampton Choir Sails for Europe: 40 Negro Singers Will Give First Concert in London—Many Requests for Spirituals," *New York Times*, March 19, 1930, ProQuest.

¹²⁹ "Hampton Choir Stirs Berlin With Voices: Negro Singers Deeply Impress Notable Audience by Rich Tones and Beauty of Spirituals," *New York Times*, May 21, 1930, ProQuest.

His spirit must have floated free,
 Though still about his hands he felt his chains.
 Who heard great "Jordan roll"? Whose starward eye
 Saw chariot "swing low"? And who was he
 That breathed that comforting, melodic sigh,
 "Nobody knows de trouble I see"?¹³⁰

Johnson established the spirituals as creations beyond entertaining folk music. He recorded them as worshipful expressions of a suffering, yet hopeful solidarity. As for the alleged "mulatto" origins of the spirituals, Johnson emphasized that "the Spirituals are purely and solely the creation of the American Negro."¹³¹ This was the literary context that Bonhoeffer carried home with him in his own personal library. But it was not his only frame of reference for this religious music. Bonhoeffer witnessed this worship culture, to some extent, from its own position of suffering and inequality in America.

Bonhoeffer reflected upon the inequality of Blacks in American society during his stay in the United States. In his report reflecting on his year-long study at Union, he shared that "I spent a great deal of time getting to know the Negro problem from every angle and also observing white America from this rather hidden perspective."¹³² Abyssinian afforded Bonhoeffer much of this insight. While attending this church, he closely interacted with a group of young men, which he deemed one of his "most important" ongoing experiences in America.¹³³ He lamented in a letter to his grandmother that these Black "intelligent" young men were barred completely from interacting with "intelligent whites."¹³⁴ The segregation of people was also a segregation of knowledge.

Bonhoeffer witnessed this racial inequality at every level of American society. In a letter to his parents, after visiting the nation's capital with his friend Fisher and becoming acquainted with its intellectual and political Black community, he wrote that "the conditions are really rather unbelievable."¹³⁵ As for the explicit racism displayed in public, he observed "not just separate railway cars, tramways, and buses south of Washington, but also, for example, when I wanted to eat in a small restaurant with a Negro, I was refused service."¹³⁶ In a letter to his brother, Karl-Friedrich, he shared further insights on the separation of Blacks and whites in public transportation, writing that it "extends to even the tiniest details"¹³⁷ and

¹³⁰ Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 11 ("Preface"). The copyright page is preceded by an "Alphabetical List of the Spirituals" which includes a statement that "the two Books of American Negro Spirituals have been reproduced exactly in their original form."

¹³¹ Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 17 ("Preface").

¹³² Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:314.

¹³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Second Semester," in *DBW* 10:321.

¹³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Julie Bonhoeffer, April 12, 1931, in *DBW* 10:295.

¹³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, December 1, 1930, in *DBW* 10:258.

¹³⁶ Bonhoeffer to his parents, December 1, 1930, in *DBW* 10:258.

¹³⁷ Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 2 and 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

commenting with some disdain that it "pleased me when the whites had to crowd into their railway cars while often only a single person was sitting in the entire railway car for Negroes."¹³⁸ In the same letter, after asserting that "the spirituals of the southern Negroes represent some of the greatest artistic achievements in America," he noted: "[I]t is a bit unnerving that in a country with so inordinately many slogans about brotherhood, peace, and so on, such things still continue uncorrected."¹³⁹ His respective language intensified in his second-semester report, when he modified his claim concerning racism from being "a bit unnerving" to "deeply distressing,"¹⁴⁰ stating that "here one gets to see something of the real face of America, something that is hidden behind the veil of words in the American constitution saying that 'all men are created free and equal.'"¹⁴¹ Thus, when Bonhoeffer returned to Germany with Johnson's edited volume of the Negro spirituals, he also carried with him the unfiltered experience of the Black community.

Bonhoeffer celebrated the Black spirituals in the United States, and he shared them with friends and students back home. According to Bethge, Bonhoeffer introduced his collections of spirituals to other Germans on at least two occasions. In 1931, Bonhoeffer formed a close circle of students in Germany, and Bethge explained that, in 1932, "they talked theology, made hesitant attempts at spiritual exercises, went for long walks, and listened to Bonhoeffer's collection of Negro spirituals."¹⁴² Bethge recalled that Bonhoeffer also shared these spirituals with his students at Finkenwalde, where he had initially met Bonhoeffer as an attending student. According to Bethge, Bonhoeffer used the spirituals "to introduce his students to this world that was practically unknown at the time."¹⁴³ Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, too, remembered his encounter with Bonhoeffer's collection of spirituals, stating that Bonhoeffer used the spirituals to illustrate the piety and theology of the Black church, but also to discuss the prevailing prejudice against Black Americans. While presenting the spirituals, Zimmermann recalls, Bonhoeffer also shared stories about Frank Fisher and how they were unable to enter hotels or restaurants due to segregation. Bonhoeffer's deep appreciation of the spirituals continued in Germany. According to Zimmermann, Bonhoeffer "played the spirituals, translated them, explained them, [and] interpreted

¹³⁸ Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 2 and 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

¹³⁹ Bonhoeffer to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 2 and 8, 1931, in *DBW* 10:269.

¹⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Second Semester," in *DBW* 10:321.

¹⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Second Semester," in *DBW* 10:321.

¹⁴² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 208.

¹⁴³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 150.

them."¹⁴⁴ The spirituals inextricably linked Bonhoeffer to his friend Fisher,¹⁴⁵ and they brought to mind the blatant and "repugnant" racism displayed in America. In his memories, writings, and records, Bonhoeffer had the context for the spirituals' significance at his disposal, and he introduced this context in Germany.

Similar to his retrospectives on his stay in America, Bonhoeffer's reflections on the spirituals in Germany were sparse. His books left them out, and they failed to appear in his lectures. With the exception of a single paragraph included in an essay from 1939, Bonhoeffer remained relatively mute on the topic. However, there are indications that the spirituals continued to influence his thinking on the subject of worship. Bonhoeffer never appropriated the spirituals, but he may have incorporated their influence into his own ideas about worship. Through them, he may have learned a language of resistance that is integral to African American culture, namely, political resistance through worship. In fact, Bonhoeffer's views on worship in some of his most celebrated works, such as *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*, display a certain thread of continuity with the songs from Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals*. These themes include the centrality of the Scripture in worship, worship as a song of pilgrimage, songs of suffering, and the depiction of Jesus as the suffering savior, which was central to Bonhoeffer's own theology.

In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer asserts that worship is central to the Christian community and that it unifies believers: "[I]t is God who has prepared one great song of praise throughout eternity, and those who enter God's community join in this song."¹⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer claimed that this song of worship is displayed in Scripture and that those who participate in it become "soberly, gratefully, devoutly focused on God's revealed Word."¹⁴⁷ Thus, Scripture is central to Bonhoeffer's conception of worship. But it is not an abstract conception of the word that merits attention. Rather, to Bonhoeffer, the stories of God's faithfulness displayed in Scripture are the grounds for true worship. Bonhoeffer's examples of God's faithfulness feature one that relates particularly strongly to a common theme of the spirituals: Israel's biblical Exodus from Egypt. In Bonhoeffer's view, the eternal song of believers includes "the victory song of the children of Israel after passing through the Red Sea."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, "Years in Berlin," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 64.

¹⁴⁵ Zimmermann, "Years in Berlin," 64–65, records that, after he had played the spirituals and told stories about racism in America, Bonhoeffer concluded the evening by stating, "when I took leave of my black friend, he said to me: 'Make our sufferings known in Germany, tell them what is happening to us, and show them what we are like.' I wanted to fulfil this obligation tonight."

¹⁴⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Day Together," in *DBW* 5:65.

¹⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Day Together," in *DBW* 5:66.

¹⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Day Together," in *DBW* 5:65.

The Black spirituals are filled with biblical references to stories of deliverance, and the Exodus account is arguably the most referenced story of all. This theme is prevalent in Johnson's book of spirituals. "Go Down Moses" is the very first song in Johnson's edited book, which also includes songs like "Didn't Old Pharaoh Get Los'?" and "Ride On, Moses." Themes of pilgrimage, oppression, and liberation are expressed in these songs. "Go Down Moses" includes these lyrics:

Go down, Moses, 'Way down in Egypt land
Tell ole Pharaoh, To let my people go
When Israel was in Egypt's land: Let my people go
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
Let my people go.¹⁴⁹

"Go Down Moses" is a short song in Johnson's work, but the song "Didn't Old Pharaoh Get Los'?" consists of eleven verses narrating the Exodus.¹⁵⁰ Other songs articulate additional stories from the Old Testament. The song "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" describes the story of Daniel and the lion's den, Jonah and the great fish, and the Jews who were thrown into a furnace after their refusal to bow to a statue of Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁵¹ According to the biblical accounts, all of them were miraculously delivered. The spiritual concludes that, if God can deliver them, "why not every man?"¹⁵² In his introduction, Johnson had explained that the Old Testament stories of the Jews "fired the imaginations" of the creators of the spirituals;¹⁵³ in Johnson's words, "they sang their hungry listeners into a firm faith that...as God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt, so would He deliver them."¹⁵⁴ The victory over Egypt was central to the spirituals because it provided hope in the midst of oppression in the context of American slavery. And Bonhoeffer used this scriptural reference when writing about the eternal song of worship.

There are additional thematic parallels between the spirituals and Bonhoeffer's theology of worship. The spirituals frequently conceptualize the Christian as a traveler or pilgrim journeying toward a heavenly home. The song "Weary Traveler" in Johnson's book includes these lyrics:

Let us cheer the weary traveler
Cheer the weary traveler
Let us cheer the weary traveler
Along the heavenly way.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ "Go Down Moses," in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 52–53.

¹⁵⁰ "Didn't Old Pharaoh Get Los'?" in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 60–61.

¹⁵¹ "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 148–151.

¹⁵² "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 149.

¹⁵³ Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 20 ("Preface").

¹⁵⁴ Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 21 ("Preface").

¹⁵⁵ "Weary Traveler," in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 184–187.

This concept of traveler also surfaces in Bonhoeffer's reflections on worship.¹⁵⁶ He wrote that "our new song is an earthly song, a song of pilgrims and sojourners on whom the Word of God has dawned to light their way."¹⁵⁷ According to the spirituals and Bonhoeffer, worship is meant to encourage Christians as they walk through the perils, suffering, and hardships of this life, and it helps them maintain their focus along the "heavenly way."

In addition to concepts of pilgrimage and biblical narratives expressed in worship, both the spirituals and Bonhoeffer address the reality of suffering. In his *Prayerbook of the Bible: An Introduction to the Psalms*, Bonhoeffer explored the importance of the Psalms in daily living, and he argued that they provide the foundation for Christian prayer. But he also situated them as worship, writing that "the Psalms, as they have been handed down to us today, were for the most part set to music for use in worship."¹⁵⁸ He acknowledged that Psalms were meant for singing, and he further explained that they offer language for suffering. These Psalms of suffering, according to Bonhoeffer, "do not deceive themselves with pious words."¹⁵⁹ He wrote that these Psalms of suffering, these examples of Christian prayer and worship, "no longer see beyond the suffering."¹⁶⁰ They allow the Christian to cry out in complaint toward God. Suffering is at the heart of worship, according to Bonhoeffer. From this position of lament, he argued, Jesus is the only hope, "for in Christ is God with us."¹⁶¹ The Black spirituals, meanwhile, offered a more succinct summary:

Nobody knows de trouble I see, Lord
 Nobody knows de trouble I see
 Nobody knows de trouble I see, Lord
 Nobody knows like Jesus.¹⁶²

Similar to the Psalms, the spirituals allow for active lament. The worshipers singing the spirituals identify with the suffering Israelites; they grieve over the terror of Pharaoh, and they actively cry out for God's deliverance. In addition to shared lament, the spirituals and Bonhoeffer found reassurance in Christ's knowledge of and participation in human suffering. As Bonhoeffer wrote, "Jesus died on the cross with words from the Psalms on his lips."¹⁶³ The Psalms provide a shared lament with Christ and human suffering, according to Bonhoeffer. The songs of the Black church further affirmed this shared Christological suffering. In

¹⁵⁶ The concept of Christian pilgrimage appears in Bonhoeffer's thought prior to his encounter with the Black spirituals. See Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:27," in *DBW* 10:506.

¹⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Day Together," in *DBW* 5:66.

¹⁵⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Introduction to the Psalms," in *DBW* 5:160.

¹⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Introduction to the Psalms," in *DBW* 5:169.

¹⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Introduction to the Psalms," in *DBW* 5:169.

¹⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, "Introduction to the Psalms," in *DBW* 5:170.

¹⁶² "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See," in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 140-141.

¹⁶³ Bonhoeffer, "Introduction to the Psalms," in *DBW* 5:162.

the words of the Black spirituals, "nobody knows de trouble I see...nobody knows like Jesus."¹⁶⁴

The Negro Spirituals and Bonhoeffer's theology of worship share several common themes, but they also present the possibility of a common purpose—resistance. The spirituals represent a legacy of resistance music formulated against oppression. In his 1845 autobiography, the African American social reformer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass had recalled that through songs—even songs consisting of lyrics that appeared void of meaning—enslaved persons "breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish."¹⁶⁵ He added that "every tone," regardless of the words, "was a testimony against slavery."¹⁶⁶ Douglass argued that the music of enslaved persons was a music of resistance. The same was true of the spirituals. By lyrically rehearsing the Exodus of the Israelites, Black Christians actively protested systems of racial oppression. The worship, veiled as art, allowed for an expression of double meaning, or a "politics of disguise."¹⁶⁷ In the spirituals, piety and politics met.¹⁶⁸ Songs like "Go Down Moses" also translated to the U.S. context. They afforded the possibility to sing the biblical stories of an oppressed people while also protesting to God and country a felt personal suffering. Israel had been delivered from a violent political system. The creators of the Negro spirituals—by way of vicarious worship storytelling—utilized music to openly resist violent politics through rhythmic piety.

Bonhoeffer seemingly employed a similar method of resistance worship in his own context. Admittedly, Bonhoeffer personally knew nothing of slavery. He operated in the upper echelons of German society, and he lived a privileged life. But he also witnessed the systemic persecution and genocide of the Jews in Germany, a genocide that the church ignored or, worse still, aided. Certain factions of German Christians strongly supported antisemitic Nazi racism by the time Bonhoeffer published the above-mentioned works commenting on worship. *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible* appeared in 1939 and 1940, respectively. In the

¹⁶⁴ "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See," in Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 140.

¹⁶⁵ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 20.

¹⁶⁶ Douglass, *Narrative*, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Scott, *Domination*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ James H. Cone, past professor at Union Theological Seminary and founder of Black Liberation Theology, in his memoir, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 97, offers his own reflection on the spiritual "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," a version of "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See," which includes an exclamatory phrase, "Glory Hallelujah!" Cone writes that, "as I heard it, the 'trouble' is white folks, and the 'Hallelujah' is a faith expression that white folks don't have the last word about life's ultimate meaning." See also James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980). In addition to the spirituals, James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 41–42, comments on Bonhoeffer's unique engagement with the Black church, spirituals, and literature.

early 1930s, Nazi-supporting Christians already advocated for the complete separation of Judaism from a national German Christian religion. On November 13, 1933, Dr. Reinhold Krause, a Nazi member, delivered a speech to 20,000 listeners at the Sports Palace in Berlin, calling for a "liberation from everything in the worship service and our confession of faith that is not German."¹⁶⁹ He further demanded a "liberation from the Old Testament, with its Jewish reward-and-punishment morality, with its stories of cattle-dealers and pimps."¹⁷⁰ The German Christians attempted to pull Christianity apart from its Jewish heritage, and this included all signs of Jewish references and influence in church music and hymns.¹⁷¹

Beyond the walls of the church, the Nazi state aggressively legislated antisemitism throughout the 1930s. In September 1935, at the conclusion of the week-long rally in Nuremberg, Hitler announced the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor" and the "Reich Citizenship Law."¹⁷² In general, they aimed to define and determine the identity and rights of people and populations living within German borders. In specific, they provided a matrix for defining the nature and limits of Jewishness. The "Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor" barred German Jews from marrying German "Aryans." The "Reich Citizenship Law" attempted to measure, via family lineage, the percentage of one's biological Jewish makeup. According to Richard Evans, "the laws opened the way for further, massive discrimination against anyone who counted as a Jew."¹⁷³ These laws were the definitive step toward the "final solution." According to Doris Bergen, "once Jews were defined, it would be much easier to isolate, rob, deport, and eventually kill them."¹⁷⁴ With these legal definitions in place, the state issued further decrees to bind Jews to written parameters of identity within the German nation. By 1938, the Reich Ministries of Interior and Justice required German Jews to obtain and permanently carry an identification card.¹⁷⁵ The definitions written into law in 1935 were applied to bodies by 1938. It was at that time that the state escalated the violence against the Jews. In November 1938, over one thousand synagogues and seven thousand Jewish-owned shops were destroyed in an upsurge of antisemitic violence during the Night of Broken Glass.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ Reinhold Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," in *Church Undone*, ed. Solberg, 257.

¹⁷⁰ Krause, "Speech," in *Church Undone*, ed. Solberg, 258.

¹⁷¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 164–171.

¹⁷² Doris L. Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 71–72.

¹⁷³ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 546–547.

¹⁷⁴ Bergen, *Holocaust*, 72.

¹⁷⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Teaneck: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 54.

¹⁷⁶ Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 584–585.

It was in this political and church climate that Bonhoeffer produced two works commenting on worship and incorporating themes from the Old Testament. Bonhoeffer wrote about the "victory song of the children of Israel," and he situated the Psalms, a Jewish text, as the foundation for Christian prayer and worship.¹⁷⁷ It is possible that Bonhoeffer took cues from the spirituals and produced his own "coded hidden transcript," a language that used piety to resist politics. In the introduction to the English translation of the *Prayerbook of the Bible*, Geoffrey B. Kelly acknowledges that Bonhoeffer's affirmation of Judaism "constituted an explosive declaration both politically and theologically."¹⁷⁸ His solidarity with the Jewish heritage immediately refuted the culture of Nazism. Kelly further suggests that when Bonhoeffer addressed suffering Christians, he was "likewise describing the crucifixion of the Jews of Europe to whom he was viscerally bound during the church struggle."¹⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer pursued a theology of worship that included codes of resistance. His own lamenting dissent reveals patterns of similarity to the spirituals he had encountered in New York. It is possible that Bonhoeffer even agreed with Johnson's words – words that he carried home to Germany:

Not that great German master in his dream
Of harmonies that thundered amongst the stars
At the creation, ever heard a theme
Nobler than "Go down, Moses." Mark its bars,
How like a mighty trumpet call they stir
The blood. Such are the notes that men have sung
Going to valorous deeds; such tones there were
That helped make history when time was young.¹⁸⁰

In 1939, Bonhoeffer produced an essay reflecting once again on the spirituals. He stated that "the strongest contribution of the Negroes for American Christendom lies in their spiritual songs ('Negro spirituals')," and he went on to cite the themes and songs that he found so moving, songs published in Johnson's book of spirituals:

[T]hey sing with moving expression about the distress and liberation of the people of Israel ("Go down, Moses..."), the misery and distress of the human heart ("Nobody knows the trouble I have seen...") and love for the Redeemer and yearning for the kingdom of heaven ("Swing low, sweet chariot...").¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Day Together," in *DBW* 5:65.

¹⁷⁸ Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in *DBW* 5:143.

¹⁷⁹ Kelly, "Editors Introduction," in *DBW* 5:152.

¹⁸⁰ Johnson and Johnson, *Books*, 11–12 ("Preface"). "German master" likely refers to Friedrich Schiller's *Ode to Joy* (1785), set to music in Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* (1824).

¹⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Essay about Protestantism in the United States of America, August 1939," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 15, *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, trans. Claudia D. Bergmann, Peter Frick, and Scott A. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 457–458.

Bonhoeffer loved the spirituals. But he also understood their context and history. He knew about American slavery, American prejudice, and American segregation. He was also well informed that whites cherished the spirituals but oppressed and rejected the Black bodies that sang the spirituals. He wrote that "every white American knows, loves, and sings these songs."¹⁸² He reflected on the irony that, while Black choirs performed these beloved songs "in the overcrowded concert halls of white people and receive[d] resounding applause," they still found "no acceptance in the communities of the whites because of social discrimination."¹⁸³ The Negro spirituals represented the worship anthem of American culture when Bonhoeffer arrived, and that anthem was spreading through Europe. But he also witnessed the oppressed and segregated culture that had produced and preserved these celebrated melodies. He knew that white Americans loved the spirituals but opposed Blacks. It was the result of a historical reality. He wrote in his paper that, when slave masters introduced Christianity to slaves, they reasoned that "nothing whatsoever had to change in the outward conditions of the slaves who were baptized."¹⁸⁴ White Christians celebrated the spirituality of Black humanity but ignored their physical reality. Bonhoeffer recognized the contradiction. This same contradiction emerged in Germany when Christians attempted to keep the beloved songs of Jewish heritage—the Psalms—alive while erasing Jews from Europe. They despised the people but cherished their music. But both forms of music included an encoded message of political dissent, and while oppressive audiences on both continents loudly sang the songs of David and the songs of the spirituals, they actively parroted an encoded language of protest against themselves.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Bonhoeffer, "Essay about Protestantism," in *DWV* 15:458.

¹⁸³ Bonhoeffer, "Essay about Protestantism," in *DWV* 15:458.

¹⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Essay about Protestantism," in *DWV* 15:457.

¹⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer likely used encoded language prior to these works exploring worship. For example, Bonhoeffer provided three Bible studies on King David to his seminary students in 1935 that were published in the same year. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Bible Study: King David, Finkenwalde, October 8–11, 1935," in *DBW* 14:870–893. In this study, Bonhoeffer states that "Christ is the son and descendant of David according to the flesh" (871); that "the people of Israel will remain God's people for eternity" (885); that "the church of God will be dishonored from the inside" (888); and that David's final sin before his death was numbering Israel, to which Bonhoeffer responds, "God's people, however, are not to be counted...God's punishment follows" (892). Bonhoeffer delivered the initial studies one month after the announcement of the Nuremberg Laws and one month before their amended guidelines for determining (i.e., counting) Jewishness. During this time, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, worked directly under Germany's Minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner. Gürtner signed the Nuremberg Laws into effect and knew about the impending amendments that would define Jewishness. Furthermore, Dohnanyi likely informed Bonhoeffer about the developments of these laws. According to Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 488, "Dohnanyi had informed Bonhoeffer about the various stages in the preparation of these rigid laws and about the strategies to modify them or find suitable compromises that would allow a more flexible interpretation." Additionally, published materials were closely regulated, making it nearly impossible to publish explicit material critiquing the church, let alone the state;

III. The Transnational Pulpit

In this final section, I explore Bonhoeffer's interaction with the preached sermon. Throughout his travels, Bonhoeffer witnessed preaching in different nations and participated in international homiletics. But preaching extends beyond the interpretation of Scripture and the instruction of Christian living. I argue that Bonhoeffer witnessed and participated in the sharing of a national narrative from the pulpit, but I also assert that Bonhoeffer realized the difference between the nation and the sermon while teaching from and sitting beneath the transnational pulpit. In his work *Nationalism in Europe & America*, Lloyd Kramer explores the relationship between the "national story" and the "religious story" and how the two often conflate into a single narrative of ultimate reality.¹⁸⁶ The unfolding of the national narrative is explained in tandem with the heavenly narrative, and the divine cosmic story is interpreted through the national story. In the following, I consider Bonhoeffer's engagement with transnational preaching, the national stories he expressed through preaching, the cultural experiences and literature that influenced his conception of the German national story, and how the pulpit abroad converted him from a national story of defense to an international message of human suffering.

In Barcelona, Bonhoeffer preached regularly. When he was tasked with overseeing the congregation for three months, he preached every other Sunday.¹⁸⁷ His messages from this time survive in over a dozen written sermons.¹⁸⁸ Seven of these sermons engage passages from the New Testament. He also taught a sermon from the Song of Solomon, and he delivered an additional message focusing on the book of Psalms. His Barcelona letters demonstrate his devotion and serious attitude toward sermon preparation. He explained in a letter to his parents that he worked on his sermons every day of the week.¹⁸⁹ He approached his sermon preparation soberly and reflected on it actively. In a letter to his friend, Helmut Roßler, he described his attitude toward preparing a sermon on Matthew 5:8 ("Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"): "I have never approached a sermon with such trepidation. But I am looking forward to Sunday."¹⁹⁰ His reverence for the selected passage is on full display in the actual sermon from August 12, 1928:

So I bring you this text today in our sermon, knowing full well that the best thing we can do with regard to it is simply to be silent. To behold and be silent, to allow ourselves to be seized

see Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 373. It is conceivable that Bonhoeffer's study on King David was also an analysis of Germany and a political message cloaked in piety.

¹⁸⁶ Lloyd Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe & America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 93.

¹⁸⁷ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:6.

¹⁸⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermons, Catechetical Lessons, and Addresses," in *DBW* 10:479–589.

¹⁸⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, November 27, 1928, in *DBW* 10:152.

¹⁹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Helmut Roßler, August 7, 1928, in *DBW* 10:128.

and conquered by this text, to lose our life to this text, to allow it to bear us upward to eternal heights and expanses.¹⁹¹

He dedicated many hours to preparing his sermons, and the congregation reportedly appreciated his delivery and style.

Bonhoeffer enjoyed many preaching opportunities in Barcelona, but he was seemingly unimpressed with the sermons he heard, especially from his superior, Fritz Olbricht. Bonhoeffer initially displayed curious anticipation for Olbricht's preaching. In a letter addressed to his family, he wrote, "I can't imagine yet how he will preach but am anxious to see."¹⁹² Yet, Olbricht failed to impress him on every front. Bonhoeffer found his preaching—along with his personality and mannerisms—entirely distasteful. In a letter to Walter Dreß, he remarked that Olbricht "is not exactly a dynamic pulpit presence."¹⁹³ In a journal entry solely dedicated to his reflections on Olbricht, Bonhoeffer described the man with even further criticism, stating that Olbricht "obviously missed his calling."¹⁹⁴ In his opinion, the pastor was better suited for the outdoors or the military in place of ministry and preaching. Bonhoeffer disapproved of his sermons and pastoral leadership. "His sermons," Bonhoeffer noted, "are uninspired and scandalously boring, his pastoral care nonexistent, his instruction hopelessly uncomprehending."¹⁹⁵ Granted, Olbricht was Bonhoeffer's superior, but Bonhoeffer failed to find in him any traits worth emulating. Despite these strong dislikes, the two men maintained a civil relationship. Olbricht praised Bonhoeffer's preaching in his report to the German Evangelical Church Committee, citing that his sermons contained "profound and rich ideas" delivered in a way "remarkable for his young age," which "gave the impression of a pastor with many years of experience."¹⁹⁶ On paper, Olbricht praised Bonhoeffer for his preaching. Bonhoeffer, however, perceived in Olbricht a jealous attitude. He asserted that this jealousy resulted from the higher attendance during his sermons compared to the smaller audiences during Olbricht's messages.¹⁹⁷ Their relationship stunted Bonhoeffer's reflection on the preaching in Barcelona, but it did not mute his introspections on the content, relevance, and style of his own sermons in the church abroad.

The German congregation in Barcelona presented unique challenges that confronted Bonhoeffer's own assumptions, both culturally and theologically. His

¹⁹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on Matthew 5:8, Barcelona, Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 12, 1928," in *DBW* 10:511.

¹⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents, grandmother, brothers and sisters, February 16, 1928, in *DBW* 10:68.

¹⁹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:77.

¹⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Diary Entry," in *DBW* 10:174.

¹⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Diary Entry," in *DBW* 10:174.

¹⁹⁶ Olbricht, "Report," in *DBW* 10:172.

¹⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Diary Entry," in *DBW* 10:174.

views on theology and homiletics were nationally defined. In an international context, however, this stance began to drift toward irrelevance, even in a German colony. Bethge wrote that Bonhoeffer "hardly noticed the excessive demands that his highly specialized theological knowledge made on the businesspeople sitting below his pulpit."¹⁹⁸ In fact, Bonhoeffer *did* realize these demands, and he admitted that his "specialized [German] theological knowledge" failed to translate to the German culture existing in Spain. In a letter to Walter Dreß, Bonhoeffer described how this realization dawned on him while preaching to the Barcelona congregation, stating, "my previous understanding of dogmatics is being severely questioned by all these new impressions."¹⁹⁹ He conceded that the politics and church culture of Spain "forced" him to entirely reimagine theology "from the ground up."²⁰⁰ In the context of Spain, Bonhoeffer even questioned the relevance of the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, a prominent influence in the German-speaking world and a highly respected authority by Bonhoeffer's standards. He wrote that "I now do have serious questions whether Barth could have written in Spain – whether he had any understanding at all for circumstances outside Germany."²⁰¹ Bonhoeffer's assumptions of celebrated German theology weakened before a congregation of Protestant business families. They had no conception of Bonhoeffer's training. Although they technically spoke the same language, Bonhoeffer was communicating in an academic vernacular that was nearly meaningless to his listeners. He realized that the theology undergirding his sermons was unnecessarily sophisticated. He also recognized his own set of cultural assumptions and experiences that informed the project of German theology in the twentieth century and which had, at least in part, been shaped by the war.

The aftermath of World War I impacted Bonhoeffer both personally and theologically, but it seemingly meant little to the Germans living in Barcelona. This initially surprised Bonhoeffer. He reflected in a letter to his dissertation advisor, Reinhold Seeberg, that "it is interesting to observe how the war and especially the period of revolution simply passed most of these people by."²⁰² He also commented on this topic in his journal. Describing the youth in Barcelona, he wrote, "they have experienced nothing, or very little, of war, revolution, and the painful aftermath of this period."²⁰³ His letter to Walter Dreß, the same letter that indicated his shifting theological perspectives, described Spain as "a country that has known neither war nor revolution."²⁰⁴ What seemingly meant little to

¹⁹⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 111.

¹⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76.

²⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76.

²⁰¹ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76.

²⁰² Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Reinhold Seeberg, July 20, 1928, in *DBW* 10:120.

²⁰³ Bonhoeffer, "Spanish Diary," in *DBW* 10:62.

²⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76.

Germans living in Spain was paramount for Bonhoeffer, and he attempted—through preaching—to turn his congregation's attention to national concerns felt on the home front.

Guilt was a prominent theme in Bonhoeffer's Barcelona sermons. His Easter Sunday service homily repeatedly turned to the topic of Christ's sacrifice and the removal of human guilt.²⁰⁵ He also addressed those who felt "burdened by guilt" in a sermon on July 15, 1928.²⁰⁶ Guilt and the church community was also a prevalent theme. Two weeks later, he stated in his sermon that "the most profound and serious feature in the life of the Christian church-community is that we are able to take away one another's guilt."²⁰⁷ His sermon on September 9, 1928, opened with the theme of guilt.²⁰⁸ This theological attention to guilt was likely tied to the political reality of the "war guilt" clause in the Treaty of Versailles (1919). In 1930, while studying abroad in New York, Bonhoeffer explicitly mentioned the "war guilt" clause in a sermon, stating that "no German and no stranger, who knows well the history of the origine [*sic*] of the war, believes, that Germany bears the sole guilt of the war."²⁰⁹ The "war guilt" clause effectively stifled the German economy and destabilized the Weimar Republic.²¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, in his New York sermon, submitted that "the debts of the war press us...in regard to our whole behaviour [*sic*], we see the hopelessness of our work."²¹¹ In his New York lecture on war, Bonhoeffer asserted that the Treaty had "proved historically" to be an "injustice to our country."²¹² In a personal tone, he added, "my grandchildren still will have to pay reparations and war debts."²¹³ Germany's national debt bore cultural relevance for the notion of spiritual debt in Bonhoeffer's theology. In Germany, this theology of guilt and debt had immediate relevance.²¹⁴ In Barcelona, however, where the effects of the war had little impact, his theology of

²⁰⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:17, Barcelona, Easter Sunday, April 8, 1928," in *DBW* 10:487.

²⁰⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on Psalm 62:2, Barcelona, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 15, 1928," in *DBW* 10:502.

²⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:27," in *DBW* 10:509.

²⁰⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:9, Barcelona, Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 9, 1928," in *DBW* 10:521.

²⁰⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 John 4:16, New York, Armistice Day Sunday, November 9, 1930," in *DBW* 10:582.

²¹⁰ Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany: 1800 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 198–201.

²¹¹ Bonhoeffer, "Sermon on 1 John 4:16," in *DBW* 10:583.

²¹² Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:415.

²¹³ Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:416.

²¹⁴ Bonhoeffer's national concern for guilt also emerged alongside his theological study of guilt in accordance with the theology of Martin Luther. According to Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Bristol: Bristol Baptist College, 1984), 97, Bonhoeffer was a "Lutheran of Lutherans."

guilt and debt failed to communicate the same relevance it had in the German context.

In addition to his teachings on guilt, Bonhoeffer explicitly instructed the Barcelona youth about war. In his letters home, he seemingly expressed disappointment in the lack of war knowledge and interest among the city's German youth. His children's sermon on Remembrance Sunday, which was likely delivered in Barcelona, featured a story that closely resembled that of the loss of his own brother, Walter, during the war. It was the story of a young man, recently turned seventeen, who "had left his mother and his little brother, to whom he had always been nothing but a great joy."²¹⁵ Bonhoeffer related the young man's death on a snow-covered battlefield, and he then narrated that the news eventually reached the mother. In the story, upon receiving the letter, the mother "began to cry loudly and to lament, asking God repeatedly, 'Why have you done this?'"²¹⁶ The story mirrored Bonhoeffer's personal experience with the war. As a young boy, he had lost both a brother and friends: his brother Walter had been wounded, drafted a letter to his family, and died shortly thereafter. When his mother received word about the death of his brother, she spiraled into depression.²¹⁷ Bonhoeffer shared his own respective memories in New York:

I tell you from my personal experience, two brothers of mine stood on the front. The older one 18 years old was wounded, the younger one 17 years old was killed. 3 first cousins of mine were also killed, boys of 18 to 20 years old. Although I was then a small boy, I never can forget those most gloomy days of the war. Death stood before the door of almost every house and called for entrance. Once came the message about the death of many thousands of seventeen and eighteen-year-old boys killed in a few hours. Germany was made a house of mourning.²¹⁸

Thus, the story in Bonhoeffer's Barcelona sermon was more fact than fiction. It had described, in detail, the death of a seventeen-year-old soldier, the very age of his brother when he passed. Bonhoeffer took the liberty to include this lengthy story in a children's sermon. He leveraged his sermon to not merely express bereavement, but also to invite Barcelona's German youth into a shared national experience that he felt they had missed altogether.

In addition to national guilt and bereavement, Bonhoeffer utilized the Barcelona pulpit to propagate a Christian ethic of war. In addition to sermons, he delivered several lectures from the pulpit to his congregation. In his lecture on "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic," he introduced the topic of national defense and war, asserting that "distressing situation[s]" disrupt neatly defined principles of ethics, including "universal brotherhood," and that Christians have the right to

²¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Homily for the Children's Service, Barcelona (?), Remembrance Sunday, November 25, 1928 (?)," in *DBW* 10:539.

²¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, "Homily for the Children's Service," in *DBW* 10:540.

²¹⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 27.

²¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Lecture on 'War,'" in *DBW* 10:412.

act out violently in self-defense for their *Volk*.²¹⁹ Bonhoeffer's justification of violence rested on the theological assumption that God had divinely willed the *Volk* and that one's own people was inherently more valuable than another national people.

According to Bonhoeffer's lecture, the ultimate good in a concrete situation was to defend one's neighbor against an intruding stranger. In this logic, the motivation for neighborly protection justified war. But war did not necessitate hatred, Bonhoeffer argued. He went on to write that "Christians who go to war will not hate their enemy, since they cannot hate in any case," and he further claimed that "they will still pray for their enemies and for their souls when they deliver their bodies to death."²²⁰ It is worth noting the similarities between Bonhoeffer's war ethic and the slave masters' bondage ethic—similarities that Bonhoeffer would come to realize by 1939. In 1928, however, Bonhoeffer was still assuming a body-soul duality that justified violence against the body while claiming benevolent interaction with the soul. A Christian could kill the body but deliver the soul. The theology of the slave master and the theology of Bonhoeffer's war ethic mirrored each other.

Christians who participated in war, according to Bonhoeffer, were also justified by war. Their love for their people, expressed in violence, sanctified acts of murder: "I will defend my brother, my mother, my people, and yet I know that I can do so only by spilling blood; but love for my people," Bonhoeffer writes, "will sanctify murder, will sanctify war."²²¹ Bonhoeffer's argument for a Christian ethic of war was grounded in a theology of national identity. His war ethic hinged on the claim that "I will have to do to those enemies what my love and gratitude toward my own people commands me to do, the people into whom God bore me."²²² He argued that Christian love was formed in the spirit of the people. This *Volk* love "commanded" Christians to defend biological neighbors over and against biological strangers. It was not a love of freedom. It was a love of national determinism.

These are the most inconsistent claims in Bonhoeffer's corpus of literature, and scholars readily point out their odd appearance in Bonhoeffer's thoughts. Clifford Green asserts that those familiar with Bonhoeffer's theology, writings, and general legacy are "rightly shocked and embarrassed" by this display of national theology and ethics of violence.²²³ Reinhart Staats derides Bonhoeffer's *Volk* war ethic as a "dreadful thesis."²²⁴ Charles Marsh, however, attempts to explain Bonhoeffer's statements by placing them into the broader context of just-war theory, which is

²¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:371.

²²⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:371.

²²¹ Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:372.

²²² Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:372.

²²³ Green, "Editor's Introduction," in *DBW* 10:11.

²²⁴ Staats, "Editor's Afterword," in *DBW* 10:618.

rooted in the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo.²²⁵ Yet, this explanation simplifies the distinction between Augustinian just-war theology and the theology of *Volk*, often termed "orders of creation," which Bonhoeffer explicitly endorsed in his lecture.

In Bonhoeffer's historical and cultural context, his claims of war and nation from the pulpit are not surprising, nor are they easily dismissible. Bonhoeffer lived in a society that viewed the world through national peoples. In his letter to Walter Dreß, lamenting the ignorance of war and revolution among youth in Barcelona, he noted that his dogmatics made little sense in a country devoid of "Spengler."²²⁶ Oswald Spengler's work *The Decline of the West*, with its first volume published in 1918, was widely read in Germany. It asserted that cultures emerge and exist as distinct living organisms. Spengler argued that a culture is birthed when "a great soul awakens out of the protospirituality," which then "blooms on the soil of an exactly-definable landscape."²²⁷ According to Ben Lewis, Spengler borrowed "Goethe's study of the development of organic forms – *die Gestaltenlehre* – to the realm of human history."²²⁸ According to this view, cultures maintain biological significance and determinism. Spengler also rejected the rigid historical practice of periodization, which usually divided history into classical antiquity, the medieval era, and modernity.²²⁹

There are hints of Spengler's influence in Bonhoeffer's own writings and reflections about nations when traveling abroad. For example, it is observable during Bonhoeffer's 1924 visit to Rome. Reflecting on the culture of Rome expressed in St. Peter's, Bonhoeffer wrote: "[I]t is the Rome of antiquity, the Rome of the Middle Ages, and equally the Rome of the present."²³⁰ He was not merely making a statement about St. Peter's. He was interpreting it through Spengler. His lecture defending a national war ethic also revealed Spengler's ideas, with Bonhoeffer claiming that "every people...has within itself a call from God to create its history, to enter into the struggle that is the life of nations."²³¹ In 1918, Spengler had postulated that "every Culture...possesses a specific and peculiar sort of history...felt and lived."²³² Spengler viewed cultures through life cycles comparable to seasons with a budding spring, a maturing summer, a dwindling autumn, and a dying winter. Spengler even provided a detailed chart, ordering

²²⁵ Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 86.

²²⁶ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76.

²²⁷ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, *Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926; originally published in German: Vienna: Verlag Braumüller, 1918), 106.

²²⁸ Ben Lewis, *Oswald Spengler and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 44.

²²⁹ Lewis, *Oswald Spengler*, 42.

²³⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," in *DBW* 9:99–100.

²³¹ Bonhoeffer, "Basic Questions," in *DBW* 10:373.

²³² Spengler, *Decline*, 131.

history and cultures into seasonal categories of "morphology."²³³ Bonhoeffer's reference to "the life of nations" is possibly a reference to Spengler's view of a culture's life cycle. Bonhoeffer described his own theology from Barcelona according to Spengler's chart of "morphology." In his letter to Walter Dreß, he wrote: "I already had in Germany a theology of spring, summer, autumn, and winter."²³⁴ The letter reveals that Dreß and Bonhoeffer shared knowledge of Spengler's work, and Bonhoeffer was adopting Spengler's ideas to categorize his own theology. Spengler had viewed the nation as a metaphysical, pre-determined, organic life-soul tied to a specific location and expressed through a defined people. Bonhoeffer's war ethic appears to have emerged from this interpretative framework.

In addition to such literary influences, Bonhoeffer's war ethic was closely tied to his own family experience. The Bonhoeffer family had participated in World War I in defense of the German nation, and Bonhoeffer had lost his older brother and several cousins during the war. War was not merely an abstract issue of morality or ethics. The young Bonhoeffer had personally witnessed the death of a generation. As a boy and later as a budding theologian, he carried those experiences with him. He likely wrestled with his own interpretation of his brother's death and the war. And there was no simple answer. If war was wrong, then his family and his nation had been at fault for sending Walter to the front lines. If war was justified, then his brother's sacrifice—in defense of those he loved—was honorable. It is impossible to know Bonhoeffer's thought process on this. He had been raised during a time of international conflict, which had increased notions of national identity everywhere. Considering Bonhoeffer's own family and cultural influences in this historical and intellectual context, it is actually somewhat of a surprise that he eventually abandoned or modified these views.

Bonhoeffer came to reject the very war ethic he had promoted in Barcelona. Nearly ten years later, while leading the underground Finkenwalde seminary, Bonhoeffer provided preaching instructions for pastors on Memorial Day (Volkstrauertag). Instead of justifying war efforts, he now claimed that "war is a sin against God's gospel of peace."²³⁵ Also absent now was his *Volk* theology. At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer stated that, "in every war and cry for war, we see that we are aliens."²³⁶ Consequently, he asserted a peace ethic against war. He encouraged pastors preaching on Memorial Day to offer "consolation" and to address the reality of evil and God's benevolence. He also said that pastors should neither romanticize war nor praise war heroes from the pulpit. He claimed that

²³³ Spengler, *Decline*, "Tables Illustrating the Comparative Morphology of History."

²³⁴ Bonhoeffer to Walter Dreß, March 13, 1928, in *DBW* 10:76-77.

²³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "On Memorial Day [Volkstrauertag] on Reminiscere Sunday, and on John 15:13-14 and Romans 5:6-8, 10a," in *DBW* 14:763.

²³⁶ Bonhoeffer, "On Memorial Day," in *DBW* 14:764.

"we owe it to those who were killed in action not to turn them into idols, which God would then zealously shatter."²³⁷ One may wonder whether Bonhoeffer, when saying so, was reflecting upon his own sermon about the death of a soldier preached – nearly ten years earlier – to children in Barcelona.

Bonhoeffer reflected on his own sermons in Barcelona more than on any other preaching. To some extent, through preaching, he realized the irrelevance of his own theology, but he still attempted to transport his cultural experiences to the community in Barcelona through preaching. It is impossible to know the extent of his realized subjectivity while living abroad, but he certainly noticed crucial distinctions. Bonhoeffer's reflections about the absence of war and revolution in the psyche of Barcelona's Germans contain a mixed tone of astonishment and irritation. The recent war had been the defining event for the entire German state, but the German population in Barcelona seemingly displayed disinterest. This transplanted national existence in some ways annoyed Bonhoeffer. He voiced his disapproval of Germans who purposefully left Germany for Spain, stating, "I notice more and more that the émigrés, adventurers, and entrepreneurs who leave Germany are damned materialistic and have not received any sort of intellectual lift from their stay abroad."²³⁸ To Bonhoeffer, Germany was home, and he assumed the obligation to share his national experiences with the German community living abroad. He shared about the war, bereavement, and death. Through his lectures, he propagated a war ethic that justified and sanctified war in defense of one's nation. Above all, from the Barcelona pulpit, Bonhoeffer preached about Germany. A few years later, he would learn about another country via the same medium.

During his studies at Union Theological Seminary, Bonhoeffer consumed a diverse range of sermons from various denominational backgrounds. In his reflections on his time in New York, he shared: "I often had the opportunity every Sunday to hear two sermons in the most varied denominations and independent churches."²³⁹ Similar to his time in Rome, Bonhoeffer seized the chance to visit many places of worship to grasp the nature and inner workings of the local church. He encountered a wide array of denominations and attended services at Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Quaker churches,²⁴⁰ participated in both progressive and fundamentalist church gatherings, and even attended a service at a synagogue. He visited large churches, small churches, white churches, and Black churches. His church attendance was also somewhat regionally diverse. In addition to New York, he heard sermons in "the southern states," the "southwest," and Florida.²⁴¹ During these church visits, Bonhoeffer

²³⁷ Bonhoeffer, "On Memorial Day," in *DBW* 14:765.

²³⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Sabine Leibholz, March 17, [1928?], in *DBW* 10:78.

²³⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:312.

²⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:313–315.

²⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:313–315.

paid close attention to the nature and content of sermons. Theology at Union was not enough; he wanted to witness theology from the pulpit.

Yet, the messengers in American pulpits grieved Bonhoeffer, and he leveled heavy criticism against most of the sermons he heard. In his review of the American church, he asserted that the pulpit was essentially functioning as a reflective broadcast against the backdrop of current events. He found that the American pastor "wants to preach to the present and identifies a sermon to the present as a political-social and apologetic sermon."²⁴² To demonstrate his point, Bonhoeffer made a list of sermon titles published in the *Times*, which he had selected "at random,"²⁴³ and he identified science, culture, prohibition, naturalism, virtue, and "needs above creeds" as themes preached in the churches of New York. He claimed, however, that one theme was obviously absent: the gospel. Bonhoeffer wrote that, of all the topics preached by New York pastors, "only one thing is not addressed, or is addressed so rarely that I have as yet been unable to hear it, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the cross, sin and forgiveness, death and life."²⁴⁴ The gospel was not merely absent in preaching; it was sometimes rejected outright from the pulpit. At a Good Friday service at an Episcopal church, Bonhoeffer heard "one of New York's great preachers" saying this: "I deny the reconciliation on the cross; I don't want that kind of Christ."²⁴⁵ Due to his theological training in dogmatics, Bonhoeffer clashed with this American context, stating that "the [American] church is really no longer the place where the congregation hears and preaches God's word."²⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer assessed the American church on the basis of what was preached from the pulpit and its proximity to Scripture.²⁴⁷ The American church, in his estimation, functioned as a "social cooperation" and had, at best, a questionable association with Christianity. According to Bonhoeffer, a church without gospel-centered, dogmatic-informed, creed-directed preaching hardly qualified as a church community.

Amidst his criticism of American preaching, Bonhoeffer did encounter one particular church community that was explicitly preaching the gospel message. He noted in his report, "I heard the gospel preached in the Negro churches."²⁴⁸ He

²⁴² Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:313.

²⁴³ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:312-313.

²⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:313.

²⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:316-317.

²⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:317.

²⁴⁷ Scripture is the central point of Bonhoeffer's conception of preaching and church community. According to Michael Pasquarello III, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Theology of a Preaching Life* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 6, "for Bonhoeffer, preaching is inseparable from the interpretation of Scripture. Biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and faithful action in the world are woven into a way of life that is established, judged, and enabled by the reality of Christ...Preaching thus invites the church to hear the miracle of God speaking through Scripture in and for the world."

²⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

described that, in the Black churches, "one really could still hear someone talk in a Christian sense about sin and grace and the love of God and ultimate hope."²⁴⁹ The Black church, according to Bonhoeffer, existed as a church community where the gospel message was front and center. Its preaching style stood in contrast to that of all the other churches, which he identified as "white" churches. The racial separation, he noted, had segregated the gospel message to the Black church: "In contrast to the often lecturelike character of the 'white' sermon, the 'black Christ' is preached with captivating passion and vividness."²⁵⁰ This preaching held Bonhoeffer's attention throughout his studies at Union, and he viewed the "Black Christ" preached in the Black church as a true representation of the Christian message.

The "Black Christ" confronted and challenged the image of a "national" or "white Christ." The "outcast" Black church in America, according to Bonhoeffer, maintained the true message of Christianity. The white church, which represented the national majority, was lacking the very foundation of Christianity. This experience likely revealed to Bonhoeffer that a sermon is not bound to the identity of a nation, nor does it speak in favor of or in defense of the nation. Bonhoeffer witnessed a community of Black believers – a community oppressed by the ideal of a white American identity – preserve the gospel message in truth and clarity in the midst of national prejudice. Confronted with the white church and the "Black Christ," Bonhoeffer witnessed, in reality, the difference between the nation and Christianity. In *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, Reggie Williams claims that, "for Bonhoeffer, Christians must see society" – and might I add the nation – "from the perspective of marginalized people."²⁵¹ Williams argues that Bonhoeffer learned this perspective from the preaching of "the Black Christ in Harlem."²⁵² Bonhoeffer realized that a transnational church requires a message for a transnational people. A mere nation-centered gospel fails to speak the language of the transnational church community. Nationalism is particular, but oppression is global. In Harlem, Bonhoeffer acquired a message of Christ that speaks beyond the nation. He learned about a gospel presentation that places Christ at the center of human suffering.

Conclusion

In the discussions above, I have attempted to demonstrate Bonhoeffer's utility for historians who explore themes in cultural history, the history of nationalism, and transnational identity. While Bonhoeffer and the church have been the foci, the points raised here transcend Bonhoeffer and ecclesiological studies. In particular, I have sought to engage Bonhoeffer beyond the wheelhouse of theology. By

²⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

²⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Report on His Year of Study," in *DBW* 10:315.

²⁵¹ Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 140.

²⁵² Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 140.

employing the lenses of hybridity, historical anthropology, and national storytelling, I have considered the cultural exchange in which Bonhoeffer participated via a transnational network committed to the church. My argument has identified the diversity of the church community, the practice of Christian worship, and the preaching of Scripture as central touchpoints in Bonhoeffer's experience abroad. However, these themes consistently extend beyond both the walls and the teachings of the church and offer insights about the world, the human, and the nation.

Bonhoeffer is not merely a voice of theology for today; he is also a human of the past who experienced the tensions between nationalism and transnationalism, the church and the state, as well as ideas about reality and reality itself. To explore these tensions, I have placed Bonhoeffer's life into wider contexts and networks. By analyzing Bonhoeffer's personal letters, lectures, and sermons from his years abroad as a young scholar, I have explored his interaction with the history of the Negro spirituals, the literary legacy of writers like Oswald Spengler, and the German ecumenical movement at the University of Berlin. These broader narratives shed light on the various influences that shaped, impacted, contradicted, and modified Bonhoeffer's identity. Moreover, in connection with Bonhoeffer's life, these larger historical themes allow scholars to invert Bonhoeffer's legacy and position it not as an end but as a means for understanding twentieth-century history. One may start with Bonhoeffer, but one will surely end with many insights beyond him. This speaks to the numerous and rich intersections in Bonhoeffer's own life as documented and preserved in his writings.

This article has prioritized and analyzed the disjointed fragments of Bonhoeffer's own life, bringing together ideas, experiences, relationships, and even cultures that may appear paradoxical. But these apparent paradoxes morphed and changed in consort with Bonhoeffer's undying devotion to the church that exists beyond the nation. Bonhoeffer's conflicts and contradictions in his unique historical context are informative. At a historical moment when internationalism and nationalism seem to be advancing in lockstep, Bonhoeffer's engagement with the international church is exemplary. He both sacrificed and gained. He abandoned his creed of the *Reich* for a code of resistance, replaced the narrative of the nation with the story of the oppressed, and exchanged his cultural essentialism for a hybrid identity that would prove irreconcilable with Nazi Germany's violent regime of thought and deed. According to Doris Bergen, "to situate Bonhoeffer in the context of his times does not reduce his significance or weaken the challenge of his witness. But it may serve to remind us what was at stake."²⁵³ I would add to this that Bonhoeffer's international context—as

²⁵³ Doris L. Bergen, "Contextualizing Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Nazism, the Churches, and the Question of Silence," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 126.

experienced abroad as a young scholar prior to the rise of the Nazi regime—reminds us all of what *is* at stake for a culture and a people unwilling to look and go beyond its particular national community.

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