A Friendship for Others:
Bonhoeffer and Bethge on the Theology and Practice of Friendship

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ABSTRACT

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This study considers the theology and practice of friendship in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s academic writing, his pastoral work and thought, his involvement in the Abwehr plot, and his prison letters, taking special interest in the influence of Eberhard Bethge on Bonhoeffer and the influence of Bonhoeffer on Bethge. Friendship, as a locus of interpretation, also provides a fresh perspective on other aspects of Bonhoeffer’s thought, including ecclesiology, divine and human agency, eschatology, vicarious representation, concrete ethics and the divine command, politics, freedom, and obedience. 

Part I of the dissertation investigates Bonhoeffer’s theology before Bethge. In Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer’s doctoral dissertation and first book, friendship is described as a community that is oriented to God’s creation and eschatological future, and the friend can participate in Christ’s redeeming work through ecclesial practices of Stellvertretung. Bonhoeffer’s failed friendship with Helmut Rößler, and his remarks about friendship within the context of his ministry in London and about the relation between ethics and the concrete command, offer insight into his theology of friendship as a political and ecclesiastical phenomenon in the context of the Third Reich. 

Part II of the dissertation looks at the theological influence Bonhoeffer and Bethge had on one another. At Finkenwalde, we begin to see this mutual influence begin to take shape, where freedom and obedience become part of the foundation of Bonhoeffer’s later concept of the Spielraum, and where we begin to see Stellvertretung, as a practice, take place between them. In the prison correspondence and through the influence of Bethge, Bonhoeffer develops the idea of the “realm of freedom” (der Spielraum der Freiheit), an expansion of Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates, where freedom and friendship become part of his understanding of social and political life. 

Integrating these theological and biographical resources, the study makes the constructive argument that a friend can be a theological Stellvertreter, taking into special account the particularity of the friend and mutuality that is characteristic of friendship. Through this participation in Christ’s redeeming work, its ecclesial location, and its political significance, a friendship can be for others.
This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

I confirm the length of the dissertation to be less than 80 000 words. This figure, which includes footnotes but excludes bibliography, is in accordance with the regulations of the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Divinity.
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And finally, I owe a great debt of gratitude to both Dr. Gregory Seach and Prof. David Ford, whose supervision and guidance allowed this dissertation to grow from a few scattered thoughts to what is contained herein.

All errors and omissions are my own.
TRANSLATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the critical English editions of Bonhoeffer throughout. There are, however, occasions when it was appropriate to include the German, and I have done so by italicising the German and placing it in square brackets. My interpolations should not be confused with the critical edition’s German interpolations, which are also in square brackets, but not italicised.

The German and English critical editions of Bonhoeffer’s work share a system of referencing that divides the Bonhoeffer material into volumes, numbered sections, and numbered subsections. This dissertation refers to the section and subsections of the critical editions in the following form:

DBW/E Volume:Section/Subsection, Page(s) in German Edition/Page(s) in English Edition.

For example, DBW/E 10:1/40, 90-91/127 refers the reader to volume 10 of both the DBW German edition and the DBWE English edition, and to Section 1, subsection 40, of that same volume in both the German and English editions. Because the German and English critical editions do not share page numbers, and readers may want to check the English alongside the German, the page numbers of both the German and English critical editions are included. In this example, 90-91 refers to the page numbers in the German DBW, and 127 to the English DBWE.

If there are no sections or subsections, the reference takes the following form:

DBW/E Volume, Page Number(s) in German Edition/Page Number(s) in English Edition.

Some materials became available after the German editions were published, and are only found in the critical English editions in translation; alternately, the material is in English, in which case I only refer to the English critical edition. The reference, in these two cases, would simply read:

DBWE Volume:Section/Subsection, Page Number(s).

or

DBWE Volume, Page Number(s).
Similarly, some material appeared in English after the first German editions were published, so appear in the appropriate English volume but appear in volume 17 of the German critical edition. This reference would read:

DBWE Volume:Section/Subsection, Page Number(s) and DBW 17, Page Number.
or
DBWE Volume, Page Number(s) and DBW 17, Page Number.
INTRODUCTION

In a photograph taken at the celebration of the baptism of Eberhard Bethge’s son, the silhouette of a man sits slightly outside the circle of the Bonhoeffer, Bethge, and Schleicher families. His back is to the camera, and he looks toward Bethge, who holds his newly baptised son. The man in silhouette is Helmut Linke, a prison guard at Tegel, who had recently arrived with a smuggled letter and a sermon from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Linke began this illicit activity after observing one of the visits between Bonhoeffer and Bethge; Linke supervised prisoner visits in order that no illicit communication could take place, and in supervising Bonhoeffer and Bethge on 19 May 1944, he encountered a friendship unlike any other he had seen. Linke would later tell Bonhoeffer how impressed he was by the conversation; writing to Bethge, Bonhoeffer relayed what Linke had said:

[What Linke] especially admired was that you “didn’t tell me what I wanted to hear”, which is what he says everyone else does in such a situation. I said that was just what was good, that we didn’t need it. He was obviously very impressed in other ways as well. This kind of conversation is a whole new world to him, and I myself think that—very objectively—it’s rather rare.

Becoming part of this ‘whole new world’ meant that Linke became more than an observer. In addition to receiving a gold watch, that conversation led Linke to become one of two primary smugglers of the uncensored correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Bethge.

This was not Bonhoeffer’s first observation about friendship. As early as his first doctoral dissertation, he opened the possibility that a friend can be Stellvertreter for another friend. In his correspondence with Helmut Rößler, we see both Bonhoeffer and Rößler negotiating a friendship under strain on account of their differing convictions. Near the end of his life, Bonhoeffer wrote of friendship and der Spielraum der Freiheit, a final addition to his social and political theology, where friendship takes up a particular place and role in the political and social world in which friendship is found. Finally, in taking Linke’s place, and observing the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, we see more than Linke did: that Stellvertretung—as an ecclesial practice through ‘acts of love’—took place between

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2 The sermon was delivered on 21 May, the day of Dietrich Bethge’s baptism; DBW/E 8:3/143, 426/382 n3.
3 DBW/E 8:3/154, 459/410 n4.
4 DBW/E 8:3/154, 459/410.
Bonhoeffer and Bethge, where the friend acts as Christ for a friend in a way that has political and social implications beyond the immediacy of the friendship itself. In this friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, the contention of the thesis comes into clear view: that Stellvertretung is appropriate to a friendship, and that a friendship can be for others.

Before we get to the contention of the thesis, however, some measure of contemporary Bonhoeffer literature needs to be taken in order to locate my work within it, followed by the related subject of Bonhoeffer and Bethge within the field of friendship literature more generally.

1.1 TRENDS IN BONHOEFFER INTERPRETATION: CONSTRUCTIVE AND HISTORICAL IMPULSES

Bonhoeffer, and his theology, have spoken to contexts at great variance from their own. Bonhoeffer, for example, was deployed in theological movements like the death-of-God theology, Marxist East German theology, and English liberal Christianity; they were early, if not sophisticated, constructive recontextualisations of Bonhoeffer, taking place in a post-war context that Bonhoeffer himself could not have imagined.\(^6\)

With the work of Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer’s friend and theological conversation partner, a major corrective took place. With his biography, published in 1967, Bethge aimed to redirect the course of these constructive readings. For Bethge, Bonhoeffer was a theologian whose core concerns were consistent from his earliest work as a doctoral student to his last letters from prison; this was a critical move in response to Bethge’s opponents, who were taking Bonhoeffer’s work out of its textual and historical context. This trend of understanding Bonhoeffer as a theologian with consistent theological concerns, and whose historical context are essential to properly understanding his theological contribution, is, as we will see, still an active mode of Bonhoeffer scholarship.

Bethge, however, did more than make sure that Bonhoeffer was well-understood on historical-critical terms. Along with the death-of-God theologians, the Marxist theologians, and the English liberal theologians, Bethge did his own recontextualising work on Bonhoeffer.\(^7\) As early as 1967, in his biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge was re-reading

\[^{6}\] Haynes’s is the most comprehensive overview of different approaches to Bonhoeffer, though his work is oriented around content. His categories are ‘radical’, ‘conservative’, ‘liberal’, among others. In comparison, my schema in this section is oriented around methodological use of Bonhoeffer. For Haynes’ approach, see Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (London: SCM, 2004).

Bonhoeffer’s legacy on the ‘Jewish Question’. Later, in the 1980s, he began refining earlier assumptions about Bonhoeffer’s record on the topic. Bethge’s work is better than many of the Bonhoeffer popularisers because of his historical sensibility and his comprehensive knowledge of Bonhoeffer’s theology. What he does, in recontextualising Bonhoeffer, is different in quality from the other contextualisers, but not different in kind; along with the others, Bethge read Bonhoeffer in order to navigate a post-war theological context that Bonhoeffer did not share.

What Bethge offers is two ways of approaching Bonhoeffer. The first is historical, and centres around the question of what Bonhoeffer said and/or did. This is seen especially in Bethge putting the prison correspondence in the context of Bonhoeffer’s theology as a whole in order to understand Bonhoeffer and his theological intentions accurately. The second is constructive, and centres around reading Bonhoeffer according to new contexts and engaging questions that Bonhoeffer could not have foreseen. This is seen in Bethge’s re-reading of Bonhoeffer for the sake of post-war Jewish-Christian relations.

The secondary literature on Bonhoeffer is too wide and unwieldy to survey completely; but with regard to recent representative publications, trends, and interpretations of Bonhoeffer, the twin categories of historical and constructive offer a good critical framework because recent volumes are a continuation of this trend. Some are historical investigations, like DeJonge’s. Others are historical, though speak to constructive contextual issues, like Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, as they read Bonhoeffer as an Anabaptist; or Marsh as he engages questions of sexuality and desire. A third way to engage with Bonhoeffer is to employ Bonhoeffer’s life and work as a resource in a constructive project, like de Graaff, Williams, and McBride. Each of the following representative volumes touch on this negotiation in these different ways, and will act as touch-points in the representative survey.

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10 Primarily seen throughout the biography, which works through Bonhoeffer’s theology beginning with his essays from university, and ending with Bonhoeffer’s prison letters; see Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, pp. 85-91, 853-91.
1.1.1 Historical readings of Bonhoeffer

Michael P. DeJonge’s *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, & Protestant Theology* is the most recent and comprehensive examination of Bonhoeffer’s habilitation thesis, *Act and Being*. DeJonge has two core theses, both concerning Bonhoeffer’s place in his historical-intellectual context. First, Bonhoeffer was not simply a Barthian, but rather brought the liberal and historical tradition of Berlin—exemplified in Harnack, for example—into a critical conversation with Barth. Second, in DeJonge’s reading, Bonhoeffer’s concern for the historical, as well as the influence of Barth, are both controlled by Bonhoeffer’s commitment to a Lutheran Christology.12

Considering our terms, however, one irony needs to be pointed out, although it is an irony with which DeJonge is perfectly comfortable. Arguing for more use of the tools of intellectual history in studies of Bonhoeffer,13 DeJonge has himself written a book of intellectual historiography, showing that Bonhoeffer was a theologian who married historical concerns with constructive ones. But DeJonge’s form of inquiry is at odds with the content of Bonhoeffer’s own approach; in order to get Bonhoeffer historically and intellectually situated, DeJonge eschews any attempt at constructive application or use of Bonhoeffer. But situating Bonhoeffer in this way leads DeJonge to point out that Bonhoeffer himself did theology through interrogating a tradition, with the resources of that tradition, in order to develop new constructive insights. Bonhoeffer is, for DeJonge, ‘no slavish adherent of the Lutheran Christological tradition’ while remaining consistent with Lutheran theology’s ‘best impulse’.14 Bonhoeffer, in this way, was not himself strictly an intellectual historian like DeJonge. This insight about how Bonhoeffer approached the theological task helps to understand the ways in which other theologians, through an improvisation on Bonhoeffer’s own methodological impulses, approach and use Bonhoeffer. Most uses of Bonhoeffer are constructive, and the constructive theologians who use Bonhoeffer tend to read Bonhoeffer much like Bonhoeffer read his tradition: not slavishly, but according to a ‘best impulse’, with present-day concerns in mind.15

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14 DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, p. 91.
15 DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation*, p. 143.
1.1.2 Historical-Constructive readings of Bonhoeffer

*Bonhoeffer the Assassin?*, written by Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel, argues that Bonhoeffer’s theology can find a much more comfortable place in the peace tradition than has been allowed. As a topic within Bonhoeffer studies, peace and the peace tradition has a place. Bonhoeffer thought he belonged, as the book reminds us, somewhere within the peace tradition.

But in order to make the claim that Bonhoeffer’s life and work are reconcilable to Anabaptist traditions, the authors make the critical mistake of confusing constructive and historical categories. The first issue is how the authors treat Bonhoeffer’s objections to war as though it were a principle in Bonhoeffer’s thought. But this is to misunderstand how concrete commands work in Bonhoeffer’s ethics; the concrete ethical command, for Bonhoeffer, could never function as a principle, because an ethic based on principle would serve the principle rather than the God who commands. The argument, then, that Bonhoeffer spoke about a concrete command of peace does not mean he would have applied such a command, during his involvement in the conspiracy to kill Hitler, as though it were an ethical principle to be applied in a new situation. Further, the claim disregards Bethge’s biography. Bethge was present for many of the conspiratorial conversations, and was involved in the conspiracy himself, making Bethge a reliable witness to Bonhoeffer’s involvement. In their attempt to disclose an Anabaptist-friendly Bonhoeffer, the constructive impulse to appropriate threads and patterns of Bonhoeffer’s thought led to a bad reading of history.

My point here, however, is not to vindicate Bethge over and against Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel; my point is that the authors of *Bonhoeffer the Assassin?* did not need to claim the historical Bonhoeffer for their project. The perceived need to articulate Bonhoeffer’s own thoughts on this matter led the authors into bad history, despite the fact that a constructive conversation about peace in Bonhoeffer’s work does not need to rely on a revisionist argument about what Bonhoeffer really thought or did during the conspiracy. When this takes place, in the way it does here, we end up with a constructive theological conversation with Bonhoeffer, but badly disguised as history. The constructive insights made by the authors

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17 In fairness to Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, they recognise that interpretation is self-involving. See Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*, pp. 101-2. But the presentation of their work, in the end, is not so easily recognised as interpretation when the claims are consistently about what Bonhoeffer really thought and did.
into the peace tradition are valuable, though not for their historical and close reading of Bonhoeffer.

Charles Marsh’s Bonhoeffer biography, *Strange Glory*, makes a similar mistake to Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel. We could dwell on factual errors in Marsh’s account of Bonhoeffer’s life, but to do so would be a distraction from Marsh’s contribution. In Marsh, we have someone who is in the upper echelon of Bonhoeffer scholars, as well as a theologian in his own right. Where these qualifications do us great service is in his chapters on Bonhoeffer’s first sojourn in New York, and the continuing influence of that period on Bonhoeffer’s life and work. It takes a scholar like Marsh to point out that Bonhoeffer’s largely negative comments about American social theology stand in contrast to the traceable influence of that theology on Bonhoeffer over the long run.

It is not Marsh’s work on Bonhoeffer’s American influences, however, that raises the most questions. That distinction is reserved for Marsh’s theory about Bonhoeffer’s sexual orientation; I will cover this claim in more detail in Chapter 5. Again, like the Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel volume, Marsh’s assertions are best seen from a constructive angle. To frame the Bethge-Bonhoeffer relationship as an example (in part) of unrequited sexual attraction, as Marsh does, is to infer more than the sources can bear. Constructively, however, to read Bonhoeffer in order to find resources for a church working on ways to express and articulate the theological contours of intimacy, would be a fair use of Bonhoeffer; though Marsh should make a more careful distinction between an historical claim about the nature of Bonhoeffer’s desire, and the way the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship could be a resource for navigating contemporary construals of affection.

1.1.3 Constructive uses of Bonhoeffer

A third way of engaging with Bonhoeffer is to employ his life and work as a resource for a constructive project. This is different from a retrieval of a historical Bonhoeffer who can then speak with contemporary significance; instead, a reading of Bonhoeffer’s life and work together can reveal certain patterns than can be deployed in constructive argument. Guido de Graaff’s *Politics in Friendship: A Theological Account*, for example, puts Bonhoeffer’s

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18 Schlingensiepp has been harshest in this regard; see Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, ‘Making Assumptions About Dietrich: How Bonhoeffer Was Made Fit for America’, *International Bonhoeffer Society Newsletter*, 110 (Spring 2015), pp. 23-27.


21 Guido de Graaff, *Politics in Friendship: A Theological Account* (London:
friendship with Bishop George Bell to good use as a case study in political friendship. Bonhoeffer serves de Graaff’s larger argument, which is controlled by the political and ethical categories of Oliver O’Donovan, and can be best understood as an extension of O’Donovan’s categories rather than a work whose theology is primarily controlled by Bonhoeffer’s habits of thought. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to political theology and a theology of friendship. I will say more about de Graaff’s work below, but, for my purposes here, de Graaff’s use of Bonhoeffer as a biographical exemplar of a particular way of thinking about a topic does offer one possibility for the use of Bonhoeffer in a constructive work of theology.

Reggie L. Williams’s *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* offers a good example of how a contextual reading can lead to some interesting insights into the possibilities present in Bonhoeffer’s thought. In this case, Williams’s location within the Black Baptist church, and his interest in the racialisation of Jesus and how that affects race relations, led him to work on the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Bonhoeffer’s theological development. For Williams, Bonhoeffer encountered systemic injustices and violence in Harlem, which led to an identification with Jews suffering similar kinds of injustice. In this way, Williams leverages Bonhoeffer’s own patterns of thought to analyse the connection between theology and race for an America that continues to confront racially motivated violence and injustice.

Jennifer McBride’s *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* is a self-consciously constructive reading of Bonhoeffer’s theology of repentance. McBride finds herself in a particular tradition of ‘thinking alongside Dietrich Bonhoeffer’ and in the methodological company of Bonhoeffer scholars like Rasmussen, whose work intentionally interpreted Bonhoeffer in and for an American context; and de Gruchy, whose work interpreted Bonhoeffer in and for South Africa. At its heart, this work is exemplary of

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Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).


23 Williams, *Black Jesus*, p. 4.


25 McBride, *Church for the World*, p. 11. De Gruchy describes his work as doing theology ‘With Bonhoeffer, Beyond Bonhoeffer’: going beyond Bonhoeffer means ‘discerning and examining those trajectories in [Bonhoeffer’s] legacy that relate to our own concerns, and take us in new and fresh directions as we grapple with the issues that face us concretely, here and now’. John W. de Gruchy, ‘With Bonhoeffer, Beyond Bonhoeffer: Transmitting Bonhoeffer’s Legacy’, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffers Theologie Heute: Ein Weg Zwischen Fundamentalismus Und Säkularismus? Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Theology Today: A Way between Fundamentalism and Secularism?*, ed. by John W. de Gruchy, Stephen Plant, and Christiane Tietz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2009), pp. 402-16 (p. 404). We could also add...
reading Bonhoeffer according to his own best impulses. In this case, McBride’s Bonhoeffer is disruptive; as McBride puts it, when ‘taken as a whole […] Bonhoeffer’s work challenges commonly held theological assumptions’. This challenge plays out in her Christological understanding of repentance as a public act of witness that does not easily find a home in either American political camp, which, through the categories of sociologist Robert Wuthnow, McBride sees as either ‘inclusive’ or ‘exclusive’ Christians. She sees the good and the not-so-good in both camps, arriving at a synthetic, critical, and constructive proposal, without slavishly building on Bonhoeffer’s own ecclesiological, Christological, and political work. For McBride, as the church takes the form of Christ, it witnesses to the work of Christ through solidarity with humanity. It accepts God’s judgment, and demonstrates God’s reconciliation of the world, through acts of redemption and repentance.

The Church for the World is a work that demonstrates how the constructive use of Bonhoeffer can rely on Bonhoeffer’s work without making unnecessary or dubious historical proposals. Its methodology is synthetic; there is no need to simply tell us ‘what Bonhoeffer thinks’, though a close reading does form the foundation of the argument; it is also a deployment of Bonhoeffer recontextualised to a particular time and place. In this sense, it is very much in the spirit of Bonhoeffer’s reading of his sources. McBride re-reads Bonhoeffer not in order to be slavish to Bonhoeffer, but to discover and construct an argument with what she judges to be Bonhoeffer’s best theological self, for the sake of an American church that is politically divided and, as a result, largely ineffective in its public witness.

Each of these three constructive uses of Bonhoeffer do something similar: each of them makes certain claims about Bonhoeffer’s life and thought, and then has those claims speak to the present in constructive ways. They are not, in this way, like DeJonge’s intellectual history. There is a significant difference, however, between Williams’s and McBride’s work, and the work of Marsh, Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel. While Williams and McBride look to Bonhoeffer’s life and work to speak to a contemporary issue, they do not make the mistake of confusing the historical with the constructive; whereas Marsh, along with


27 McBride, Church for the World, p. 11.
28 McBride, Church for the World, p. 11.
Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, do make dubious historical claims as though they were necessary for Bonhoeffer to speak to the present. That is, to explore Bonhoeffer’s insights into the peace tradition could speak to the contemporary peace tradition without Bonhoeffer himself needing to be a pacifist; similarly, to explore Bonhoeffer’s life could speak to contemporary questions of same-sex intimacy without the need for him to experience same-sex attraction.

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My point, here, is that one need not recreate a ‘historical Bonhoeffer’—as do Marsh, and Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel—in order for Bonhoeffer to take part in a constructive argument informed by current context. Instead, Bonhoeffer’s theology and life reveal certain patterns that have their source in their historic context, but are not reducible to that context. Bonhoeffer, in this way, can be foundational, as is the case for de Graaff, Williams, and McBride, without recourse to unnecessary (and sometimes dubious) historical claims.

My work, however, does not fall neatly into the three categories listed above, though it takes elements from each. This is not a piece of intellectual history, or a constructive theology that engages directly with contemporary sources. It is closest to Marsh and Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel in that it indirectly has contemporary significance, though I do not rely on any claim about a historical Bonhoeffer. My work is a close reading of Bonhoeffer (and later, Bethge), with reference to historical context, but without making strong claims about my work as historical reconstruction. It is constructive, though it only engages with current contexts or other theologians in a limited way. I negotiate this way of thinking of my work as historical and constructive, yet without being easily recognisable as either, by way of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s understanding interpretation as the articulation the ‘unthought-of’ in a person’s work, because Bonhoeffer, on account of his diverse modes of theological production, is well-suited to this approach.

1.2 THE ‘UNTHOUGHT-OF’ AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

A great deal of Bonhoeffer’s work is found in exploratory letters and unfinished manuscripts; his work on Christian life and community tapped a deep root of Christian experience; he wrote for audiences both popular and academic; and the form of his work was myriad, including doctoral theses, sermons, addresses, and letters never intended for public consumption. This diversity of form, audience, context, and content leads Bonhoeffer’s work to be a theological conversation within itself. In this way, a careful textual reading leads to a
Bonhoeffer that already lends himself to constructive possibilities, and where new theological possibilities can emerge from within his own patterns of thought; constructive theology with Bonhoeffer, in this way, emerges from what lies between the things that Bonhoeffer has already said. As de Gruchy explains, Bonhoeffer’s legacy is ‘open-ended’, and this makes for an invitation ‘to become participants in a continuing quest which borders on our own horizons’.  

My work, here, takes it for granted that a close reading of Bonhoeffer, and later Bethge, will be constructive not because it directly engages with contemporary sources but because the work as a whole already lends itself to constructive possibilities.

This way of integrating the textual with the constructive is articulated in ‘The Philosopher and his Shadow’, an essay by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He is best known for his work on intersubjectivity, and this is at play in the essay; but the concept of intersubjectivity leads him to develop the idea of the ‘unthought-of’ as a way of describing the task of interpretation. For Merleau-Ponty, ‘the perceived world endures’ in the ‘reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things’, which ‘are not things and not nothing, but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and the same world’. But just as we perceive the world, Merleau-Ponty suggests, so in the thought of a philosopher we can perceive ‘articulations between things said’. Discovery of what lies ‘between things said’ is what Merleau-Ponty claims he is doing in interpreting Husserl: the ‘unthought-of’ in Husserl, that which is ‘wholly his and yet opens out on something else’ is ‘not to possess the objects of his thought; it is to use them to mark out a realm to think about which we therefore are not yet thinking about’. For Merleau-Ponty, ‘[t]here is no dilemma of objective interpretation or arbitrariness with respect to these articulations […] since we can be faithful to and find them only by thinking again’.

As I proceed to think with Bonhoeffer, and then to think with Bethge, I am doing what Merleau-Ponty describes as the articulation of the ‘unthought-of’; to articulate what Kelly, describing Merleau-Ponty’s work on interpretation, describes as the ‘aspects [that] belong to [the work] essentially’:

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The main feature of this principle is that the seminal aspects of a thinker’s work are so close to him that he is incapable of articulating them himself. Nevertheless, these aspects pervade the work; give it its style, its sense, and its direction; and therefore belong to it essentially.\(^{35}\)

So to inhabit the middle ground between what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘literal reproduction’ and ‘inevitable distortion’\(^{36}\) is neither to repeat—even in a more sophisticated way—what has already been said by the philosopher, nor is it to depart inappropriately from the structure of the work in question. To inhabit this middle ground is to express something that belongs essentially to the work of the person under investigation, while saying something new.

The subject of friendship is particularly appropriate for this kind of investigation because a surface reading of Bonhoeffer or Bethge—however close that reading would be—could not reveal a complete, systematic, and whole theology of friendship in Bonhoeffer. Bethge put it this way: ‘there is not a single passage in any of his own books in which he wrote a specific analysis of the place and dignity of friendship, whether sociologically, psychologically, philosophically or theologically’.\(^{37}\) This sentiment is an overstatement, as I will argue through the thesis.\(^{38}\) But it is right to say that there is no extended and systematic treatment of friendship as a distinct theological topic. Despite this lack of extended and systematic reflection on friendship, Bonhoeffer does have a lot to say on friendship; and friendship can be, without great difficulty, understood within Bonhoeffer’s own thinking on both Stellvertretung and his political and social theology, making for a faithful interpretation that is not limited by Bonhoeffer or Bethge’s lack of systematic reflections on the subject.

This emphasis on Bonhoeffer’s and Bethge’s own work also differentiates my work from Guido de Graaff’s work in particular, the most significant recent monograph on Bonhoeffer and friendship. For de Graaff, the practice of friendship between George Bell and Bonhoeffer serves as a case study in service of developing and critiquing certain trends in moral and political theology, which de Graaff does adeptly.\(^{39}\) But this thesis is more in line with Bethge’s own work on friendship in Bonhoeffer, articulating the concept of friendship using Bonhoeffer’s own conceptual resources. What Bonhoeffer does, and says, drives


\(^{38}\) And as Bethge’s own essay shows; Bethge looks to the 23 January 1944 letter in particular; see Bethge, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Theology of Friendship’, pp. 91-99.

\(^{39}\) I will say more on de Graaff below.
Bethge’s work on friendship; the major difference between my work and Bethge’s is that I can look at the friendship from the outside, and speak to Bethge’s own part in it. My intention is to write a theology of friendship faithful to the resources offered by Bonhoeffer and Bethge by relying most heavily—though not exclusively—on modes of thought that lie within the structure of Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s own thinking. In this way, throughout the thesis, I will speak of the ‘unthought-of’ in terms of what Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s theology makes possible. This is not a way to say that Bonhoeffer, or Bethge, held precisely the positions that I mark out—that would be the mistake of confusing the historical with the constructive—but it is a way to say that taken as a whole, a person’s theology can accomplish things they may not have intended, and remained ‘unthought-of’, but things that are made possible by the theologian nonetheless. In this way, my work here is constructive through the interrogation of Bonhoeffer and Bethge according to that which they make possible.

Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of how one would articulate the ‘unthought-of’ in a person’s work helps to describe how a close textual reading and interpretation can be a constructive one, but this is not the only methodological issue that needs to be covered. The evidence that I use to articulate Bonhoeffer’s, and later Bethge’s, theology of friendship takes both a textual form, and a practical one. Structurally, the thesis begins with a theology of friendship that emerges out of Sanctorum Communio, followed by a chapter on Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship with Helmut Rößler; it continues with a chapter on Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship as it is expressed in the prison literature, followed by a chapter that focusses on Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship with Bethge, a chapter that ends with the way Bethge re-articulates the significance of friendship for the task of interpretation.

The use of what Bonhoeffer and Bethge say about friendship, alongside the use of the evidence of the way each of them practiced friendship, is not meant to treat the practice of friendship as an example of what they said about friendship. The intention here is neither to vindicate Bonhoeffer or Bethge as faithful practitioners of their theology, nor to accuse them of being unfaithful practitioners. As such, Bonhoeffer’s and Bethge’s theological reflections are not treated as something that takes priority over practice; nor is practice considered something that lies apart from theology. Thus both what they said, and what they did, constitute evidence for a theology of friendship in this thesis.

So, my approach to this thesis is constructive, in that my investigation proceeds according to what Bonhoeffer’s and Bethge’s theology makes possible; and both theological reflection and practice are treated together, as evidence. But there is one more source of reflection that informs my approach to the material: topics in friendship literature more generally.
Neither Bonhoeffer nor Bethge consciously engaged with classical Christian or philosophical texts on friendship, and do not appear to know the friendship literature of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, or their theological descendants such as Augustine, Aquinas, or the monastic literature of John Cassian or Aelred of Rievaulx. In other words, Bonhoeffer and Bethge did not themselves look to the literature from which many of the themes listed below find their source and expression. Bonhoeffer did find himself reflecting on the German middle-class and aristocratic tradition of friendship as it was presented in Stifter’s fiction, and this influenced the fiction he was writing in Tegel; there are also traces of Hegel and Kierkegaard in the prison friendship letters. Though the study of the relation of Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship to Stifter, Hegel, and Kierkegaard would be worthwhile, it will not be the focus of this study, which is centred on friendship within the structures of Bonhoeffer’s life and theology rather than any of these philosophical and theological genealogies.

Nevertheless, in my argument concerning Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s theology and practice of friendship as a whole, what is disclosed is that Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s theology of friendship does offer points of contact with the literature on friendship more generally. I have divided these points of contact under four headings: 1. particularity and partiality; 2. mutuality and reciprocity; 3. politics; and 4. friendship as a way of knowing. In the case of 1., 2., and 3., the thesis will include some critical re-evaluation of the friendship literature.

1.3.1 Particularity and Partiality

Liz Carmichael sees particularity and partiality as part of the earliest Greek and Roman notions of friendship, finding its final classical form in Cicero, where friendship-love is ‘partial, exclusive, and contingent on worthiness’ and one that finds an uneasy place in Christian reflections on friendship on account of this, because it is ‘unlike the universal love commanded by Christ’. The language of friendship as particular and partial, however, does find a place in the Christian tradition, though very carefully on account of a fear that a particular friendship could lead to ‘cliques and sedition, distraction from inner calm, and other possible sins’.

The problem of the tension between the universal love of neighbour and the partiality expressed in the love of a particular friend is solved in a number of ways by Christian thinkers. Meilaender, for example, calls this the ‘preferential bond’ of friendship, and sees this ‘particularity of preference’ as a kind of exclusion, one difficult to reconcile with the Christian love that ought to be universal. Meilaender suggests, by way of Augustine, that though friendship must necessarily be particular and preferential, it should be ‘placed in a larger context, seen as a call toward and preparation for a love more universal in scope’, and is part of the ‘constraints of finitude’ but would nevertheless ‘lead us toward the love of God’. White points out a similar strategy in Newman and argues that Kierkegaard’s own negative assessment of partiality is but one strategy in Christian solutions to the perceived conflict between a universal and a particular love. Summers devotes a chapter to particularity in his monograph, claiming that particularity gives friendship ‘meaning and potency, allowing it to form a framework within which an ecclesial community can flourish’. Soskice is less conditional about the good of particularity in friendship, because ‘[y]ou are friends with particular people and not with everyone, and this gives friendship a different scope from love even within the Christian lexicon. You should, according to the

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44 Carmichael, Interpreting Christian Love, p. 3.
46 Meilaender, Friendship, p. 6.
47 Meilaender, Friendship, pp. 21, 32, 34-5.
50 Summers, Friendship, p. 125.
Scriptures, love your neighbour and even your enemy. You cannot be friends with everybody without evacuating ‘friendship’ of all meaning.\textsuperscript{51} Soskice, like Meilaender, identifies friendship’s particularity as a creaturely good.\textsuperscript{52}

Bonhoeffer’s theology, and the practice of friendship with Bethge, can make a critical contribution to the model proposed by Augustine and seen in Meilaender and others. For them, particular love (understood as eros, of which philia—friendship—is a subtype) is a school of love that leads toward a self-sacrificial and general love for others (agape) or a love that is integrated into agape.\textsuperscript{53} Bonhoeffer, however, creates an interesting possibility through the concept of \textit{Stellvertretung}. Both particularity and creatureliness are present in Bonhoeffer on \textit{Stellvertretung}, where \textit{Stellvertretung} offers a limited solution to the problem of general and particular love.

In \textit{Sanctorum Communio}, Bonhoeffer speaks of \textit{Stellvertretung} in two ways. Firstly, Christ’s \textit{Stellvertretung} is an atoning work that is universal, for the sake of all people. But the practices of the church—her acts of love and repentance—are also a form of \textit{Stellvertretung}, related very closely to Christ’s \textit{Stellvertretung}. I will say more about this in Chapters 2 and 5, but for introductory purposes, the acts of love and repentance that the church carries out for others are different from Christ’s \textit{Stellvertretung} in that the church’s \textit{Stellvertretung} cannot be universal in the way Christ’s atoning work is universal. Instead, the acts of love are particular, especially in the case of the forgiveness of sins, an act of love for the sake of others in their own historical and personal concreteness. A love for a particular other, rather than being a ‘school of love’ that leads to a more general creaturely love, or integrated into that general love, God’s universal love in Christ—accomplished in his \textit{Stellvertretung}—is the \textit{founding condition} of a creaturely particular love; and because God’s universal atoning work in Christ for all is not perceived by Bonhoeffer to be in competition with the atoning work of the church, the apparent conflict between universal and particular loves is not as large a factor for Bonhoeffer as it is for those committed to Augustine’s legacy on this point.


\textsuperscript{52} Soskice, \textit{The Kindness of God}, pp. 161-2.

\textsuperscript{53} As it is in Jüngel; see Eberhard Jüngel, \textit{God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism}, trans. by Darrel L. Guder (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1983), p. 338.
1.3.2 Mutuality and Reciprocity

The related concepts of mutuality and reciprocity are also well-represented in friendship literature. Hutter finds the earliest notions of friendship’s mutuality in classical Greek notions of friendship; Carmichael identifies it as a feature of friendship in Aquinas, through his use of Aristotle; and Backström includes a section on reciprocity in his monograph on friendship. Soskice, too, identifies reciprocity as a second distinctive in friendship, writing that love can be unrequited, but friendship requires at least two: ‘[t]o be a friend is to have a friend’. Carmichael, similarly, calls this ‘giving and receiving’ an integral part of friendship-love. A more critical reading of friendship’s mutuality and reciprocity is made by Kierkegaard, who calls reciprocity in love a ‘contamination’, preferring the duty of love because it does not expect a return. Meilaender devotes a chapter to this concept of mutuality and reciprocity; it necessarily implies a demand of return, for Meilaender, which is at odds with the love of another for their own sake.

The related concepts of mutuality and reciprocity are another topic in friendship literature with which Bonhoeffer and Bethge come in critical contact. In Bonhoeffer’s theology of Stellvertretung, as it relates to friendship, we will see that mutuality and reciprocity in friendship is not part of a contractual exchange, but a relationship in which something is offered to another—and something is offered in return—but without the necessity of return. The significance of this will be investigated in Chapter 5, where the

58 Carmichael provides a distinction between ‘friendship as a reciprocal relationship, and the kind of love one associates with the friend. Friendship as relationship models such love and enables us to observe its nature’. But this appears to make a false distinction between the form of the relationship (reciprocal) and the love within the relationship. For my work, here, reciprocity is one of the forms that friendship-love takes. For Carmichael’s take, see Carmichael, Interpreting Christian Love, p. 4.
59 Meilaender, Friendship, p. 42.
60 Meilaender, Friendship, pp. 36-52.
61 Meilaender, Friendship, p. 48. This critique of the necessity of exchange is part of a larger problem; for Meilaender, both benevolence toward, and the desire to enjoy another, must each be present in love, though unreconciled, because these two loves lie ‘within the brokenness of human history’ and only in hope will there be a day when ‘good will is regularly crowned with mutual love’; Friendship, pp. 49-50. My concern here, however, is with the claim the mutuality necessarily implies the necessity of exchange.
Stellvertretung practiced reciprocally does not imply the necessity of exchange, or that something is given for the sake of something being returned. Instead, in acts of love and repentance—the practice of Stellvertretung—love can be freely given and freely returned.

1.3.3 Friendship and Politics

Friendship’s relation to political thought has its roots in classical philosophical traditions. For Aristotle, friendship is both a personal good and a good for the whole city. In Cicero’s ‘law of friendship’, friends do not do dishonourable things for one another, especially ones against the republic, and friendship could not lead to political instability; instead, it is a bond of peace. As McGuire puts it, ‘Cicero insists on what for us might seem unlikely, that political activities and private bonds come together for the public good in the lives of virtuous men’. Interest in classical philosophical appraisals of friendship and politics has led to secondary work by political scientists like Horst Hutter.

A relation between friendship and politics has found contemporary expression as well, many of them relying on classical ideas and texts, though not entirely. There are recent philosophical monographs by Jacques Derrida, Mark Vernon, Ray Pahl, there are two collections of essays on friendship and politics, one edited by Preston King and Graham M. Smith, another edited by John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko. There are also historical monographs, such as the one by Graham M. Smith on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and

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66 Hutter, *Politics as Friendship*.


Theologians are doing similar work as well, and much of the literature is positive in its evaluation of the link between friendship and politics. Young lists John Milbank, Paul Waddell, and Stanley Hauerwas as examples of theologians whose ‘conceptions of friendship enable constructive, innovative practices of community that respond to the deficits of modernity’.  

Meilaender, however, is critical of the association between friendship and politics, and offers an entry into how to read Bonhoeffer on the subject. Meilaender calls the association between friendship and politics ‘incoherent’ because it confuses private goods with common goods. In the pursuit of justice, the particular goods of friendship must be put aside. De Graaff is critical of Meilaender on this point, and rightly so:

[Meilaender’s] criticism has been that the ideal of civic friendship amounts to a category mistake, involving the projection of a private relationship onto a public one: political community, an instrumental bond for the sake of justice, is expected to deliver the goods that only friendship can offer.

But what de Graaff goes on to point out is that the distinction between public/private does not map cleanly onto politics/friendship, and looks to O’Donovan’s tripartite distinction as a more nuanced and appropriate way to think of these spheres. DeGraaff writes:

[C]lose social units (e.g. family) become part of society, their interests and pursuits not left behind but rather drawn into a nexus of goods enjoyed in a wider and more public context, such as art and education.

These goods do not necessarily involve government, and are thus part of the common good without being part of a system of instrumental justice. Rather than a public sphere and a private sphere only, there are private, public, and political spheres. This framing of the issue does greater justice to friendship, in de Graaff’s mind, because while ‘friendship has no direct

74 Meilaender, *Friendship*, p. 74.
75 Meilaender, *Friendship*, p. 75.
76 De Graaff, *Politics in Friendship*, p. 27.
78 De Graaff, *Politics in Friendship*, p. 28.
79 De Graaff, *Politics in Friendship*, p. 28.
business in the area of politics, or at least in political *office* […] we might imagine friendship to have a share in this sphere without “ politicizing” it. In this way, friendship is private and political, but not directly political.

I will follow de Graaff in using O’Donovan on this point for a different reason than that given by de Graaff himself does so. De Graaff’s work, as I mention above, is one that uses the Bonhoeffer-Bell friendship in order to speak of the relation of friendship and politics. It is an extension and exploration of the limits of O’Donovan’s own categories and distinctions, and an attempt to fit friendship within O’Donovan’s ethical project. De Graaff does not look to Bonhoeffer’s own theology of friendship, or ethics, in order to make the case for politics in friendship, despite the fact that he could have done so.

My reason for following de Graaff’s use of O’Donovan is not because I have any interest in extending or modifying O’Donovan’s ethical project, but to articulate Bonhoeffer’s own theology of friendship, and to think through friendship with Bonhoeffer and Bethge. O’Donovan’s categories are operational in the background of this investigation because they offer the flexibility that the Bonhoeffer and Bethge material demands. O’Donovan’s tripartite model makes the best sense of Bonhoeffer’s own ‘political and social theology’, the term I will employ throughout this work, because when Bonhoeffer does ‘political theology’ he does not speak simply of the authority of the government in distinction from other social goods. Bonhoeffer’s political theology is one that grows out of a heavily modified Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms. For example, early in Bonhoeffer, we have a political theology that depends on the distinction between the church and the state, but the state itself is concerned with goods that Meilaender would think of as private, including communities like marriage. In this way, Bonhoeffer’s political theology is part of a theology of sociality, where his concerns are not the difference between public and political good, and a private sphere of limited and particular goods, but how different kinds of social communities—including the church—interact with one another, and are in a variety of ways obedient to the command of God. O’Donovan’s distinction between public, private, and political allows a space for things—including friendship—that might be considered ‘private’ in the sense that they are more immediately concerned with a particular good, but ‘private’ communities that are in some kind of relation to the sphere of the ‘political’ and the ‘public’ without direct contributions to statecraft. As we will see, this articulation of the issue will be a helpful way in which to understand Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship, offering a critical response to Meilaender, and a way to think of friendship as something that can reach beyond itself, and as something that can be for others.

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80 De Graaff, *Politics in Friendship*, p. 29.
1.3.4 Friendship as a Way of Knowing

To call friendship a form of epistemology would be heavy-handed; nevertheless, there has been some recent theological interest in friendship as a way of coming to know the truth. David B. Burrell’s *Friendship and Ways to Truth* sees the way of truth as ‘constituted by personal encounters’ and these encounters happening ‘within a community, in the company of friends’.\(^{81}\) Soskice, too, sees friendship as a way of ‘dialogical thinking’:

In contrast to the Hegelian pattern, where thesis and antithesis sublate one another to be mutually annihilated in synthesis, in dialogical thinking the one and the other one are not destroyed by their encounter, but become more truly themselves.\(^{82}\)

Young points out that this aspect of friendship reaches back to Aristotle, for whom friendship enables knowledge;\(^{83}\) his monograph, *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought*, is a study of historical friendships that were ‘built around the pursuit of wisdom or understanding’ and ‘exchanges’ that ‘engaged in some form of criticism, in attempts to repair deficient conceptual or interpretive approaches’\(^{84}\). Most recently, Samuel Kimbriel’s book, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*,\(^{85}\) examines late-antique and early medieval examples of ‘intimacy and understanding [that] go hand in hand friend[ship]’ in order to retrieve a tradition that, for Kimbriel, repairs a current ‘habit of isolation buried, often imperceptibly, within our practices of understanding and relating to the world’.\(^{86}\)

As an investigation into friendship in the thought and practice of Bonhoeffer and Bethge, this project is much more modest than Burrell’s, Young’s, Soskice’s, or Kimbriel’s. Unlike Burrell, Young, and Kimbriel in particular, I am not making the claim that friendship is going to solve the problems within a major intellectual project or heal a malaise of modernity. This would be to make too large a claim, considering the sources I am investigating here.

Yet their work does provide another point of contact with the Bonhoeffer-Rößler and Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship. What we see, in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship in a limited way, and the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship in a fuller way, is that friendship can be a way of

\(^{82}\) Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, p. 175.
\(^{83}\) Young, *Uncommon Friendships*, p. 10.
\(^{84}\) Young, *Uncommon Friendships*, p. 11.
\(^{86}\) Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*, p. 1.
reaching toward theological truth. This will be most clear in Chapter 5, where we will see that Bonhoeffer speaks of Bethge as the one who helped him clarify his own thoughts, and was a part of Bonhoeffer’s own process of truth-finding. This was a task that did not end for Bethge at Bonhoeffer’s death. Instead, Bethge turned to friendship as a way to establish his hermeneutical priority over other interpreters of Bonhoeffer: Bethge was Bonhoeffer’s friend, therefore he knew what Bonhoeffer meant, and could speak most truly about what Bonhoeffer intended to say within the ongoing reception and interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s work in the post-war context. It would be a mistake to lend too much theoretical and philosophical weight to this process. Nevertheless, the friendship between Bethge and Bonhoeffer was integral to Bonhoeffer’s own process of theological reflection, and Bonhoeffer said as much; and, according to Bethge, the friendship was integral to Bethge’s own interpretation of Bonhoeffer.

The four categories above—alongside the thesis as an investigation into what Bonhoeffer makes possible and the way the thesis draws together both theology and practice—are part of the way I approach my evidence and material. The final task, to conclude this introduction, is to describe how each of these three approaches relate to one another in the thesis as a whole.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In summary, my approach to the Bonhoeffer and Bethge material on friendship will bring together the following three elements: 1. The structure of Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s thought on friendship makes certain unthought-of conclusions possible, and these possibilities are faithful to the person being interpreted without resorting to the necessity of historical verifiability. 2. This look at Bonhoeffer and Bethge on friendship is not at the exclusion of their practice of friendship, and where practice is taken into account as evidence, leading to a method where theology and practice build upon one another. 3. The investigation takes into account the four relevant categories found in the friendship literature and listed above.

It would be helpful here, before I come to the summary, to state one of the limitations on assessing the degree of influence Bethge had on Bonhoeffer, and Bonhoeffer on Bethge: it is difficult to assess Bethge as a thinker, independent from Bonhoeffer, until well after Bonhoeffer’s death. Bethge’s literary estate, where we would find Bethge’s own theological work at the time of his friendship with Bonhoeffer, and correspondence with people other than Bonhoeffer, is difficult to access. It is archived where Bonhoeffer’s literary estate is archived—at the Staatsbibliothek on Potsdamer Straße in Berlin—and consists of numbered, but unsorted and uncatalogued, boxes of untranscribed letters and other documents from
Bethge’s life. Future Bonhoeffer and Bethge research will certainly benefit from this archive—especially the hundreds of pages of letters shared between Bethge and his fiancée and wife, Renate, while Bethge was on the Italian front and while Bonhoeffer was in prison and Bonhoeffer and Bethge were sharing their own correspondence. For the time being, however, access to these letters, and the Bethge archive as a whole, is overseen by Bethge’s surviving family and is limited.

This limitation, and the three elements above, leads to the following structure:

Part I: Bonhoeffer on Friendship, 1927-1935. Chapters 2 and 3 investigate Bonhoeffer on friendship before meeting Eberhard Bethge.

Chapter 2: Friendship in Sanctorum Communio. Chapter 2 is primarily a description of Bonhoeffer’s own habits of thought in Sanctorum Communio; what emerges is the possibility of friendship as a kind of community in which Stellvertretung can be practiced, and where we find the first conceptual resources for the possibility that friendship could be for others. A discussion of mutuality and reciprocity, and particularity and preference, begins here, though both will be more fully investigated in the conclusion to Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: The Rößler Correspondence. What Bonhoeffer makes possible in Sanctorum Communio is then followed by Chapter 3, on Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship with Helmut Rößler. Structurally, Sanctorum Communio provides certain insights about friendship to which insights from the Bonhoeffer-Rößler chapter are added. The practice of friendship with Rößler does not provide an example of friendship in Sanctorum Communio; it provides additional data, and contributes on its own to a theology of friendship that builds on what Bonhoeffer had to say in Sanctorum Communio. Though there is very little research into Rößler’s impact on Bonhoeffer, this chapter shows the value of this friendship in understanding certain aspects of Bonhoeffer’s theological development. This chapter also investigates friendship’s political aspects, and serves as a way to begin to understand the way friendship could be for others; it also describes friendship in terms of a mutual way of knowing.


Chapter 4: Orders, Mandates, Friendship, and Freedom. The political aspects of friendship continues to be investigated in Chapter 4, beginning with Bonhoeffer’s prison correspondence with Bethge on the mandates and in relation to friendship. And as the Rößler-Bonhoeffer friendship builds upon what Bonhoeffer makes possible in Sanctorum Communio, the prison letters build upon the chapters that preceded it. While the secondary literature on der Spielraum der Freiheit—a concept related to friendship and the mandates, and introduced
into the conversation with Bethge by Bonhoeffer—is spare, this chapter shows that these remarks by Bonhoeffer illuminate other aspects of Bonhoeffer’s political theology, and are best understood with reference to longstanding concerns in Bonhoeffer’s thought. As such, the political aspects of friendship become more conceptually grounded in Bonhoeffer’s thought as a whole, and add to what was first revealed in the Rößler friendship: that friendship, as political, is a way of understanding it as for others.

Chapter 5: Interpreting the Bonhoeffer-Bethge Friendship. The final chapter on Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s practice of friendship—even though it does provide the clearest example of what was disclosed in the three previous chapters—is not meant to act simply as an example of what has already been disclosed. It, too, provides another unique insight into friendship that builds upon what we know of Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship and what Bonhoeffer and Bethge have said about friendship. In this chapter, the practice of Stellvertretung becomes clear in the context of a mutual and particular friendship. Further, friendship—as a way of reaching toward theological truth—is seen clearly in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship in terms of mutuality; friendship, as a way of knowing, becomes another way to speak of friendship for others, and as it is seen in Bethge’s interpretation of Bonhoeffer after his death. The conclusion to this chapter critically engages some friendship literature’s approach to the mutuality and particularity of friendship. Finally, the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship serves as a way to see friendship as an appropriate way for Stellvertretung to take place, and as both a good shared between friends and a good for the political and social world the friends inhabit.

All of these factors come into play, finally, in the conclusion where I will make some final summative remarks, and suggest possible next steps and implications regarding what Bonhoeffer and Bethge, together, make it possible to say about friendship: that Stellvertretung is appropriate to friendship, and that friendship can be for others. It is to this central task that we now turn, beginning with Bonhoeffer’s theology of Stellvertretung as its found in Sanctorum Communio.
PART I: BONHOEFFER ON FRIENDSHIP, 1927-1935
Who in our time could, for example, lightheartedly make music, nurture friendship, play, and be happy? Certainly not the ‘ethical’ person, but only the Christian.  

Bonhoeffer wrote these words to Eberhard Bethge from Tegel prison in 1944, though the claim that the Christian has a peculiar ability to nurture friendship finds a place in his thought as early as 1927. In Sanctorum Communio, friendship—and the way it takes shape among Christians in the church—finds a place within his ecclesiology as an enduring social relation which is grounded eschatologically in God, subject to judgment, and open to eternal life. Within the context of the thesis as a whole, the chapter offers conceptual foundations for understanding the relation of friendship to Stellvertretung, and the way friendship can be for others; it does so by developing what Bonhoeffer makes possible in Sanctorum Communio as a whole. In its most basic form, the conclusion of this chapter is that friendship, under certain conditions, is a lasting, redemptive social relation that reaches beyond itself in its significance for others.

Before we get to the textual exposition itself, a few things need to be said about the text, and interpretation, of Sanctorum Communio. As for the text, Bonhoeffer’s original dissertation was completed in July 1927. The editors of the critical DBW and DBWE editions call the dissertation text SC-A, and the published text SC-B. The SC-A text was heavily worked over by Bonhoeffer, and 20 to 25 percent of it was cut or relegated to footnotes for its publication in 1930. This was to reduce the cost of printing during the depression and to please Reinhold Seeberg, Bonhoeffer’s doctoral supervisor, editor of the series in which the book appeared, and, through his foundation, a financial contributor to the cost of publishing the dissertation as a book. Thus the removal of material, or its relegation to footnotes, is related more to financial exigency than it is to the quality of the material itself. The published version of Sanctorum Communio does make sense as a whole, and the arguments can be followed, though they are much more compact as a result of the paring down of the dissertation; but this does not mean that the material from the dissertation, relegated to footnotes by Bonhoeffer for publication or restored by the editors of the critical editions, should be considered dispensable or without value. Through the reconstruction of the dissertation in the DBW and DBWE volumes, we see some of the details of Bonhoeffer’s argument, including those pieces that were important for Bonhoeffer himself in 1927 (even if

87 DBW/E 8, 2/102, 291/268.
they were not important to Seeberg, or the publishers, in 1930). Therefore, the material from SC-A should be considered of value in an investigation into Bonhoeffer’s theology.

A primary interpretive concern has to do with the form of *Sanctorum Communio*, specifically the relationship between *Sanctorum Communio* and the discipline of ethics. While I will draw out Bonhoeffer’s ethical concerns in *Sanctorum Communio*, I nevertheless agree with Eva Harasta, who points out that Bonhoeffer’s work took place before ethics was considered a discrete discipline apart from dogmatics, and that for Bonhoeffer, the primary basis for ethical claims was through dogmatic theology; this way of relating ethics to dogmatic theology takes place, for Harasta, in *Sanctorum Communio*. What this means for my investigation is that Bonhoeffer’s ethics can be pursued in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer is concerned with encounter with others, the ethical demands of that encounter, and the resolution of those demands; in this way, *Sanctorum Communio* is a work with moral dimensions, and ethical themes—such as what one can, and should, do for a friend—can be pursued. This will be most important for *Stellvertretung*, including its relation to eschatology; more will be said about the moral import of these for friendship in Section 3 and Section 4.

But neither is *Sanctorum Communio* a decision-making manual, or a guide to how to make decisions in the world as it is, and this leads to a second implication of Harasta’s point about *Sanctorum Communio* as a text where ethics and theology are considered together: theology also matters to ethics. Aside from the poverty and inadequacy of relegating doctrine to the theoretical realm and ethics to the practical realm, and the resulting isolation of Christ in a history that has little bearing on everyday decision-making—as Holmes points out—this kind of reading would not do justice to Bonhoeffer himself. The structural pattern of *Sanctorum Communio* plainly puts the work within a broader, dogmatic-ethical category through its structural use of creation, fall, and redemption as its defining categories. After establishing his theological method as it relates to social philosophy and sociology in chapter 1 of *Sanctorum Communio*, and then establishing his basic concepts of personhood and sociality in chapter 2, the next three chapters consider sociality and various forms of social arrangement as they relate to ecclesiology in terms of creation (Bonhoeffer’s ‘Primal State’), fall, the redeeming work of Christ in the church, and eschatology. Moral and ethical deliberation is set within a created, fallen world where God has acted on our behalf in Christ,

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92 DBW/E 1, 200/22, SC-A.
and where God continues to act for others in the church, and over which God will ultimately pass judgment. This grand narrative is where Bonhoeffer places the encounter of persons, collective or otherwise.\textsuperscript{93} This way of reaching back to creation, and forward to a new creation—from the here and now—will be important for the following reading of \textit{Sanctorum Communio}, but it is not something imposed upon the work from the outside; the structure is already there, and Bonhoeffer summarises his work this way himself.\textsuperscript{94} This ‘reaching back’ and ‘reaching forward’, overlooked as it is by interpreters who write of ‘community’ as a singular category without reference to a primal state or to eschatology, was nevertheless important for Bonhoeffer; and to ignore this dogmatic shape to the work risks misunderstanding what Bonhoeffer meant by ‘community’ specifically, a central term throughout this discussion.

A second issue of interpretation is the significance of the difference between three of Bonhoeffer’s central terms in \textit{Sanctorum Communio}: \textit{Gemeinschaft}, \textit{Gemeinde}, and \textit{Kirche}. The critical translation of \textit{Sanctorum Communio} in the DBWE is at pains to make the distinctions clear, as is Green in his study \textit{Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality}.\textsuperscript{95} Quite rightly, Green (who was also editor of the critical English edition) differentiates between two of these terms by translating \textit{Gemeinschaft} as ‘community’ and \textit{Gemeinde} as ‘church-

\textsuperscript{93} In this sense, \textit{Sanctorum Communio} is a work of moral theology on O’Donovan’s terms, which looks to ‘the beauty and order of the life that was the creator’s gift to his creation’ but is also open ‘to a new moment of participation in God’s work and being’. Moral thinking, for O’Donovan, is ‘descriptive of the world’ and ‘always open to the future’. O’Donovan himself uses a faith, hope, and love triad for his own ethical reflection, rather than a creation-fall-redemption paradigm, though it is a triad that refers to creation as an ethical norm alongside eschatological possibility. See Oliver O’Donovan, \textit{Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology I} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 92-93.


\textsuperscript{95} Clifford J. Green, \textit{Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality}, Revised edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Throughout.
community’. This is not without its own problems, however, as Kirche, translated as ‘church’ and referring to what Bonhoeffer often calls the ‘empirical church’, can collapse into Gemeinde through the false semantic field created by the duplication of the word ‘church’ in the translation of Gemeinde as ‘church-community’. Overall, it does accomplish, albeit imperfectly, what was intended. The three terms, in translation, are differentiated from one another. And in fairness to Green, there are no better proposals on the table.

After the careful translations of the English critical edition of Sanctorum Communio, it is unfortunate that so much of the Bonhoeffer literature in English continues to be less than careful with these terms, because it can result in a distortion that the translators intended to avoid. Of particular relevance to this investigation, the distinction of terms becomes especially important because it allows for a more complex interaction between these various social realities and arrangements, an interaction present in Bonhoeffer’s own text, investigated here in Section 2 where ‘empirical church’ and ‘Gemeinde’ are related but not the same; Gemeinde is possible in social relations other than the empirical church. This subtlety would be lost without paying close attention to Bonhoeffer’s distinctions. To preserve these distinctions, I often use the German term in my prose in order to retain the character of Bonhoeffer’s subtle differentiation.

The final issue of interpretation is related to both the ethical dimensions and Bonhoeffer’s differentiation of terms as they process through his dogmatic structure. The meaning of Gemeinschaft and Gemeinde change and shift according to where Bonhoeffer is within his theological narrative. The terms have different shades of meaning when they are discussed within the context of the primal state before the fall, within the context of the fall, or as reconciled in Christ eschatologically. Attentiveness to the changing and shifting of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Gemeinschaft helps illuminate the importance of its original and eschatological wholeness, and its current state of fracture; this attentiveness will be


especially important when the discussion turns to the eschatological dimension of Gemeinschaft and Gemeinde and its meaning for Gemeinschaft in the present.

2.1 FRIENDSHIP AS GEMEINSCHAFT

The first step in arguing for friendship as a lasting social relation, and one that under certain conditions can be redemptive, is to establish friendship as a social relation in which God is at work. As such, this section offers the first steps toward the meaning of a ‘lasting’ and ‘redemptive’ friendship through the concept of Gemeinschaft, and friendship as a form of Gemeinschaft. As we will see, to call friendship a form of Gemeinschaft leads to seeing friendship as a social phenomenon in which God is at work, and which is oriented to God’s ultimate ends.

The primary evidence of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of friendship as a form of Gemeinschaft is found in SC-B, where Bonhoeffer describes the difference between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. In a technical discussion about the mediation of will, its independence, and the way will takes the form of objective spirit, Bonhoeffer makes a number of claims about Hegel’s contribution to the concept of Gemeinschaft. For Bonhoeffer, will—as objective spirit—is something that forms a structure that is greater than the individual wills of the participants in the community. In this discussion, Bonhoeffer relates this objective spirit to purpose, and speaks of a work of art as something that is not reducible to a purpose. Instead, it has ‘fulfilment and understandability in itself because the objective spirit that sustained it was an end in itself’, and thus it continues to ‘live’; this is unlike an artefact that had a purpose which is no longer understood, and is ‘dead, because the objective spirit that sustained it […] was always a means to an end [and] has ceased along with that purpose’.98 This is all in Bonhoeffer’s effort to describe the difference between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft has an end in itself and, as a result, Gemeinschaft is lasting, like a piece of art; in contrast, Gesellschaft has purposes that do not last, because they are means to an end, like an artefact. I will speak to the significance of this difference below, but I begin with Bonhoeffer’s discussion of objective spirit and will because in it Bonhoeffer speaks of specific examples of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft; the Gemeinschaft that best embodies ends that reach beyond itself is friendship, a correlation that Bonhoeffer makes three times in the context of his discussion of objective spirit,99 leading to a conclusion that is difficult to

98 DBW/E 1, 63-64/100-01.
99 DBW/E 1, 62/98, 63/100, 64/101.
refute: not only is friendship, for Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinschaft*, it is one of the most exemplary forms of social relation that, in not being reducible to a purpose, can endure.

Bonhoeffer is not, however, content with a non-theological reading of the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and he adds some distinctive theological qualities to his definitions in a longer, more detailed argument in SC-A, definitions that are then deployed in his argument in SC-B and seen above in a truncated form. If we look to the detailed argument of SC-A we see that Bonhoeffer begins with sociology, but then self-consciously differentiates his work from that of the sociologists. For Tönnies, and for Bonhoeffer following Tönnies, *Gesellschaft* exists ‘purely within history’, and is ‘constituted to realize its purpose’. This sociological definition for Bonhoeffer, however, is preliminary, and he quickly turns to theological terms and subjects. Society may dream to ‘establish the Realm of God on earth’, but even this apparent eschatological grounding of society in God does not make it *Gemeinschaft*, because *Gesellschaft* is, by definition, ‘constituted in history to realize its purpose’, and ‘in no way does the idea of a society extend beyond the idea of its constitutive purpose’. What Bonhoeffer means is that even if the purpose of a society is the ‘Realm of God’, a society by definition will never be able to accomplish that on its own; God establishes the ‘Realm of God’, not creatures, however righteous their intentions. So long as its purpose is historically borne in a human desire to establish this ‘Realm of God’, *Gesellschaft* will find its end within history. In Bonhoeffer’s theological reading, *Gesellschaft*’s purpose ‘lies, speaking purely eschatologically, at the end of history’, meaning this purpose is ‘necessarily within history and is temporally conditioned’. In this way, society is something characterised by human purposive action, rather than God’s, and therefore it cannot extend beyond the limit of history; and, through the reference to eschatology, Bonhoeffer makes *Gesellschaft* a theological term rather than simply a sociological one.

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100 According to Green, *Gemeinschaft* is a sociological term for Bonhoeffer, defined as a particular group of people who ‘will one another and their common life as ends in themselves, thus constituting a “structure of meaning”’; this is in contrast to *Gesellschaft*, which is a group of ‘people [who] will one another and their common life as a means to an end’. Green, however, is only right insofar as he follows Bonhoeffer’s pre-theological definition and a distinction based on Tönnies’s *Community and Society*. See Green, *Sociality*, p. 38; Green, ‘Introduction to the English Edition’, p. 15. For this curtailed definition in Bonhoeffer, see DBW/E 1, 55-57/87-89.
101 DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
102 DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
103 DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
104 DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
Bonhoeffer’s sociological-theological definition of Gesellschaft is, again, made in contrast to Gemeinschaft. For Bonhoeffer, a community is ‘value-bearing’, and it therefore ‘transcends its inner historical limitations’ through this value-bearing.\(^{105}\) Bonhoeffer then turns to theological terms in order to clarify the meaning of this sociological definition: for Bonhoeffer, because community holds a value that is not confined historically, this is a way of ‘thinking’ of community ‘eschatologically and supratemporally, that is, in God’; therefore, for Bonhoeffer, ‘the nature of community is grounded in and willed by God’.\(^{106}\) The Gemeinschaft that is lasting, then, is lasting for theological reasons: because it is eschatologically grounded in and willed by God.

There are a number of leaps in logic here on Bonhoeffer’s part, and they demonstrate his intent to bridge sociological disciplines and theology. It is difficult to deduce why, in the case of Gesellschaft, society cannot extend beyond its purpose historically, and therefore cannot extend beyond the limit of history eschatologically; or in the case of Gemeinschaft, why ‘value’ is irreducible to history because history is without meaning, and thus leads to thinking eschatologically and supratemporally about community because of its ‘value-bearing’. But to be overly concerned with the ways that Bonhoeffer successfully, or unsuccessfully, wrestles sociological terms into theological submission would be to miss Bonhoeffer’s theological point. Bonhoeffer’s interest is in articulating ‘an inherently Christian social philosophy and sociology’ that arises ‘out of fundamental concepts of Christian theology’; and, specifically, this Christian social philosophy and sociology ‘is most fully articulated in the concept of the church’.\(^{107}\) I will return to the significance of the church below, but for now my point is that Bonhoeffer has no desire to be bound by the narrowness of sociological description because in his mind, sociology and social philosophy, by definition, are not sufficient. Bonhoeffer begins with sociological and social philosophical descriptions and definitions, but the church bears the meaning of true sociality, a sociality that arises out of fundamental concepts of theology. The result of holding both sociological disciplines and theology as starting points makes for a messy method, but one that is able to preserve insights from them both, in a process of mutual influence.

Discussing Bonhoeffer in terms of ‘mutual influence’ is in contrast to Green, and more recently Mawson, who have argued that Bonhoeffer understands theology as instrumental in clarifying and correcting sociology and social philosophy. For Green, though sociology and social philosophy function with relative autonomy and independence from theology as

\(^{105}\) DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
\(^{106}\) DBW/E 1, 235/95, SC-A.
\(^{107}\) DBW/E 1, 200/22, SC-A.
disciplines, neither sociology nor social philosophy operate with complete independence in Bonhoeffer’s text. Theology, according to Green, will ‘qualify and transform’ the sociological and social-philosophical terms borrowed by Bonhoeffer because of the regulatory nature of revelation. Mawson takes Bonhoeffer’s statement about employing sociology and social philosophy in the ‘service’ of theology to mean that theology takes on a corrective role with regard to the errors of sociology and social philosophy, such as the prioritising of the individual apart from their standing before God, and an individual’s relationships with other human beings.

The issue with this way of understanding the relation between sociology and social philosophy in Bonhoeffer, in distinction from my proposal, is that though Green and Mawson can make their argument based on the way Bonhoeffer says he proceeds, it does not describe the way Bonhoeffer actually does proceed, as seen above in his description of the difference between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. The primary issue with Green and Mawson is not that they are wrong about theology’s qualifying, transforming, or corrective role for Bonhoeffer; the issue is that this does not fully describe how the meeting of theology with sociology and social philosophy functions in the arguments Bonhoeffer makes here. Further, Green and Mawson both make Bonhoeffer’s method appear much tidier than it actually is in practice.

First, in answer to Green, it is not simply sociology and social philosophy that are qualified and transformed by their meeting with theology. Theology, too, is qualified and transformed through its meeting with sociology and social philosophy. Theology itself is inflected by the definitions that Bonhoeffer takes for granted, a phenomenon seen in theology’s qualification by social categories like Gemeinschaft. The eschaton—God’s end—becomes a social phenomenon, as can be seen here in the definition of Gemeinschaft as something that is eschatologically ‘in God’; this social inflection of theology will be even more clear when Bonhoeffer speaks of the way sociality endures eschatologically, something I will look at more closely in section 4.

Secondly, in answer to Mawson, the social categories Bonhoeffer uses are part of his sociological and social-philosophical sources, not his theological ones. In saying that Bonhoeffer’s method, in practice, is marked by the mutual influence of theological and sociological sources, I am not saying that for Bonhoeffer, sociology or social philosophy are corrective to theology in the same way that theology is corrective to the findings of sociology

109 Green, Sociality, pp. 26-27.
and social philosophy. This would be too close to calling sociology or social philosophy a kind of revelation. But it is to say that the meeting of disciplines results in a process of mutual transformation, offering an insight that is not necessarily in conflict with ‘revelation’, including an eschatology that is understood in terms of its social dimension, a sociality that is understood by Bonhoeffer according to the sociological and social-philosophical sources and their definitions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.

This more subtle, and messy, meeting of social philosophy and sociology with theology is germane to this discussion of friendship, because what Bonhoeffer accomplishes, through exploiting the sociological distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and its meeting with Christian doctrine, is to press the theological together with the sociological in order to yield a theological definition of a certain kind of human social phenomenon, and a social understanding of eschatology. For example, Bonhoeffer affirms here, in addition to the affirmation in SC-B, that one of the communities to which he is referring, is friendship.\(^\text{111}\) So what we find, in Bonhoeffer’s definition of Gemeinschaft, and friendship as Gemeinschaft, is friendship as a community where people will one another, and their common life, as ends in themselves. But because neither the persons nor their common life are means to an end in Gemeinschaft—as they are in Gesellschaft—friendship is open to what lies beyond itself. This means that friendship, for Bonhoeffer, rather than being grounded in itself as historically limited social relation, is eschatologically grounded ‘in God’ and open to God’s ultimate purposes. This makes it a lasting form of social relation in which God is active because it is eschatologically grounded in and willed by God; and further, eschatology is reframed as a way of speaking of God’s action understood according to particular social categories, such as friendship. In this way, friendship as a social phenomenon is one oriented to God’s end; and at the same time, God’s end, in friendship, is a social one.

The discussion of Gemeinschaft is a preparatory discussion, for Bonhoeffer, about the nature of the church, adding one more characteristic of friendship as Gemeinschaft. Bonhoeffer writes that ‘only community, and never a society, can or should become “church”’;\(^\text{112}\) and that ‘God […] has a purpose for every community no matter how small, every friendship, every marriage, every family. And in this same sense God also has a purpose for the church’.\(^\text{113}\) Again, we again see Bonhoeffer referring to friendship as a type of community. But my point here is to say that for Bonhoeffer, friendship—as a type of Gemeinschaft—is one of the social relations that are related most closely to church because

\(^{111}\) DBW/E 1, 235/95, 236/96, SC-A.
\(^{112}\) DBW/E 1, 64/101.
\(^{113}\) DBW/E 1, 74/119.
*Gemeinschaft* is eschatologically grounded in God and thus open to God’s purpose, and more appropriately understood in relation to the church than society would be.

In summary, then, friendship is a form of *Gemeinschaft* for Bonhoeffer. And though the argument is difficult to parse on account of the way Bonhoeffer proceeds both sociologically and theologically, his point is clear: friendship, as an exemplary form of *Gemeinschaft*, is therefore eschatologically grounded in God and open to God’s purposes, and a form of social relation in which Bonhoeffer thinks God is at work and active.

But there are other things that have come to light in this investigation into friendship as *Gemeinschaft*. The first to mention here is that Bonhoeffer makes an abstract and elliptical distinction between *Gesellschaft*, defined by the utility of its historical purpose, and *Gemeinschaft*, defined by God’s enduring purpose. Whether this is an accurately rendered distinction within the context of Bonhoeffer’s work will be discussed further in this chapter’s conclusion. The second is mentioned above, in passing: *Gemeinschaft* is an important part of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the church; I will return to this subject as well, as it is important for the way Bonhoeffer thinks of redemption as ecclesially located.

Finally, as I point out above, social forms inflect Bonhoeffer’s theology. Similarly, this socially inflected theology leads to an understanding of God’s end, in friendship, as social. In this way, Bonhoeffer’s theology is oriented to sociality and his understanding of sociality is theological.

### 2.2 FRIENDSHIP AND THE ESCHATON

Bonhoeffer’s social understanding of eschatology, and the related eschatological understanding of friendship—as *Gemeinschaft*—is not the last word on eschatology and friendship in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer will go on to say that a friendship is a collective person subject to judgment and open to eternal life, making friendship a social form that endures in the present, not because a friendship is inherently resilient, but because Christ—in an eschatological prolepsis—can repair a friendship through an encounter in which Christ himself is present.

This line of inquiry into social reparation, for Bonhoeffer, is part of his developing investigation into eschatology in *Sanctorum Communio*. For Bonhoeffer, eschatology is concerned with ‘two groups of ideas’. The first is judgment, a judgment that is passed on both individuals and collective persons.114 ‘The question is’, asks Bonhoeffer, ‘how do we

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114 DBW/E 1, 194/283.
conceive of human Gemeinschaft as undergoing judgment?"  

Bonhoeffer answers, ‘[j]udgment applies to persons. But this obviously means that it applies not only to individual persons [Individualpersonen], but also to collective persons [Kollektivpersonen]’; thus communities—as collective persons—undergo ‘eternal judgment’ as ‘undivided entities’.

Despite the logical difficulty of people being judged as individuals and as members of a collective person—where God might condemn a collective person but not all the persons within it and vice-versa—Bonhoeffer insists that this is ‘an idea that is as necessary as it is incomprehensible’. Much the way Bonhoeffer is willing to speak of the necessity to think in terms of wholes within wholes in the universal church—I will say more on this below—he is willing for the logic of judgment to be subservient to what he considers necessary conclusions. These arguments rely on the witness of Scripture; and in Scripture, God judges both individual persons and collective ones. Bonhoeffer offers the examples of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in Matthew 11:21-24, and the churches that are addressed in Revelation 2 and 3, where villages and churches are subject to judgment as wholes, but the fate of individuals within those wholes might be different from the whole.

The second group of ideas with which eschatology is concerned, for Bonhoeffer, is eternal life, and the eternal life that extends to communities as collective persons. For Bonhoeffer, communities—as collective persons—undergo ‘eternal judgment’ as ‘undivided entities’, which means that ‘the community as a collective person can expect eternal life’; sociality, then, endures eschatologically. This is true for the relation between human persons and God, in that ‘eternal life’, for Bonhoeffer, ‘means perfect community with God’. But sociality endures among human persons as well. For Bonhoeffer, ‘God’s church-community […] is now “entirely justified and sanctified”, one in Christ and yet all individuals. […] They give themselves to each other and to God, thereby establishing human community and community with God’. In this way, Bonhoeffer speaks in a more particular way about how Gemeinschaft is eschatologically grounded in God: its eschatological grounding means that it is subject to judgment and shares in eternal life.

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115 DBW/E 1, 194/283-84.
116 DBW/E 1, 194/284.
117 DBW/E 1, 194/284.
118 DBW/E 1, 194/284.
119 DBW/E 1, 194/283.
120 This belief in the eschatological persistence of sociality leads Bonhoeffer to a significant departure from his own earlier eschatology; before writing Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer argued against an eschatologically persistent sociality in the form of the church. See DBW/E 9:2/9; 352-33/323.
121 DBW/E 1, 194/284.
122 DBW/E 1, 197/287-88.
These eschatological forms of community—as collective persons under judgment and open to eternal life—are related to the fallen forms of community through an eschatological foretaste or prolepsis that takes place when one meets Christ in another. Bonhoeffer covers this in his discussion of community in the fallen state, where community is infinitely fragmented because sin disrupts the sociality of its pre-lapsarian form: ‘sin […] has stepped between human beings and God, [and] between human beings themselves’. Community with God and other human beings remains, but is continually broken by the divisive power of sin; Bonhoeffer describes overcoming the experience of another as ‘alien, and as making demands’ through an ‘eschatological prolepsis’ where a person is revealed in their own right ‘as love, as Christ’. In this way, unredeemed sociality in the church is continually breaking down and built up again into a unity. Broken forms of community, then, are able to find their reparation and wholeness when a person is proleptically encountered as Christ in the present.

Bonhoeffer affirms this line of thinking when he turns to write his chapter on eschatology. Eschatologically speaking:

[C]ommunity is real and eternal, which in history is merely realized in a rudimentary way and disintegrates again and again. Whereas even in the church the I and the You still encountered each other as strangers, that is, in a strangeness that was overcome only in the eschatological foretaste of sanctification, here the revelation of one heart to the other is fulfilled in divine love.

Thus, for Bonhoeffer, community (including church-community) is subject to disintegration in the present through the encounter of others as strangers or alien. But there is a lasting, eschatological form of community, and through the reception of another person as Christ—in the kinds of practices Bonhoeffer will describe as theological Stellvertretung—a person is revealed in divine love, community is restored in the present, and a person’s strangeness is overcome; this is described by Bonhoeffer here as an ‘eschatological foretaste of sanctification’. As I argued in Section 1, the insights of sociological disciplines inform Bonhoeffer’s eschatology: community in the present is realised according to a foretaste of its eschatological end, an eschatological end that for Bonhoeffer, is understood according to

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123 DBW/E 1, 38/63.
124 As Green summarises, in his own peculiar way: ‘the individual person, still inescapably related to others and bound up in corporate life, is afflicted by a deep isolation, while corporate existence is a contradictory solidarity of egocentric individualism’. Green, Sociality, p. 50.
125 DBW/E 1, 144/213.
126 DBW/E 1, 144/213.
127 DBW/E 1, 197/288.
social categories like *Gemeinschaft* as a sanctified collective person subject to judgment and open eternal life.

For Bonhoeffer, one of the communities that undergoes judgement, and which can share in eternal life and can therefore be understood in the present according to its social end, is friendship:

God’s judgment and grace applies to persons. This means that judgment and grace apply to all individual persons [Einzelpersonen] within the church-community[,] […] to marriages and friendships that have become part of the sanctorum communio, and finally to the unity of these, the collective person of the church-community.\(^\text{128}\)

The community that undergoes judgment as a collective person, and is open to eternal life, is not simply the community of the church as a whole. Individual persons, collective persons like marriages and friendships, and the unity of these in the eternal *Gemeinde*, are taken all together and ‘constitute the powerful unity of God’s church-community’; ‘[t]hey are now “entirely justified and sanctified”, one in Christ and yet all individuals’.\(^\text{129}\) The intermediary bodies that make up the universal church, then, endure within the eternal *Gemeinde* as persons ‘in community with each other’.\(^\text{130}\) As ‘persons only in community with each other’, persons neither dissolve in a collective ‘assimilation into God’s all-encompassing person’, nor are they left alone with God, or with one another apart from God.\(^\text{131}\) How Bonhoeffer reconciles this with Jesus’s words on levirate marriage in Matthew 22:25-30, Mark 12:20-25, Luke 20:27-36, is unclear. Jesus says there that in the resurrection of the dead, there is no marriage; this makes an argument for the eschatological persistence of social forms like marriage, or friendship, difficult to make from the Synoptics. Bonhoeffer, however, does think that as one of these intermediate collective persons, friendship endures in some kind of eschatological form that, through eschatological prolepsis, is experienced in the present.

This reading is a departure from both Leahy and Marsh. In order to understand Bonhoeffer on community one cannot, like Leahy, simply say that persons are ‘created in relation to one another’\(^\text{132}\) and that Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology has God’s originally intended sociality as a centre.\(^\text{133}\) Creation is one of Bonhoeffer’s referents, but so is the eschaton. In order to understand Bonhoeffer on community, one looks toward the originary and unmediated sociality of God’s creation \textit{and} to a community’s eschatological

\(^{128}\) DBW/E 1, 197-98/287.

\(^{129}\) DBW/E 1, 198/287.

\(^{130}\) DBW/E 1, 197/287.

\(^{131}\) DBW/E 1, 197/287.

\(^{132}\) Leahy, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Notion of Church’, p. 39.

\(^{133}\) Leahy, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Notion of Church’, p. 38.
end, ultimate judgment, and openness to eternal life and perfect community with God. In the present, community is subject to sin, and therefore persons are experienced in alienation from one another; in the church, this originary unity is experienced again according to its eschatological end in God through the eschatological prolepsis of encountering Christ in another. Marsh, critical of Bonhoeffer’s use of a philosophy of encounter, claims that Bonhoeffer is not able to provide an understanding of community that has continuity. But this would be to fault Bonhoeffer for not solving a problem he does not intend to solve under the heading of sin and sociality. Indeed, community does have continuity, but one needs to look to its unbroken created or its eschatological state. For Bonhoeffer, ‘unbroken social community belongs to primal being […] in parallel to the eschatological hope we have for it in the church’, so whether it be understood through Griesbach’s philosophy of encounter or Hegel’s collective spirit, community is unbroken, but only in primal being and in eschatological hope. Marsh’s criticism of Bonhoeffer for the lack of enduring relationality and encounter is only plausible if one looks to community in the fallen state, because there one will not find enduring, perfect encounter; but if one looks to the community as created, and then restored eschatologically, encounter does endure; this enduring encounter is experienced in the present through eschatological prolepsis, where another is encountered as Christ in the sort of practices that, as we will see, Bonhoeffer describes in the ecclesial form of Stellvertretung.

Friendship, then, is a lasting social relation for Bonhoeffer. This is not to say that a friendship necessarily endures in the present; friendship, like Gemeinschaft in general, is subject to the disruption of sin that alienates people from one another. This is where Bonhoeffer’s dogmatic structure aids in more subtle interpretation of Gemeinschaft: in its present form, Gemeinschaft is subject to the disruption of sin. The disruption of sin in the present is overcome through an eschatological foretaste of sociality in its sanctified form, a proleptic encounter of another as Christ; through this prolepsis, community is restored. Thus, a friendship’s ability to last is dependent on both its orientation to what lies beyond the immediate, and the presence of Christ to it in the present.

There is an implication to be drawn out here as well. We already know, from Section 1, that friendship is a social relation in which God is active; and now we can see that for Bonhoeffer, there are social forms—such as friendship—that are part of the church in the present. These conclusions, alongside the idea that a proleptic and restorative encounter can

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135 DBW/E 1, 37-39/63.
take place with Christ, are each key to what I will argue next: that friendship is a redemptive social relation.

2.3 FRIENDSHIP IN THE EMPRIRICAL CHURCH

To say what I have said so far is not yet to say that friendship is redemptive. To argue that friendship, for Bonhoeffer, is a social form which is redemptive in the present, one must be able to locate it in the church—as the body of Christ and what Bonhoeffer calls ‘the empirical church’—because it is in this church that Bonhoeffer is confident that Christ is active in a redemptive way.

Bonhoeffer describes the empirical form of the church in a number of different ways. In its empirical form, the church ‘is the organized “institution” of salvation’; ‘its centre is the cult, consisting of preaching and sacrament or […] the “assembly” […] of its members’. It is a ‘legal body’, operates according to ‘rules’ rather than the ‘inner disposition of its members’, may be a ‘political force within the state’, and, quoting Seeberg, is the ‘historical work of Jesus Christ’. It has an ‘objective spirit’, which means that it has ‘an active will of its own that orders and guides the wills of the members who constitute it and participate in it’; it is defined by ‘space and time’ and has ‘historical and social effects’.

The question of form, however, is secondary to the church’s primary identity in Christ. In a question about the relation between Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the empirical form of the church—one inflected by Bonhoeffer’s reading of Hegel—Bonhoeffer wonders, ‘how is the spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit of the sanctorum communio related to the objective spirit of the empirical church-community?’. For Bonhoeffer, ‘Kirche ist Christus als Gemeinde existierend’, the church is Christ existing as Gemeinde, ‘[h]owever questionable its empirical form may be’. Aside from his particular language, and his Hegelian interpolations (and an accompanying argument with Kant), this is not an unusual reading of the church: the appearance of the church according to form is secondary to its primary identity in Christ.

Alongside form, number is also secondary to the church’s primary Christological identity. This is taken up by Bonhoeffer in his discussion of intermediary forms of the church that are smaller than the universal body of Christ, and as small as ‘two or three gathered’.

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136 DBW/E 1, 140/208.
137 DBW/E 1, 140/208-09.
138 DBW/E 1, 141/209.
139 DBW/E 1, 141/210.
140 DBW/E 1, 142/211.
141 DBW/E 1, 143/212.
what Bonhoeffer calls *Einzelgemeinden*. The significance of these intermediary forms is overlooked by others; Greggs, for example, making an argument for the priestliness of the church through Christological mediation and Christ’s *Stellvertretung*—and against a priestly caste within the church—does not imagine an intermediary sociality in the church, only one form of sociality among persons in the church, and another between the church and the world.\footnote{Tom Greggs, ‘Ecclesial Priestly Mediation in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’, *Theology Today*, 7 (2014), pp. 81-91 (p. 87).} But the *Gemeinde*, for Bonhoeffer, is made up of smaller church-communities. There are ‘*Einzelgemeinden*’ and ‘an organization that encompasses them’.\footnote{DBW/E 1, 151/223.} These *Einzelgemeinden*, for Bonhoeffer, include the smallest sociological units:

> For even a community of two people […] which has been placed under the word of God and is sustained by God, would doubtless fit this description of the smallest sociological unit […] and this would mean that wherever even “two or three are gathered” there would also be the body of Christ.\footnote{DBW/E 1, 153-54/226.}

For Bonhoeffer, then, this means that even ‘two or three gathered’ can be the church as the body of Christ, as *Einzelgemeinden in Gemeinde*.

For Bonhoeffer, to call the ‘two or three gathered’ the body of Christ does not erode the unity of the universal church. The ‘universal church’, for Bonhoeffer, is not a body unto itself with individual congregations as ‘members only of this body’.\footnote{DBW/E 1, 153/225.} Instead, there are bodies in bodies. Bonhoeffer relies on the analogy of the individual Christian in order to make sense of this problem. ‘Christ’, for Bonhoeffer, ‘is fully present in each individual, and yet he is one; and again he is not fully present in any one person, but only all human beings together possess the whole of Christ’.\footnote{DBW/E 1, 153/225-26.} Similarly, ‘each individual congregation is the body of Christ, and yet there is only one body; and again it is only the church-community as a whole that can actualise all the relationships within the body of Christ’.\footnote{DBW/E 1, 153/225-26.} So for Bonhoeffer, the fact that there are any number of ‘bodies of Christ’ in any number of different local congregations does not impair the fact that the church-community, taken all together, is the body of Christ as well.

Plant calls Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the self-sufficiency of each congregation an idiosyncratic interpretation of the New Testament,\footnote{Plant, *Bonhoeffer*, p. 66.} but Bonhoeffer’s logic is not idiosyncratic to his own understanding of Christ’s presence in the church, and the insistence
in Matthew 18:20 that Christ is present in gatherings of two or three. Bonhoeffer, retaining the necessary unity of Christ in the universal church, and his presence in the two or three, ends up saying that *Einzelgemeinden* can be wholes, but only when they are part of the larger whole universal body of Christ. This presents another logical difficulty, similar to the problem of God’s judgment of individual and collective persons; again, like Bonhoeffer’s solution to the problem of judgment, his logic proceeds according to necessary conclusions. Bonhoeffer is willing to see wholes within wholes because it allows him to speak of social relations in which Christ is active in unique ways, but without reducing what is unique about *Einzelgemeinden* to the way Christ is active throughout the universal church, in such things as word and sacrament. This retains the possibility of a diversity of modes of Christ’s activity, while keeping them within their necessarily larger ecclesial context, and makes most sense of Bonhoeffer’s claim that though the smallest sociological unit ‘necessarily extends beyond itself and has its place within the “whole” body of Christ; it is in fact merely an individual actualization of that body’.\(^{149}\)

This is why, in this discussion of the unity of the body, Bonhoeffer returns to the question of form in order to reveal the conditions needed to qualify the ‘two or three gathered’ as the body of Christ. In addition to being ‘placed under the word of God and sustained by God’,\(^{150}\) the individual congregation can be considered the body of Christ if Christ is at work, because to speak of the ‘body of Christ’, is not, for Bonhoeffer, a reference ‘to form, but to function, namely the work of Christ’.\(^{151}\) This means that neither the outward marks of the empirical church, nor its number, are what qualify them as the body of Christ; it is, for Bonhoeffer, Christ being at work that qualifies a social unit as the body of Christ. This also means that Soosten, by speaking only of limbs of the body of Christ,\(^{152}\) rather than bodies in bodies, misses the significance of *Einzelgemeinden* as the body of Christ according to Christ’s work in them. What Bonhoeffer is saying that the *Einzelgemeinden* are both part of the body, and whole bodies in their own right, because Christ is at work in them.

As a matter of function rather than number and form, we can extend the category of *Einzelgemeinde*, as the body of Christ, to other social units that fulfil the function Bonhoeffer describes. Bonhoeffer gives the example of marriage as the smallest of sociological units that can be considered an ‘individual congregation’ and ‘the body of Christ’.\(^{153}\) What Bonhoeffer makes possible, here, is that a friendship—if Christ is at work in this ‘two or three

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\(^{149}\) DBW/E 1, 154/226.

\(^{150}\) DBW/E 1, 153-54/226.

\(^{151}\) DBW/E 1, 153/225.

\(^{152}\) Soosten, *Die Sozialität Der Kirche*, p. 270.

\(^{153}\) DBW/E 1, 153-54/226.
gathered’—can be considered alongside marriage as a body of Christ that is part of the body of the universal church, not on account of it carrying any of the institutional marks of the empirical church, but on account of Christ acting in it. A friendship can be a unity of its own, within the unity of the church as a whole. This is not to say that a friendship, any more than a marriage, is the empirical church. The empirical church has its own markers. It is to say that on Bonhoeffer’s terms, a friendship can be considered the body of Christ and part of the church, if Christ is at work within it. And if a friendship is ecclesially located—as a body of Christ within the body of Christ—then we can also begin discuss friendship in terms of what Bonhoeffer has to say about Christ’s work in the church more generally. As we do so, what we find is that friendship begins to emerge as a social relation that can be redemptive, because it is a social relation in which Stellvertretung can take place.

2.4 FRIENDSHIP, STELLVERTRETUNG, AND ACTS OF LOVE AND REPENTANCE

For Bonhoeffer, there are two kinds of Stellvertretung. The first is called theological by Bonhoeffer, and is a Stellvertretung that, because ‘we are not able to carry [our sin] by ourselves’, is ‘possible only so long as it is based on an offer by God’.\(^\text{154}\) It is God’s work, accomplished for a humanity unable redeem itself under its own power. It is not, for Bonhoeffer, an ‘ethical, but a theological concept’.\(^\text{155}\) The second is called ethical Stellvertretung. This difference is overlooked by Green, for example, who only writes about theological Stellvertretung, and while Bonhoeffer does not take the time to develop ethical Stellvertretung in detail, it is misleading to refer, as Green does, to ‘Stellvertretung’ as a single undifferentiated category.\(^\text{156}\) Bonhoeffer’s ‘ethischen Begriff der Stellvertretung’\(^\text{157}\) is the one that he associates with friendship, calling it ‘an act of human heroic love (for one’s country, friend, etc.) even within the bounds of the highest ethical obligation’.

\(^\text{154}\) DBW/E 1, 99/156; see also Green, Sociality, p. 56. In English editions of Bonhoeffer’s work, Stellvertretung has been translated as either ‘deputyship’ or ‘vicarious representative action’. ‘Vicarious representative action’ is the better of the two, capturing the way the Stellvertreter (or vicarious representative) stands in for another. But Bonhoeffer’s soteriology was not one of ‘representation’ alone; it was, as we will see, substitutionary as well. I have taken the option of using the German word in most cases, unless I am quoting from the English critical edition. That way, my descriptions of Bonhoeffer’s use of Stellvertretung becomes the primary way of giving Stellvertretung its meaning, rather than the more limiting English attempts at translation.

\(^\text{155}\) DBW/E 1, 99/156. Emphasis in original.

\(^\text{156}\) Green, Sociality, pp. 55-58.

\(^\text{157}\) DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.

\(^\text{158}\) DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.
There are significant differences, for Bonhoeffer, between theological and ethical *Stellvertretung*. The first difference concerns what is borne. In theological *Stellvertretung*, Jesus ‘takes the sin of others upon himself, bearing ‘sin and punishment’ for others.’ In ethical *Stellvertretung*, a person can assume ‘evil in another person’s stead’ but this can only mean bearing the ‘consequences of sin’ but not the sin itself. A second difference has to do with degree. In theological *Stellvertretung*, Christ is ‘vicarious representative of our person as a whole, and thus we owe everything to him.’ This is not true in ethical *Stellvertretung*; when someone represents us ethically, ‘we do not put our ethical person as a whole at stake, but only as much as we owe.’ Both of these, however, point to their foundational difference: theological *Stellvertretung* is ‘an offer by God’, while ethical *Stellvertretung* ‘remains an act of human heroic love’. For Bonhoeffer, God bears our sin and punishment, representing our person as a whole; but a person can only bear the consequences of our sin, and can only represent us in a partial way. Put simply, God is at work redemptively as Christ in theological *Stellvertretung*, redeeming the whole person; while ethical *Stellvertretung* is partial, human work for another. It would seem, then, that Bonhoeffer thinks of friendship as a social relation characterised by human, rather than divine action for another.

There are good reasons, however, to think of friendship as social relation that is redemptive in the theological sense, and not limited to ethical *Stellvertretung*. To make such an argument, two things would have to be in place: firstly, theological *Stellvertretung* would need to be understood as something that can take place within a human social relation; secondly, theological *Stellvertretung* would not be concerned with the form of the social relation, but with the manner of Christ’s work. As to God’s work within a human relation, in Section 1 it was clear that Bonhoeffer does think that God can be active in friendship as *Gemeinschaft*; in Section 3, we saw that Bonhoeffer thinks that Christ can be active in a social relation, an activity that qualifies the social relation as *Einzelgemeinde* and therefore as part of the universal church. So we know Bonhoeffer thinks that God’s presence in a human relation is possible; to speak of friendship as a redemptive social relation would be a matter of defining this action on the more specific terms of *Stellvertretung*. As to form and function, simply to say that Bonhoeffer speaks of friendship in terms of ethical *Stellvertretung* is not

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159 DBW/E 1, 99/155-56.
160 DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.
161 DBW/E 1, 100/155.
162 DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.
163 DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.
164 DBW/E 1, 99/155-56.
165 DBW/E 1, 262/156 n17.
enough to disqualify friendship as a redemptive social relation. This would be to reduce Stellvertretung to relational form. But Stellvertretung is not a social form, it is a ‘function’ in Bonhoeffer’s terms, a way that God acts for others. And as we will see below, Bonhoeffer speaks of theological Stellvertretung in terms of social relation, and in terms of God’s work, in Christ, within that ecclesially located social relation. This makes Stellvertretung not a matter of relational form, but a mode of God’s action in Christ, for others, in the church.

This argument for Stellvertretung as a social mode of God’s redemptive work begins with the way Bonhoeffer describes theological Stellvertretung as something that, even though it is God’s work for others, takes place in the church. In his passage on the difference between ethical and theological Stellvertretung, Bonhoeffer writes: ‘vicarious representative action is […] possible only so long as it is offered by God; this means it is in force only in Christ and Christ’s church-community’.

Theological Stellvertretung is, therefore, not simply offered by God and in force in Christ, it is also in force in Christ’s Gemeinde.

This ecclesial Stellvertretung is understood in terms of God’s love that is shared in the church-community as a love taking place among and between human agents. As Bonhoeffer puts it, ‘since the love of God, in Christ’s vicarious representative action, restores the community between God and human beings, so the community of human beings with each other has also become a reality in love once again’. Green, Soosten, and Greggs see this as a love that has divine origin, but also as a love that is shared among the people of the church. For Green, with Christ as Stellverteiter, all of humanity has been brought into community with God; Soosten calls it a reconciling love between human beings that is not our own in the first place, but a manifestation of Christ’s own reconciling love; Greggs speaks in terms of mediation, but similarly says that for Bonhoeffer, Christ not only mediates between humans and God, but between human beings as well. As such, the reconciling love of Stellvertretung comes from without, and through this, loving community between God and human beings is restored, and through the restoration of community between God and human beings, community between human beings is restored as well.

This point about a divine love that takes place between human beings—yet a love not

167 DBW/E 1, 100/157. Emphasis in original.
168 Green, Sociality, p. 56.
169 Soosten, Die Sozialität Der Kirche, p. 269.
clearly two aspects of theological Stellvertretung. God’s love reconciles human beings to God, and human beings with one another; thus, God’s redeeming work of Stellvertretung is accomplished on our behalf, and yet takes place in Christ existing as Gemeinde; yet this does not make it, on account of it manifesting among human beings, a kind of ethical Stellvertretung. Bonhoeffer is willing to pursue the logic of God’s saving work in Christ existing as Gemeinde as God’s work because it is taking place in Christ’s body. For Soosten, the external context of this justification is, in this way, simultaneously the enabling foundation of the social act of church-community, in that the constitution of the church-community—God’s love in Stellvertretung—also aims for human participation in the Stellvertretung of Christ. There is a ‘double-relationship’. Thus, he identifies two Scriptural tropes in Bonhoeffer’s christological ecclesiology.\(^\text{171}\)

1. Stellvertretung extra nos. The first is the exclusive Stellvertretung that describes Christ and his work accomplished for us and on our behalf. This is a theological Stellvertretung that is conceptually governed by Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 4:15-16, where Christ is described as the head of a body. This is the work accomplished by Christ for the sake of others and whole communities. The primary example of this, following Israel’s remnant, is Christ’s own laying down of himself for the sake of all humanity as Stellvertreter.\(^\text{172}\) As Green points out, with Christ as Stellvertreter, all of humanity has been brought into community with God in a new humanity,\(^\text{173}\) a Christ whose “saving work is to transform the community of sin into the community of the Spirit of love.”\(^\text{174}\)

2. Stellvertretung in Christo. This type of theological Stellvertretung is conceptually governed by Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, where the body of Christ is described in its integrated wholeness. As Soosten puts it, interpreting Sanctorum Communio, the members of the body can, through this corporately oriented Stellvertretung, stand in for one another, and not as an ethical Stellvertreter, but with full soteriological significance of theological Stellvertretung.\(^\text{175}\)

Soosten’s point, as he explains Bonhoeffer’s distinction between the headship language and the body language of Paul, is that yes, Christ’s redeeming work is extra nos, accomplished by Christ and for all of humanity; but because in the church, human persons are in Christo, they can indeed bear one another’s sins and suffering not simply ethically, but

\(^{171}\) Soosten, Die Sozialität der Kirche, pp. 269-70.
\(^{172}\) DBW/E 1, 75/119-20.
\(^{173}\) Green, Sociality, p. 56.
\(^{174}\) Green, Sociality, p. 64.
\(^{175}\) Soosten, Die Sozialität der Kirche, pp. 269-70.
theologically and redemptively for one another.\textsuperscript{176} This makes \textit{Stellvertretung} something that takes place within social relations between human agents.

This \textit{Stellvertretung in Christo}—as a reconciling love that restores the community of the church, and is a love that is a manifestation of Christ’s own reconciling love, takes place in concrete practices of \textit{Stellvertretung}. Bonhoeffer describes them as acts for-one-another, \textit{Füreinander}, practices that are, for Bonhoeffer, the result of being with-one-another, \textit{Miteinander, in Christo}.

Bonhoeffer speaks not of the form of social relation (apart from the fact that it takes place in the \textit{Gemeinde}) but of the way persons act for one another within the sociality of the \textit{Gemeinde}; and the way human agents act for one another, in theological \textit{Stellvertretung}, are as follows:

1. \textit{Self-renouncing love for the neighbour}. The first act of love is self-renouncing work for the neighbour, where a person is called to advocate for another in particular ways in everyday matters, giving up possessions, honour, and under some circumstances, whole lives. For Bonhoeffer, this may mean giving up community with God, taking on God’s wrath in order that others may have community with God; this is theological, not ethical \textit{Stellvertretung}, because a person takes the place of another as their substitute, as Christ does.\textsuperscript{178} This act of love is, through Bonhoeffer’s underdetermination of ‘neighbour’, an act that can be for another who is not necessarily ecclesially situated.

2. \textit{Intercessory prayer}. The second act of love is intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer, for Bonhoeffer, is an ecclesially situated kind of \textit{Stellvertretung}, and another that reaches beyond the \textit{Gemeinde} itself; it is transgressive of this boundary between \textit{Gemeinde} and the world outside \textit{Gemeinde} because it ‘potentially draws the one for whom it is offered into the church-community’.\textsuperscript{179} (I will return to \textit{Stellvertretung} as both ecclesially located, and reaching beyond the \textit{Gemeinde}, in the conclusion to the chapter.) It is also theological \textit{Stellvertretung} because when a person prays for another, they enter into their particular sin and affliction, and as such, bear those afflictions as Christ: ‘[i]n our intercession we can become a Christ to our neighbor’.\textsuperscript{180} (Bonhoeffer even makes here a nominal connection to

\textsuperscript{176} Soosten, \textit{Die Sozialität der Kirche}, pp. 269-70.

\textsuperscript{177} DBW/E 1, 117/178; see also Guido de Graaff, ‘Intercession as Political Ministry: Re-Interpreting the Priesthood of All Believers’, \textit{Modern Theology}, 32 (2016), pp. 504-521 (pp. 8-9).

\textsuperscript{178} DBW/E 1, 121-22/184 and 128/191.

\textsuperscript{179} DBW/E 1, 123-24/186; see also DBW/E 1, 126/188-89 and 128/191.

\textsuperscript{180} DBW/E 1, 125/187. De Graaff writes: ‘once the priority of Christ’s intercession has been firmly established (and our belonging together in Christ’s body), Bonhoeffer allows himself to entertain forms of Christian ministry that are modelled on Christ’s intercession.’ But ‘modelled’ is not the right word here; for Bonhoeffer, ecclesially located theological \textit{Stellvertretung} is to redeem and intercede \textit{as} Christ, rather than \textit{like} Christ. De Graaff,
friendship, saying that the sins of the unknown person, when we pray for them, ‘afflict me no less than those of a closest friend’). Bonhoeffer is clear that what he is speaking of is not ethical Stellvertretung, but theological Stellvertretung, because in intercession, we become Christ for a neighbour as Gemeinde, and as a member of the Gemeinde; this ‘does not compel God, but, if God does the final work, then one member of the community can redeem another, in the power of the church’. 

3. Mutual forgiveness of sin in God’s name. The third act of love is the mutual forgiveness of sins in God’s name. Again, Bonhoeffer describes this in the terms of theological, not ethical Stellvertretung. We forgive one another’s particular sins, as ‘the person who takes them upon himself, bears them, and wipes them out’. But in this ecclesial forgiving of sins, as the person bears them, they do so as the Christ takes them upon himself and ‘bears them’. Thus, even as we forgive one another, it is ‘only Christ [who] can do it, which for us means his church as the sanctorum communio’.

4. Repentance. Bonhoeffer does not refer to repentance where he writes about Stellvertretung as ‘acts of love’. But in his section on the empirical church, he speaks of repentance in terms that make it appropriate to include here. Repentance, for Bonhoeffer, is something that, like the three ‘acts of love’ listed above, can be done for others, including a whole community of people: ‘[i]n the church, as in any other community, people repent both for their own sin and that of the collective person of the community’. And revisiting his distinction between ethical and theological Stellvertretung, and the distinction about form and function in the empirical church, Bonhoeffer asks, ‘is this collective person perhaps “Christ existing as church-community”, the body of Christ?’ The answer, for Bonhoeffer, is yes, but ‘[o]nly insofar as God’s own self is at work in the act of repentance’. These acts of love and repentance are each a way of acting as Christ, and as a person ‘standing in as a substitute for [one’s] neighbor’. This is another double Stellvertretung, in addition to the double Stellvertretung of Christ that is accomplished by him extra nos and with him in Christo. In the acts of reconciling love, a person stands in for the neighbour as a substitute through self-renouncing love, intercession, in bearing sins, and in repentance. But it

‘Intercession as Political Ministry’, p. 9.

181 DBW/E 1, 124/187.
182 DBW/E 1, 125/187.
183 DBW/E 1, 121-22/184, 128/191.
184 DBW/E 1, 126/189.
185 DBW/E 1, 126/189.
186 DBW/E 1, 126/189.
187 DBW/E 1, 144/214.
188 DBW/E 1, 144/214.
189 DBW/E 1, 121-22/184. Emphasis in original.
is also Christ’s *Stellvertretung*: we renounce ourselves for our neighbour as Christ, bearing their afflictions in prayer as Christ, forgiving and bearing their sins as Christ. These acts are necessarily located in the church-community, and as such, Bonhoeffer consistently refers to the *Gemeinde* as necessary for *Stellvertretung*. But as a practice, *Stellvertretung* is nevertheless taken up within the body by the actions of specific persons who act, pray, forgive, and repent for others. Bonhoeffer does not imagine, here, any competition between divine soteriological agency and human action. For Bonhoeffer, if we are in Christ, we act for others in the church as Christ, and in four easily identifiable concrete acts.

For Bonhoeffer, then, friendship as a redemptive social practice is a possibility, under certain conditions. Ethical *Stellvertretung*, taking place under the power of the person, is clearly described in terms of friendship, but this is not an exclusive claim. Though Bonhoeffer’s preferred designation of the person for whom one acts in theological *Stellvertretung* is neighbour, not friend, the identification of the friend as ethical *Stellvertreter* is only necessary insofar as it is unclear whether the friend is acting in the church for the friend as Christ. But I have already argued that friendship should be considered alongside marriage as a form of the body of Christ if God’s work is taking place in it, and even more clearly that Bonhoeffer thinks of friendship as *Gemeinschaft* and therefore as where God is at work in its eschatological grounding in God. Here, again, it is not a question of form. As I have already shown, there are distinct kinds of social relation that subsist in the church as intermediate forms of the body of Christ and where God is at work. Similarly, what makes ecclesial *Stellvertretung* theological is much the same as that which makes a social relation the body of Christ: it is where Christ is at work. Thus the form of relation—friendship—is not what determines the relation as ethical or theological. What determines *Stellvertretung* as theological is God’s work in Christ, as *Stellvertreter*, taking place in the context of human action for others in the church, and seen in acts of love and repentance. Therefore, friendship is not categorically excluded from theological *Stellvertretung*, opening the possibility of friendship as a redemptive social practice, if one were to find evidence of Bonhoeffer’s acts of love and repentance taking place within it. This leads to the conclusion that Bonhoeffer’s use of neighbour, rather than friend, is not on account of categorical exclusion of friendship from theological *Stellvertretung* (as we might think if we allowed Bonhoeffer’s textual association between friendship and ethical *Stellvertretung* to govern the argument); and that friendship, on Bonhoeffer’s terms, is not necessarily only ethical. Friendship can be a redemptive social relation if we were to identify these practices within it.

Further, *Stellvertretung*—the way Bonhoeffer describes how Christ is encountered in others—is one of the ways in which a community like friendship can experience, in the
present, proleptic restoration. Thus what Bonhoeffer says about friendship being eschatologically grounded in God becomes more fully explained and determined. Friendship is lasting, in the present, not because it is immune to sin and not subject to the effects of sin, but because it can be restored in the practices of Stellvertretung that make Christ present to another, and where its eternal, eschatological form is therefore experienced proleptically in self-giving acts of love, intercession, mutual forgiveness of sins and repentance.

Finally, the ecclesial location of this Stellvertretung can, in the case of intercessory prayer, be one that reaches across the boundary of the Gemeinde, bringing the one for whom one prays more deeply into the Gemeinde. Bonhoeffer thinks that God’s work for others restores human relationship with God and among people within the church; but here, in his description of intercession, Bonhoeffer describes this form of reconciling love among human persons as incorporative, restoring or bringing others into the human sociality of the church. This will be revisited in the conclusion, as it will be significant for the question of the limits of friendship which will be addressed in Chapter 3, and the possibilities for friendship addressed in Chapter 4.

There is, however, one more thing to be said about friendship’s relation to redemption, and how the friend can act as Christ for the friend: for Bonhoeffer, this Stellvertretung can be for the whole of a community, opening up the possibility that friendship—through this ecclesially located practice of Stellvertretung—has significance beyond itself. This leads, as we will see, to the possibility that a friendship can reach beyond itself for the sake of others.

2.5 FRIENDSHIP FOR OTHERS

In Section 4, I described Bonhoeffer’s practice of Stellvertretung as acting as Christ for others in the church; this acting for others, however, is not necessarily limited to acting for just one person. For Bonhoeffer, the sin that has come between persons is redressed on a social level through repentance, a Stellvertretung that is a way of acting for others corporately. As I pointed out there, repentance is a form of theological Stellvertretung for Bonhoeffer, in that ‘God’s own self is at work in the act of repentance’.190 For Bonhoeffer, when one person repents ‘[i]n the church, as in any other community, people repent both for their own sin and that of the collective person of the community’.191 This repentance is not for the sake of a single person; in repentance, the collective person as a whole ‘hears, repents, and believes’:

190 DBW/E 1, 144/214.
191 DBW/E 1, 144/214.
The community that is [...] willed and created and has become culpable; it must seek repentance, believe in and experience justification and sanctification, and experience judgment and grace at the limits of time. [...] [it is] the whole community that, in the individuals, hears, repents, and believes.¹⁹²

So for Bonhoeffer, repentance as theological Stellvertretung is a way that a person acts for others in a corporate way, where the repentance of one person is the repentance of the whole Gemeinschaft or Gemeinde.

In his discussion of Stellvertretung in Sanctorum Communio, Soosten writes that the implication of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Stellvertretung is that members can act as Stellvertreter for other parts of the body;¹⁹³ in this way, Soosten sees Stellvertretung as work undertaken for the sake of others in the church, a subject I covered above in Section 4. Greggs, however, pushes this in a different direction, following the logic of Bonhoeffer’s remarks on repentance and Stellvertretung above; for Greggs, there is an ‘internal ordering’ of the church that is employed by Bonhoeffer to understand the relationship between the church and the world in terms of the church’s corporate priestliness. Greggs, making this argument with the resources provided by Sanctorum Communio, sees Christ acting in the church as Kollektivperson for the world, saying that ‘[i]n this, a priestly relation of the church to the world can be identified: Christ’s priesthood extends not to individuals—not even to the sum of all individuals as in Luther—but to the church as a body; the church is the priest of the world’.¹⁹⁴ Greggs, then, does not limit corporate action simply to repentance; Stellvertretung itself has this kind of character of corporate acting for others. So for Soosten, a member of the church can act for another; and for Greggs, the church, in its corporate form, acts for the world.

What both Soosten and Greggs overlook is the significance of the intermediary nature of the Einzelgemeinde, which makes the way persons act for others in the church and for the world much more complex. For Bonhoeffer, the body of Christ can subsist in the universal church as a whole, as Einzelgemeinde. Following Soosten’s claim that a person can act for others in the church, and Gregg’s claim that the church as a collective person can act for the world, I would simply add that, for Bonhoeffer, communities like friendships are Einzelgemeinden as well, and collective persons. In this way, a friendship—as Einzelgemeinden and collective persons—can act for others in the church (as Soosten suggests, though limiting himself to the member of the church) and for the world (as Greggs suggests, though limiting himself to church acting as a single collective person for the world).

¹⁹² DBW/E 1, 75/119.
¹⁹³ Soosten, Die Sozialität der Kirche, p. 270.
In this way, a friendship in which acts of love and repentance take place is a social unit that acts as a unity in those acts of love and repentance; this friendship, as collective person, can in turn act for the whole of the church and for the world. Thus not only the individual members, or the church as a whole, can act for others as Christ. *Einzelgemeinden*, as collective persons and the body of Christ—including the ‘two or three gathered’ of friendship—can act for others, for the sake of the whole of the *Gemeinde*, and for the sake of the world.

Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology, then, as one in which a person acts for others, and in which persons can be collective, leads to the possibility of a collective person—like friendship—acting for others. A repentant friendship can repent for the church; a friendship in which theological *Stellvertretung* takes place can in turn act for the world. Friendship, in this way, is more than a private good whose benefits are shared only between friends. A lasting friendship, in which acts of love and repentance are taking place, has significance for the church as a whole, and for the world as well. Friendship itself, in this way, is a shared ecclesial and political good.

How this might be true is underdetermined here, on account of the conceptual difficulty of describing how a friendship, as opposed to a friend, might act for others through self-renouncing love, repentance, intercession, or forgiveness. I would only point out that *Stellvertretung* in friendship—conceptually, at this point—is open to what lies beyond it, a possibility that will be investigated in the chapters that follow.

2.6 CONCLUSION

To summarise the findings of this chapter, Bonhoeffer’s understanding of community, eschatology, the empirical church, and *Stellvertretung*—and friendship’s relation to each of these—leads to a theology of friendship as an *enduring* social relation, which under certain conditions can be understood as *redemptive* and for others:

1. Friendship *endures*: Bonhoeffer’s thinking on eschatology, and its part in Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship, begins with friendship as *Gemeinschaft*. As a form of *Gemeinschaft*, for Bonhoeffer, friendship is not limited by historical purpose; the implication of this lack of historical limitation makes a friendship, for Bonhoeffer, open to purposes beyond itself, and thus eschatologically grounded in God and open to God’s purposes. To say that a friendship is enduring or lasting, however, is not to say that friendship necessarily endures uninterruptedly in the present. This is because a friendship, as *Gemeinschaft* in its present form, is subject to the disruption of sin. But Bonhoeffer’s dogmatic structure leads to additional, eschatological dimensions to *Gemeinschaft*: friendship’s eschatological grounding
in God, as a collective person subject to judgment and open to eternal life, means that the disruption of sin in the present is overcome through an eschatological foretaste of sociality in its sanctified form. This prolepsis takes place when one encounters another as Christ in Gemeinde and in a friendship as a type of Einzelgemeinde; through this prolepsis, community is restored.

Bonhoeffer’s eschatology, as it takes form in a sharp distinction between Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft, is not without its problems. For Bonhoeffer, Gemeinschaft is an end in itself and therefore open to God’s purposes, and Gesellschaft is determined by its utility in the present; but it’s not clear why these are mutually exclusive categories. Why can a sociological phenomenon not be of utility in the present, and open to God’s eschatological end? As we will see in the next chapter, Bonhoeffer’s own understanding of this changes in his theology of the ‘orders of preservation’, where certain social phenomena can be of present utility, and open to new creation in Christ.

2. Friendship can be redemptive: For friendship to be a redemptive social form, it must be ecclesially located, because for Bonhoeffer, redemption is something that happens in Gemeinde, in Christ. Friendship, for Bonhoeffer, can be an ecclesial social relation within the church, as an Einzelgemeinde of two or three gathered together, if Christ is active in it. Its number—how many persons are in the social unit—does not matter, for Bonhoeffer, any more than its form: a marriage is an example of Einzelgemeinde, despite its number, so long as Christ is at work in it; so friendship, too, as the ‘two or three gathered’ in which Christ is present, is another candidate for Einzelgemeinde, an instantiation of the body of Christ within the whole body of the universal church. This is not to say that a friendship is the empirical church, though it is to say that on Bonhoeffer’s terms, a friendship can be considered the body of Christ and part of the universal church, if Christ is at work within it.

One of the ways Bonhoeffer speaks of Christ’s work, specifically in the church, is Stellvertretung. Though Bonhoeffer speaks of friendship as ethical Stellvertretung, and as something that takes place under the power of the person, this is not an exclusive claim. The identification of the friend as ethical Stellvertreter is only necessary insofar as it is unclear whether the friend is acting in the church for the friend as Christ. But friendship, as Gemeinschaft, is a social relation in which God is at work through its eschatological grounding in God; so we know that friendship, for Bonhoeffer, can be a social relation in which God is at work. And friendship, alongside marriage, can be the body of Christ if Christ’s work is taking place in it; so friendship can be, in this way, ecclesially located as well. To say that friendship can be a redemptive social relation is simply a step toward speaking more specifically about the nature of God’s work in this ecclesially located social
relation; this is not a step beyond ethics, but a step into an ethics in which God is active in Christ as *Stellvertreter*, an ethics in which human and divine soteriological agency are not in conflict with one another. Friendship, then, is not necessarily excluded from being a redemptive social relation; it would qualify as a redemptive social relation if theological *Stellvertretung* were to be found taking place within it.

That friendship is a redemptive social relation is central to the ongoing argument of this thesis. In the way that human persons in the church can redeem others as Christ means that human and divine soteriological agency are not in competition; more will be said about this in Chapter 5. Also in Chapter 5, the significance of acts of love and repentance for Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge will be looked at closely; but before that, in Chapter 3, the significance of their absence in the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Helmut Rößler will lead to some conclusions about their relation to friendship’s resilience: if Christ is not present through acts of love and repentance, the proleptic reparation of friendship becomes a limited possibility.

3. Friendship can be *for others*: One of the conclusions that can be drawn from Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology—as an ecclesiology in which a person acts for others, and in which persons can be collective—leads to the possibility that a collective person, like friendship, can act for others. A collective person such as a friendship, in this way, can repent for the church; and a friendship in which theological *Stellvertretung* takes place can, in turn, act as a collective person for the world. This moves in two directions. First, a friendship is for others in that it can take the place of others for their sake; the collective person, in this case, is *Stellvertreter*. Secondly, this makes friendship more than a private good whose benefits are shared only between friends; a friendship could be for others, in this way, in that it is not simply for itself. It is as a social relation with significance for the political and social world in which the friendship is found. This will be an important distinction as the thesis moves forward.

How friendship might have significance beyond its internal goods will become clearer in the rest of the thesis. In Chapter 4, Bonhoeffer’s theology of the *Spielraum* will be described as a way that friendship has significance for the whole of social and political life; In Chapter 5, the significance of Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge for the political and social life in which the friendship finds itself will be seen in friendship’s part in the conspiracy to kill Hitler, and then after Bonhoeffer’s death, when the friendship between them becomes part of Bethge’s claim for understanding Bonhoeffer, and for articulating Bonhoeffer in new post-war contexts. Before we turn to those subjects, however, Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Helmut Rößler will reveal that Bonhoeffer was already, in the early 1930s, assuming that friendship
had political dimensions and was a consideration for the larger ecclesial-political conflicts faced in the Church Struggle.

Before I move to those chapters, there are some other theological threads and problems that are beginning to show themselves, and are worth mentioning here, as they will inform the shape of the rest of the thesis as a whole. The first has to do with the practices of the church as they relate to the world in which the church is situated. There will be much more to be said about the boundary between the church and the world in which the church is situated, and how this boundary ought to be understood; at this juncture, however, I would simply point out that already, in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer is thinking of intercessory prayer as a practice that can bring the one prayed for more deeply into the *Gemeinde*, thus opening up the possibility that the church can have practices that reach across the boundary between the church and the world; and that self-offering, too, is something that can be done for another, no matter the boundary of church and world.

The second has to do with the way that theological *Stellvertretung*, in its ecclesial practice, is a practice that is mutual and reciprocal, and particular. In the Introduction, I suggested that there are a number of ways that friendship has been understood, and though Bonhoeffer himself does not appear to engage with this literature, there are features of his theology that offer limited engagement with it. One of them is the way universal love relates to particular loves, with particular love being most closely related to friendship-love; another was friendship-love as mutual.

In this chapter, Christ’s accomplished work of *Stellvertretung* is described in general terms by Bonhoeffer, in the way Christ’s *Stellvertretung* is for the sake of the whole of humanity: *Stellvertretung extra nos* is accomplished in a general way for the sake of humankind. But this *Stellvertretung extra nos* is necessary for the possibility of ecclesial *Stellvertretung*; and *Stellvertretung in Christo*—leaving aside repentance—is particular, and even partial, in that it is an act that is not always for a corporate other, but for a neighbour or friend. As self-renouncing love, it is a love that takes into account the specific needs of a particular neighbour; as intercessory prayer, it is prayer for a particular neighbour’s afflictions; as forgiveness of sin, it is the forgiveness of particular person’s sins with the expectation, in this case, that your sins will be forgiven as well.

But friendship-love—as a mutual and a particular love—has led theologians such as Meilaender (by way of Augustine) to consider it to be inferior to a love that is universal. What Bonhoeffer offers here, however, is twofold. First, Bonhoeffer does not place particular acts of love for particular others within a hierarchy of value where the love of a particular person is considered a lesser love, or as preparatory for the love of all others. It is possible that
Bonhoeffer is wrong in not identifying this as a conflict, and that a particular love is necessarily preferential. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer, here, does not treat this kind of particular love as lesser love than divine and universal love, or a kind of love that is preparatory; instead, he treats particular acts of love for particular persons as an appropriate creaturely expression of Christ’s love for all, and a love in which Christ is at work for others in particular ways.

Secondly, in the case of mutual forgiveness of sins, the hope and expectation that one will be loved in return—through the mutuality of such acts—does not makes these acts at odds with loving another for their own sake, or as a way of forsaking love as duty. Instead, particular acts of love for a particular person are not necessarily part of an economy of debt or exchange, because they are acts of love in which a person acts as Christ for another; and if it is God who acts, as Bonhoeffer puts it, an act of love ‘does not compel God, but, if God does the final work, then one member of the community can redeem another, in the power of the church’. So even as it is described as a love that is mutual, it is not a love in which God can be compelled, in another as Christ, to reciprocate; in this sense, mutuality would be the free offering of oneself in Christ to another, as another does so for you.

Thus, through particularity and mutuality as part of the conceptual construal of friendship-love, and particularity and mutuality as they relate to *Stellvertretung*. *Stellvertretung* has a natural, though critical, place in the context of friendship. *Stellvertretung*, in friendship, would be a way for particularity to be understood as an appropriate creaturely instantiation of Christ’s love of all, and where mutuality would be hoped for; but because God is not compelled, this love would be offered freely. We will return to the question of whether *Stellvertretung* is possible in friendship when we look at Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge. But before we turn to that possibility, we will turn to the friendship that preceded Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge—Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Helmut Rößler—where a very different kind of relationship will reveal the dialogical and political possibilities of friendship.

\[195\] DBW/E 1, 125/187.
You know, of course, that over here people are losing many of their friends, often in the most shocking ways, but certainly also finding new friendships. In the past year, I have lost many people who were important in my life, but in the struggle of the churches I have also found a community again, one which is unbreakable from a human viewpoint. Its shape is becoming ever clearer, even now. The only concern is to know, before night comes, who is a friend and who is not [...] I can tell you one thing: more important than any insight, than anything to do with your fundamental beliefs, is to have people in your life with whom you share convictions.

Bonhoeffer wrote these words from Finkenwalde in March of 1936, a time and place where new friendships were beginning to take form. But the Church Struggle, by this time, had already taken a personal toll on Bonhoeffer; friendships may have been gained at Finkenwalde, but friendships had been lost as well. One of the lost friendships Bonhoeffer is referring to here was with Helmut Rößler, a friendship that began at least as early as 1926.

Before the end of the friendship, however, the Rößler correspondence captures a theological conversation in the form of twelve letters shared between 1928 and 1934. And while Bonhoeffer had other friends who acted as theological interlocutors, the Rößler correspondence captures something unique: a theologically substantive set of letters where the writers addressed one another as friends, and engaged in conversation about friendship and its limits. But it was not a friendship easily recognisable on the basis of what was said about friendship in Sanctorum Communio, in that the friendship neither endures nor does it have recourse to acts of love and repentance that would provide the friendship some resilience. But the intention, here, is not to provide an example of friendship as described in Sanctorum Communio. Instead, in describing a friendship that was both dialogical, and one in which convictions about a political-ecclesial environment are shared, this correspondence adds to what was already discovered in Sanctorum Communio.

The most thorough treatment of Rößler’s significance to Bonhoeffer is given by Bethge in his biography, where he calls Rößler one of Bonhoeffer’s friends while Bonhoeffer was lecturing in Berlin in 1929-30, but Bethge does not say much about the nature of the friendship, Rößler’s political leanings, or much about what their conversation reveals about Bonhoeffer’s theological development. The limited attention given to Rößler was

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196 DBWE 14:1/69a, 163.
197 DBW/E 10:1/40, 90/126 n2.
198 For a detailed survey of other sets of correspondence, see the Appendix, where I outline the uniqueness of the Bonhoeffer-Rößler correspondence in relation to other sets of correspondence.
199 Bethge, Bonhoeffer: A Biography, p. 137.
characteristic of Bethge’s treatment of living figures; Bethge said very little, for example, about the unsavoury military decisions and Nationalist Socialist company kept by the Commandant of Berlin, Paul von Hase, Bonhoeffer’s cousin. Bethge is similarly discrete about Rößler and his political past; Rößler had survived denazification, and at the time of Bethge’s writing of the biography was a living figure and prominent churchman. So in Bethge’s references to the Bonhoeffer-Rößler letters, he treats the correspondence outside the immediate context of the arguments between Bonhoeffer and Rößler, and as part of his own arguments or biographical descriptions about things other than Rößler and the friendship. This includes Bonhoeffer’s one-time ‘disinterestedness’ in politics; to give context to the fanaticism of the German countryside in 1931, a fanaticism that Bonhoeffer described to friends in New York by reading his letter from Rößler, or to bring some clarity to an argument Bonhoeffer had with Barth about concrete commandments. Marsh, Schlingensiepen, and Moses follow the same pattern, using the correspondence between Rößler and Bonhoeffer to make a point in an argument about Bonhoeffer’s theological development or to add biographical details to Bonhoeffer’s life, but apart from the context of Rößler as interlocutor. Similarly, De Graaff does not look at the Rößler correspondence in order to make his argument about the connection between politics and friendship for Bonhoeffer.

But when one looks at the Bonhoeffer-Rößler correspondence as a whole—as a theological conversation and political argument, between friends, about the German nationalism and the Church Struggle—there is a great deal to be learned about Bonhoeffer’s life and theology as they relate to ethics, politics, ecclesiology, eschatology, concrete commandments, and the personal toll of the Kirchenkampf. Each of these subjects will be covered here through the lens of friendship, because one of the benefits of an investigation

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201 Rößler was a member of the governing church council in the Rhineland from 1948-68, and died in 1982; see DBWE 11, 587.


205 Marsh, *Strange Glory*, pp. 82, 97, 100, 111, 124-25, 144, 418.


208 In de Graaff, *Politics in Friendship*. 
into this friendship—as dialogical and embedded in the political tumult of its time—is a more nuanced appraisal of Bonhoeffer’s theological development, as he moves away from a naïve nationalism and toward a critical and Christologically-centred political ethics. Despite the fact that, as I will show, this movement takes place in reaction to Rößler, there is no other detailed investigation into the way Rößler influenced Bonhoeffer’s theology through their friendship.

Alongside the theological material found in Bonhoeffer’s addresses in Barcelona (DBW/E 10:2/3, 8 February 1929) and Czechoslovakia (DBW/E 11:2/14, delivered on 26 July 1932), the central resource for this investigation into the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship is their correspondence. It takes place over three distinct periods.

**Period 1.** In the first period, the letters share personal and family news and pastoral concerns. Rößler was in Brandenburg, and Bonhoeffer wrote from Barcelona, Berlin, and New York. All the letters are from Bonhoeffer. Organised chronologically, we have one letter written by Bonhoeffer from Barcelona (DBW/E 10:1/40, 7 August 1928); five letters written by Bonhoeffer from Berlin (DBW/E 10:1/78, 5 April 1929; DBW/E 10:1/79, 7 April 1929; DBW/E 10:1/106, 23 February 1930; DBW/E 10:1/119, 24 June 1930; DBW/E 10:1/148, 24 June 1930); and one letter written by Bonhoeffer from New York (DBW/E 10:1/148, 11 December 1930). Topics covered in the letters include the challenges of being a pastor (DBW/E 10:1/40); family news about marriages, deaths and births (DBW/E 10:1/78, DBW/E 10:1/79, DBW/E 10:1/106); and plans to see one another in person (DBW/E 10:1/106, DBW/E 10:1/119). The theological content of the letters centres around what Bonhoeffer was reading.

**Period 2.** During the second period, the conversation becomes more theologically substantial, and the friendship is revealed to be under strain. Rößler was still in Brandenburg; Bonhoeffer was in New York and Berlin. Organised chronologically and topically, the exchange begins with a detailed theological reflection by Rößler on eschatology, nationalist sentiment, and parish life in Brandenburg, written to Bonhoeffer in New York (DBW/E 10:1/164, 22 February 1931); Bonhoeffer continues a conversation about India, begun by Rößler in 10:1/164, in a brief response from Berlin (DBW/E 11:1/14, 18 October 1931); in a more substantial theological letter, responding to a letter from Rößler (not extant) about the published version of the lecture given by Bonhoeffer in Czechoslovakia, in which he spoke of the concrete commandment, Bonhoeffer picks up the topics of eschatology from DBW/E 10:1/164 and concrete commandments from the lecture (DBW/E 12:1/22, 25 December 1932, also written from Berlin).

**Period 3.** The third and final period of correspondence takes place while Bonhoeffer was a pastor in London and Rößler was a pastor in Holland; this period marks the end of the
friendship. The letters revolve around the relation between the German churches abroad, the Confessing Church, and the Reich Church. Organised chronologically and topically, it begins with a letter from Rößler to the German Evangelical Pastors Abroad, including Bonhoeffer, giving reasons why the German churches outside Germany ought not side with the Confessing Church (DBW/E 13:1/168, 16 November 1934); Bonhoeffer responds with a personal letter to Rößler saying that siding with the Reich Church was the wrong path, and accusing Rößler of complicity with the Reich Church (DBW/E 13:1/172, 20 November 1934); the final letter in this period, and the last between Bonhoeffer and Rößler, was written by Rößler to defend his position and to make an argument for their continued friendship, despite their divide (DBW/E 13:1/181, 6 December 1934).

What we will see, through these three periods of correspondence, is that for Bonhoeffer, there are limits to friendship: a friendship can dissolve and end. The reason for the dissolution of this friendship, however, was not theological disagreement. Both Bonhoeffer and Rößler share eschatology, for example, as an integral part of theological inquiry, though they do disagree about its meaning. This disagreement, on its own, did not lead to the dissolution of the friendship because friendship, for Bonhoeffer, can include theological debate and argument. (In fact, we will see that theological debate and argument between friends is part of the way Bonhoeffer thinks through his positions and claims.) There is disagreement, however, that is unbearable for Bonhoeffer, and in this instance, it centres around the character of God’s action in the world, and in the way God, through the church, speaks to the world. As we will see, digging deeply into the theological disagreement about eschatology yields that the failure of this friendship is related to the possibility, and the specific content, of the concrete commandment. For Bonhoeffer, the church can speak a divine command to the world, and call it to repentance; but Rößler’s theology is politically optimistic, and sees no room for this kind of divine command. The friendship can bear disagreement and discussion about the possibility of a divine command, but when it becomes clear to Bonhoeffer that Rößler does not hear the concrete ‘No’ to National Socialism, the friendship becomes impossible. In the end, what was central to the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Rößler was its dialogical nature, but dialogue, and even mutual theological influence, is not enough—from Bonhoeffer’s perspective—to sustain a friendship once political commitments diverge, and once a friend is no longer sharing the same ecclesiastical space.
As I argued in the first chapter, *Sanctorum Communio* describes friendship as lasting; this friendship, however, does not last. If it did not last, can we call it a friendship, in Bonhoeffer’s terms? If so, what kind of a friendship was it? What we will see is that both Bonhoeffer and Rößler described the relationship as a friendship, and as such, the relationship provides a concrete example of a friendship in practice. The correspondence also shows intimacy and affection, and that theological argument and conversation were important to them, though intimacy, affection, argument and conversation were unable, on their own, to sustain the friendship itself.

The friendship began early in Bonhoeffer and Rößler’s time as theological students at the University of Berlin. The two were close enough that Rößler took a vacation with Bonhoeffer and Walter Dreß, staying together with the Bonhoeffers at Friedrichsbrunn in the spring of 1927, a visit that Rößler would remember fondly. In December of that same year, Rößler was one of Bonhoeffer’s opponents at the public defence of his first doctoral thesis.

The letters are marked by a warmth and affection that is not found in all of Bonhoeffer’s correspondence. Bonhoeffer writes about his concern for the wellbeing of Rößler and his family, and his gladness and pleasure in their correspondence. The letters contain personal reflections on the joys and struggles of ministry. Bonhoeffer is even unusually candid with Rößler about his struggle with a depressive episode in New York. Bonhoeffer consistently expresses regret over missed opportunities for them to see one another and the hope that they see one another soon.

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209 Bethge sees evidence of the friendship while Bonhoeffer was lecturing in Berlin in 1929-30; see Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, p. 137. There is earlier evidence for the friendship, however, in a letter dated 8 February 1926, where Bonhoeffer sends Rößler’s regards to Walter Dreß, found in German in DBW 17, 22-23, and in English in DBWE 9:1/94a, 152.
210 DBW/E 9:1/100, 169/167.
213 DBW/E 10:1/40, 90/126.
214 DBW/E 10:1/106, 169-70/204-05.
216 DBW/E 10:1/40, 90-91/127.
This was more than epistolary pleasantry. While the letters are marked by the formal use of *Sie* rather than *du*, Bonhoeffer nevertheless calls Rößler’s correspondence ‘freundschaftlicher’ and sends his regards ‘in alter Freundschaft’ and ‘In herzlicher Freundschaft’; addresses Rößler as ‘Freund’ and writes that he is often with Rößler in his ‘thoughts, as is a friend with a friend’ (‘wie ein Freund beim Freund’). Rößler calls Bonhoeffer ‘Freund’ as well. And, when we look to Bonhoeffer’s correspondence more generally, we see that ‘friend’ is a descriptor that Bonhoeffer reserves for a limited number of people, such as Bethge. Bonhoeffer is judicious in his use of titles and relational terms, and is aware of fine degrees of relational differentiation. As I argue elsewhere in this thesis, for example, his use of ‘brother’ is reserved for people with whom he has a particular, disciplined, and ecclesiastically ordered relationship. Bonhoeffer is equally judicious with the terms ‘friend’ and ‘friendship’. It is a term Bonhoeffer uses sparingly and intentionally; he uses it for Rößler.

In addition to the affection they felt toward one another, it was also a friendship that included theological dialogue and conversation. Rößler, writing about this combination of theological dialogue and personal affection, says:

[The] infrequency of our correspondence is remarkable compared to the intensity of our mutual intellectual engagement. In any case, I often think intensely of you—quite involuntarily, wondering what your opinion might be on this or that topic of event. And sometimes Friedrichsbrunn hovers over me like a smiling, melancholy reflection with those few precious days in 1927. Your *Sanctorum Communio* doubtless contributes to that feeling, a book I have read halfway through with great engagement and joy in your accomplishment, even though the unfinished character of your thoughts does sometimes seem quite tangible. […] I am glad to be reading it for the sake of our own dialogue.

And just as Bonhoeffer’s work was read closely by Rößler, Bonhoeffer took Rößler’s theological work seriously as well. Rößler’s theological letters were evocative enough that Bonhoeffer read one of them to his American friends in New York, a letter that, as

222 DBW/E 11:1/14, 34/55.
223 DBW/E 11:1/14, 32/54.
224 DBW/E 10:1/78, 140/179.
226 See the Appendix for examples of Bonhoeffer’s judicious and limited use of the term ‘friend’.
Bonhoeffer puts it, ‘riveted my attention and occupied me like nothing else. When you wrote me then, what you said about your work stayed with me for a long time’.  

Bonhoeffer’s dialogue with Rößler included not just conversation, but disagreement. In his last letter to Rößler, Bonhoeffer begins by saying that they are both ‘once again, on opposite sides of an issue’. Even though Bonhoeffer’s arguments with Rößler tended toward attempts to find common ground rather than the cultivation of opposition, it could, nevertheless, include unresolved theological arguments. This was not unusual for Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Franz Hildebrandt, for example, included two longstanding disputes, each of them criticising the other over the use of sources. And, as we will see later in the thesis, Bonhoeffer had disagreements with Bethge as well, many of which influenced Bonhoeffer’s own theological development, and which Bonhoeffer held as essential to the character of their friendship.

In 1932, however, both Bonhoeffer and Rößler were beginning to wonder if the friendship was sustainable. Cracks in the friendship’s foundation begin to appear in a Christmas letter that year; again, lamenting the fact that they had been apart for so long, Bonhoeffer writes to Rößler, describing his joy at receiving Rößler’s letter:

> All the years we have been apart seemed to vanish in an instant, and it was as if we stood face to face or side by side, as we did in our student years and occasionally on the tennis court. It’s quite remarkable how a few words have the power to make the years disappear. […] I would like so much to talk through the whole complex of questions [about concrete commandments] with you[…]. […] In our discussions, I have always felt that we lost no time on arriving at something that was a burning issue for one of us. This has made our conversations especially worthwhile.

But in the letter, Bonhoeffer was beginning to recognise that he and Rößler were ‘differently constituted spiritually’ and suggested that Rößler may be right to say, as he had in a previous letter, that they were ‘bound to go separate ways’. Theological conversation and personal affection are still in play, but an end to the friendship was looking increasingly possible.

The parting of the ways came in 1934. There was, in the end, a disagreement that broke this friendship. This break is clear at the end of Bonhoeffer’s final letter to Rößler; Bonhoeffer was afraid that his friendship with Rößler was at risk, comparing it to the bad

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228 DBW/E 11:1/14, 32/54.
232 DBW/E 12:1/22, 38/82.
state of his relationship with Bishop Heckel, the head of the Church Foreign Office; Bonhoeffer and Rößler were, in Bonhoeffer’s mind, also ‘threatened by such a parting of the ways. So I am asking you,’ wrote Bonhoeffer, ‘could we not get together some time? We could clear up so many things! I look forward to your reply soon’. The letter ends with Bonhoeffer’s hope for reconciliation, but we can also see clearly that the friendship is under stress. For Bonhoeffer, if Rößler was in agreement with and working for Heckel, the friendship may be over. And it was. Rößler writes one more letter to Bonhoeffer saying that he was in league with the head of the foreign office, saying ‘[of] course I wrote my circular letter by agreement with Heckel’; it is the last piece of correspondence we have between them.

So this friendship takes on a different shape from what was described in Sanctorum Communio. It was not lasting; nor do we see evidence of acts of love and repentance. The friendship was, instead, an affectionate and dialogical one; despite this affection, and the theological dialogue they both appreciated, the friendship ended when their convictions diverged.

But what were the issues at stake? Where does the unbreachable fissure between them lie? It begins with their differing assessments of the situation in Germany and what that meant for the church. The following investigation into these differing assessments will reveal Rößler’s sympathy with the popular nationalism of his congregants, which put Rößler at odds with Bonhoeffer over the manner and the way the church can speak into a concrete political situation. Before I turn to that, and in order to set the stage for a more detailed analysis of the Rößler’s influence on Bonhoeffer and their eventual disagreement, I will turn to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the concrete commandment before his conversation with Rößler.

3.2 THE CONCRETE COMMANDMENT AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE BARCELONA LECTURE

The most comprehensive early example of Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on concrete commandments is found in an address on ethics and moral theology delivered by Bonhoeffer to his expatriate German congregation in Barcelona on 8 February 1929. Themes that will

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233 DBW/E 13:1/172, 241/254-55. Bonhoeffer had once spoken positively about his relationship with Heckel, writing to Vibrans on August 24 1936: ‘Heckel just came and spoke to me about extra ecclesiam […] He was kindness itself’. See DBW/E 14:1/114, 228/344.

234 This is Schlingensiepen’s conclusion as well. See Schlingensiepen, Bonhoeffer, p. 173.


236 DBW/E 10:2/3, 323-45/359-78; for the date of the lecture, see Bethge, Bonhoeffer:
become familiar in Bonhoeffer’s later work are already present here, including Bonhoeffer’s critique of principled ethics, and his understanding of God’s will and command as concrete. He will later develop these ideas more thoroughly, and critically, but the foundations of his approach are already clear here. How he applies his critique of principled ethics, however, is inconsistent; one of the principles that Bonhoeffer employs is Volk as an ethical determinant. And, as we will see, the Volk as ethical determinant is one that is related, in Bonhoeffer’s mind, to friendship.

In the Barcelona lecture, Bonhoeffer asserts that there are no ‘universally valid Christian norms and commandments’. The reasons for this are theological, and have to do with God’s freedom. God does not operate according to human categories, but according to the path he chooses (seen, according to Bonhoeffer, in the ‘path of the cross’); therefore there is no ‘Christian ethic’, at least in the sense that humanity is at odds with God if it derives ways of acting according to its own ‘innumerable human paths’. Further, because God is free, ‘I will do something again today not because it seemed the right thing to do yesterday, but because today, too, God’s will has pointed me in that direction’. God may command differently today than he did yesterday; but to act again, according to what appeared to be right action in the past, is to operate upon a principle, and ‘would be surrendering the most precious human possession, my freedom’, an ‘immense gift’ given to humanity by Jesus.

So for Bonhoeffer, there is no Christian ethic, only God acting the way God acts, with freedom, and freely commanding. What this means for human decision-making is that there ‘is absolutely no possibility for establishing universally valid principles, since each individual moment lived before God can confront us with completely unexpected decisions’. For Bonhoeffer, at least at this juncture, there is only the ‘decisive moment at hand’, a moment ‘that is of potential ethical value’, and moments where one’s ‘immediate relationship with God’s will’ is ‘continually establish[ed] anew’. This results in ethical decisions as solitary acts, as Bonhoeffer puts it, in a ‘solitude in which a person stands before the living God. […] And precisely because I am face to face with God in this solitude, I alone can know what is right and wrong for me personally’.

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237 DBW/E 10:2/3, 323/359.
238 DBW/E 10:2/3, 327/363.
239 DBW/E 10:2/3, 327/363.
242 DBW/E 10:2/3, 333/368.
244 DBW/E 10:2/3, 332/367.
This freedom from principles, and the opportunity to follow God’s will, means that ‘Christians must enter the complicated reality of the world’.^^245 Not making decisions ahead of time means a twofold reliance on God and the concrete situation; indeed, in this lecture, just as human beings encounter one another, God encounters human beings.^^246 A decision-maker ‘cannot decide a priori what to do but rather will know only when they have actually entered into the situation of crisis itself and are conscious of being addressed by God’.^^247 It is, then, the concrete situation that leads a person into a circumstance where one is addressed by God; as Bonhoeffer puts it, ‘we must place ourselves in a concrete situation and from there direct our gaze toward eternity’.^^248

But Bonhoeffer is inconsistent on this concrete, solitudinous decision-making before God. If one is presented with an ethical decision, and one stands before God in order to discern God’s will, would God not speak clearly and decisively? No, according to Bonhoeffer. As much as Bonhoeffer is concerned to speak of ethical decision-making as a lonely discernment of God’s will in the moment, he also speaks of the church and the Volk,^^249 ‘two of God’s orders’, that ‘seem to be in conflict’.^^250 Here Bonhoeffer undermines his own argument.^^251 In this case, the solitudinous decision-making is, on the one hand, concrete and free before God; on the other hand, it is the Volk who demand allegiance and determine the ethical course of action, rather than God in his freedom in the moment of decision.

Thus the decision against the neighbour as enemy, and for the neighbour as Volk, is predetermined:

If I ever find myself in the distressing situation of having to decide whether to expose my biological brother, my biological mother, to the hand of the attacker, or to raise my

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^^246 Nation, et al., argue for a connection between the dynamic ethical encounter of persons, as described in Sanctorum Communio, and the dynamic of the moment of ethical demand that Bonhoeffer describes here in the encounter between God and human beings; see Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, Bonhoeffer the Assassin, pp. 108, 109-10.
^^248 DBW/E 10:2/3, 345/378.
^^250 DBW/E 10:2/3, 333/368. The DBW editors see this as a reference to a contradiction between ‘orders of creation’ and ‘orders of preservation’, and thus a conceptual conflict; Green, as editor of the English edition, sees it as a description of conflict between the demands made by the orders of church and Volk; DBWE 10:2/3, 368-69 n25. Green’s suggestion makes most sense, especially considering that Bonhoeffer goes on, in this address, to speak of the conflict and contradictory demands made by these two Ordnungen.
^^251 I am not the first to point this out. See, for example, Bethge, Bonhoeffer: A Biography, p. 119; Heinz Eduard Tödt, Authentic Faith: Bonhoeffer’s Theological Ethics in Context (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 121; Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, Bonhoeffer the Assassin, pp. 117, 119-20.
own hand against the enemy, then the moment itself will doubtless tell me which of these two is and must be my neighbour, including before the eyes of God.

But for Bonhoeffer, as he continues, it is the Volk, to whom he belongs according to ‘the divine order [Ordnungen] of things’, which he would defend, because for him, if he does ‘not act, I am doing nothing other than surrendering my neighbors’. Despite his own protestations that this is according to the ‘concrete situation’ with which he is confronted, Bonhoeffer is caught in a contradiction, siding with the defence of the neighbour (through the demand of the Volk for war) over the love of an enemy (through the demand of the church for peace), on principle. The two orders, one preaching peace and love of enemy, and another championing war, lead to a decision between the destruction of an enemy or the surrender of a neighbour to destruction, where the love of neighbour is to be chosen over love of the enemy in advance.

This move from the individual making an ethical decision before God, to a determination of war made by a people, is explained by Bonhoeffer in reference to a class of people who can discern God’s will. Bonhoeffer imagines a kind of Christian moral aristocracy at work:

[The] determination as to when this moment has arrived for a people can and may only be made by human beings who are conscious of the grave responsibility for what they do, surrendering their own selfish will to the divine will that guides world history.

There is a class of people, according to Bonhoeffer, who are able to set aside their own selfish wills, and when they are able to do so, can make decisions according to the divine will; the ‘moment’ of decision can and may only be taken up by those who can set aside their selfish wills and surrender the course of history to God’s will. The implication here is that large-scale decisions about foreign and domestic policy should exclude those who are only able to act according to their own desires, and that others—by virtue of their inability to set aside their own wills for God’s—are not to take part in such moments of decision.

\[252\] DBW/E 10:2/3, 337/371.
\[253\] DBW/E 10:2/3, 336/371.
\[254\] Nation, et al., see a disrupted, unrecognised, but necessary moral framework in operation here; this may suit their larger argument throughout their book that Bonhoeffer eventually does embrace an ethic of peace that is morally determinative, but the claim about a moral framework is neither necessary to, nor present in, the lecture. See Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*, pp. 112,-13, 114.
\[255\] DBW/E 10:2/3, 340-41/373.
This Protestant aristocratic sensibility bears on friendship for Bonhoeffer. For Bonhoeffer, this moral aristocracy comprises individuals whose ‘intellectual growth, youth, or power’ can lead a person ‘beyond others’,\(^{256}\) and this can mean separation from a friend:

If our own intellectual growth, our own intellectual youth, our own power leads us beyond others, that is, if through God’s actions with us we find ourselves inwardly prompted to separate from a friend, there is no room for sentimentality. God wants us courageously to resolve to go beyond the other even if by moving beyond the other person we hurt that person. For God wills strength of life, not anxiety. And it is God who will find a way of amply healing the wounds he inflicts through us, that we inflict for his sake.\(^{257}\)

For Bonhoeffer, here, a person’s intellect and power can lead that person beyond others; the intellect and power are identified with God’s actions, and those actions inwardly separate a friend from a friend.

Bonhoeffer, however, is caught in a problem similar to the one of the Volk as a moral determinant. In this case, signs of moral superiority determine the moral course of action. Rather than God prompting the dissolution of the friendship, intellect and power are evidence of God’s action that leads to the necessity of separation. God’s actions, here, are found in the pre-existing condition of intellect and power rather than in commanding, and intellect and strength determine a moral course rather than the command of God.

There are two things to point out here. The first is that Bonhoeffer’s nationalism, at this point, partly determines the outcomes of moral decision-making. Bonhoeffer will soon show evidence of moving away from this; but here, his nationalism determines ethical decisions about war and peace. In this way, Bonhoeffer does speak of the importance of the concrete in ethical decision-making, though as he refers to the Volk as part of ethical decision-making, the ‘concrete’ is still conceptual and abstract. The ‘concrete’ situation that Bonhoeffer is imagining here is not one that connects immediately to the decisions facing his expatriate congregation, but to future and possible ethical decisions; Bonhoeffer himself is not yet speaking of the concrete situation in Germany with specificity.

The second thing to point out is that Bonhoeffer is beginning to associate friendship with moral and political decision-making in a way he did not in Sanctorum Communio. There are people who surrender their own will to the will of God that guides world history, including decisions about war and peace; these individuals, through God’s gift, have the intellect and power to make such moral determinations. If it becomes clear that between friends, one friend is able to make proper moral determinations, and another is not, God

\(^{256}\) DBW/E 10:2/3, 340/373.

\(^{257}\) DBW/E 10:2/3, 340/373-74.
prompts the separation of friend from friend, though not without the hope of some kind of resolution through God’s future healing. In this way, a friendship depends on a shared ability to hear God’s will concerning the shape of history, either through the surrender of the will to God or through God’s provision of intellect and power; and a breach in friendship is God’s to heal.

As we now turn to Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Helmut Rößler, this is precisely what we see: that Bonhoeffer considers Rößler’s moral determinations—with regard to nationalist movements and Reich interference with the church—to be deficient, and for this reason Bonhoeffer ends the friendship. This does not happen, however, before Rößler’s presses Bonhoeffer’s ethics in a direction where the ‘concrete’ is not simply conceptual, it is specific to the political and social movements of the Germany they inhabited.

3.3 ESCHATOLOGY, CONCRETE COMMANDMENTS, AND A FRIENDSHIP UNDER STRAIN

Two developments in Bonhoeffer’s approach to ethics take place after the Barcelona lectures: one is that Bonhoeffer’s ethics become more christologically focussed; another is that they begin to take into account, with more specificity, the concrete situation of Germany. More successfully than in his Barcelona address, Bonhoeffer is able to abandon the Volk as a moral determinant for ethical decision-making, and to carefully integrate an ethic of God’s command with a concern for the concrete situation in Germany.

This development takes place partly through Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Rößler, seen primarily in the second period of correspondence between them. In this period their friendship was under stress, caused by diverging political convictions and their differing political eschatologies. But as we will see, the friendship remains one of theological conversation, despite their divergences and differences; evidence of the dialogical nature of the friendship is seen most clearly in Rößler’s influence on Bonhoeffer, particularly through Bonhoeffer’s response to Rößler’s critical assessment of his friend’s inability to take into account the concrete situation in Germany.

Barnett points out that the uneasy alliance between Bonhoeffer’s nationalist sympathies and his critique of principled ethics does not last long, and is not a factor by the time Bonhoeffer leaves New York in 1931; Tödt points out that Bonhoeffer re-evaluates

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the antagonism between ‘orders’ and nationalist sentiment as a determining factor in his ethics in his turn to a ‘christological concentration’\textsuperscript{259} in his 1933 Christology lectures.\textsuperscript{260}

These developments, however, do not happen in isolation from the friendship Bonhoeffer shared with Rößler. Before Bonhoeffer left New York, and before the Christology lectures, Bonhoeffer and Rößler began their discussion about Germany’s situation with what they saw happening in the church. As an exchange student at Union Seminary in New York, Bonhoeffer described ‘the situation of the church [in the United States] which, without suspecting it, is now smiling in desperation’.\textsuperscript{261} German theology, particularly Luther, seemed provincial to American students, and according to Bonhoeffer they ‘just don’t understand’ the theological stakes of the German church.\textsuperscript{262} This assessment of the American reception of Luther, and German theology more generally, is picked up by Rößler in a response to Bonhoeffer. Rößler agrees with Bonhoeffer about the state of the American church, calling it ‘theologically grotesque’. ‘But’, writes Rößler, ‘are things much different in our own church?’\textsuperscript{263} For Rößler, things are not that different.

While Rößler was not wholeheartedly sympathetic to National Socialism, particularly when it is syncretistically combined with the gospel and ‘in the service of one or the other quite respectable human concern’,\textsuperscript{264} Rößler was willing to share the concerns of the people he was serving on account of being ‘called to a deed of ongoing love’ toward them.\textsuperscript{265} For Rößler, the struggle was for an appropriate German nationalism that does not ‘betray the gospel’; he writes:

> My own heart is hotly engaged in the mighty struggle for national self-assertion and the will for the future, a struggle that, especially in the rural flat country, has grown tremendously[,] […] and precisely because I am so engaged in that struggle, I often feel sorely challenged lest I betray the gospel to the “most sacred possession of the nation”, especially since by doing so the way of the cross […] can be made considerably easier by external success.\textsuperscript{266}

Rößler continues to say that he is, on account of love, nevertheless called to the ‘questions and distress of today’s rural inhabitant’, a distress that is ‘of an exclusively nationalistic

\textsuperscript{259} The phrase is from Tödt, \textit{Authentic Faith}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{260} See Tödt, \textit{Authentic Faith}, pp. 121-22. For examples of this in the Christology lectures themselves, see DBW/E 12:2/12, 282/302 and 298-99/316-17.
\textsuperscript{261} DBW/E 10:1/148, 216/261.
\textsuperscript{262} DBW/E 10:1/148, 216-17/261.
\textsuperscript{263} DBW/E 10:1/164, 237/281.
\textsuperscript{264} DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/282.
\textsuperscript{265} DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/282.
\textsuperscript{266} DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/282.
[vaterländisch] disposition’. In this sense, Rößler sees his task as ‘preaching the cross’ in the midst of the ideas that are moving the rural population of Germany, such as the renewal of the ‘Prussian idea of the state’, ‘racial purity, war on the Jews’, renegotiation of reparation payments, anti-Marxist sentiments, and the ‘“third Reich” of German freedom and righteousness’. Rößler’s struggle is to remain both faithful to the gospel and to take seriously the real concerns of the people he is serving. The problem in Germany is not, for him, the ‘mightly struggle for national self-assertion’; it is its syncretism of the combination of the völkisch movement of national fervour with a ‘new paganism’, which he calls a ‘tragedy’. Nationalism ought to be Christian for Rößler, who reports that it is difficult for him ‘not to betray the theologia crucis and instead value the kingdom of God higher than the tormented fatherland’. So for Rößler, there is a hierarchy of commitments, rather than a conflict between his Christian calling to love his people and the nationalist movements in which his people were participating.

This sympathy with a growing popular nationalism has to do with Rößler’s political eschatology. Rößler pointed out that for him, all the spheres of human life—including what he calls the ‘profane’ and ‘autonomous’—were coming more and more ‘under the purview of the eschatological’, something Rößler sees happening among his congregants: ‘the experiences I’ve had during the past year and a half in the rural Mark Brandenburg have certainly contributed to that feeling’. While Rößler describes the church as the place where ‘God personally gather’s together God’s people […] who have been brought and are brought ever anew out of their own self-glorification and self-determination’, this is all written within the context of Rößler’s optimistic view of the nationalistic turn within Germany and the German church. Rößler is critical of the ‘pagan’ aspects of the growing popular movements taking hold in rural Brandenburg, but was not dismissive of their nationalist concerns, because for him, the ‘purview of the eschatological’ was encroaching over all spheres of life, including such movements.

Part of Rößler’s eschatological confidence has to do with Buß, repentance. For Rößler, the time of asking for penance was over. He asks Bonhoeffer: ‘Can we still be prophets who

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267 DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/282.
268 DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/283.
269 DBW/E 10:1/164, 238/282.
270 DBW/E 10:1/164, 239/284.
271 DBW/E 10:1/164, 239/283.
have time to bring about hardness of heart through the call to penance? Must we not bring the realism of love to those who are lost?’ Rößler is explicitly arguing against ‘Barth’s call to penance’ (Bußruf), as it is found in one of Barth’s collected essays in Die Wort Gottes und die Theologie, where Barth argues not for sacrificial penance but for a ‘radically new way of thinking’ that begins with Christ calling his disciples to follow him. Rößler disagrees with Barth, and thinks this theology of penance should be replaced with a theology focussed more immediately on Christ preached as ‘the great hope […] proclaimed to this hopeless, suffering humanity’.

Taken as a whole, Rößler’s optimistic eschatology is one where all spheres of life were coming under the purview of a Christ who offers hope rather than a call to repentance. So it is no wonder that Rößler would have sympathy for the nationalist movements taking root among his congregants. His eschatology is primarily one of hope, and this leads him to love his congregants where they are. But without the possibility of a complementary call for repentance, the changing of one’s mind—and the political consequences of changing one’s mind about certain aspects of the nationalism that was gripping Brandenburg—a critical faculty that could begin to formulate a ‘No’ to these social movements is eroded to the point of being ineffectual, or even, as it seems in Rößler’s mind, unnecessary.

One thing that can be said for Rößler is that he was in touch with what mattered to his congregation: he was not above the fray. And in the midst of Rößler’s description of the difficulties of ministry in rural Brandenburg, he accuses Bonhoeffer of being ‘unpolitical’. This is part of Rößler’s argument for his conclusions about the political situation he was in. For him, even though Bonhoeffer might have a ‘high vantage point’ in New York, he was unable to understand the concrete struggles of pastors like Rößler, who were on the ‘frontline soldiers in the filthy trenches’, and therefore better able to formulate a theological response to the nationalism that was taking root in his parish.

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277 DBW/E 10:1/164, 242/286. See the translator’s guide to the DBWE, in volume 17, on the DBWE approach to translating Buß as penance, penitence, and repentance. Context determines how Buß is translated in English. Forgiveness, Buß, and the concrete commandment are all related in these letters, so despite the DBWE choice to translate Bußruf as ‘call to penance’, there is good reason to think that Bonhoeffer and Rößler are arguing about the same thing, though differently conceived. Victoria Barnett, ‘The Translation of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English Edition: An Overview’, in Indexes and Supplementary Materials, ed. by Victoria J. Barnett, Mark Brocker, and Barbara Wojhoski (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), pp. 1-8 (p. 6).
280 DBW/E 10:1/164, 239/283.
Bonhoeffer’s initial response to Rößler’s accusation, on 18 October 1931, is unfortunately short.\(^{281}\) Bonhoeffer thinks that there is such a thing as a ‘local’ German theology, and that the Germans have ‘understood what the gospel is’;\(^{282}\) Bonhoeffer, however, remains unconcerned with the national fervour that gripped Rößler, and does not engage Rößler on the theological and eschatological significance of the German Christian movement. But the accusation has been made, even though Bonhoeffer does not immediately respond: for Rößler, Bonhoeffer is not close enough to what is going on ‘in the trenches’, and Bonhoeffer’s ethical determinations are not sufficiently grounded in the concrete.

Bonhoeffer does soon ground his ethics in Germany’s concrete situation. Rößler introduced into that conversation a political eschatology that was uninterested in repentance; then, Bonhoeffer revisits these same topics in a lecture at an ecumenical peace conference in Ciernohorské Kúpele, Czechoslovakia, delivered on 26 July 1932 and published in *Die Eiche* later on the same year.\(^{283}\) It is no wonder that the address became an important subject between the two of them: Rößler insisted that Bonhoeffer take into account the concrete situation of Germany; but once Bonhoeffer begins to get more specific about the nationalist movements to which Rößler was sympathetic, he does so through a political eschatology that, as we will see, is critical of the nationalist movements to which Rößler was sympathetic.

In the lecture, Bonhoeffer speaks clearly about the concrete situation in Germany, framed by a concern that the ecumenical movement did not think its task was a theological one. For Bonhoeffer, the lack of theological vigour in the ecumenical movement meant that it

\(^{281}\) DBW/E 11:1/14, 32-34/54-55. Reading this letter as a response to the previous extant letter depends on the assumption that there is no missing letter and that Bonhoeffer mistakenly calls the February letter the ‘December’ letter. The DBW 11 editors think this is not a response to 10:1/164 because it mentions a letter from ‘the last day of December’ that received Bonhoeffer’s ‘riveting attention’. The reason to doubt the existence of a December letter is that the content of the letter Bonhoeffer describes is about Rößler’s life as a German pastor, and fits the content of the February letter, 10:1/164; reading the letters in sequence makes best sense of the direction of the conversation; it was the material on eschatology and politics from the February letter ‘stayed with’ Bonhoeffer ‘for a long time’. If there was a missing letter from December, it may have been a relatively inconsequential Christmas letter, like Bonhoeffer’s own to Rößler on 11 December 1930 (DBW/E 10:1/148, 216-17/261) and that Bonhoeffer kept both letters together, responding to them both at once, reading the substantial February letter to his American friends but speaking of both letters together as the ‘December letter’. Alternatively, the missing December letter may have covered the same kind of material as the extant February letter, though it would be odd to think that Rößler would have been so repetitive.

\(^{282}\) DBW/E 11:1/14, 33/54.

\(^{283}\) DBW/E 11:2/14, 327-44/356-69.
was not robust enough to withstand the political fluctuations that the church, and the ecumenical movement, should resist: the ‘political wave of nationalism among the youth’.\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 329/357.}

Bonhoeffer connects this theological resistance to the church’s ability to speak a concrete command. For Bonhoeffer, because the church is ‘\textit{Christus Praesens}’, Christ in the flesh and as a human organization, it therefore has the ‘authority of the Christ who is present and living in it’, and is thus able to proclaim both ‘gospel and commandment’.\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 331/359.} The ecumenical movement, then, if it were to think of itself as ‘\textit{one church}’ that had ‘joined together in order to express their claim, or rather the claim of our Lord, on the entire world’,\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 331/359. Emphasis in original.} it could take a stand and speak with the authority of the Christ who is present and living in the church; this would lead to the possibility that the ecumenical movement, as a church, could ‘proclaim not principles that are always true but rather only commandments that are true today’:\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 332/359-60.} that is, commandments concerning the rise of nationalism which Bonhoeffer is addressing.

In the lecture, Bonhoeffer says that the church can err or sin, but that this should not prevent it from speaking concretely; even if ‘the church is in error and sinful […] it may speak [the commandment] in faith in the word of the forgiveness of sins that holds true for the church as well’.\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 334/361.} To be at risk of erring or sinning simply means that the church must not lose sight of the centrality of its proclamation of the forgiveness of sins:

Thus […] the proclamation of the commandment is founded in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. The church cannot command unless it itself stands in the belief in the forgiveness of sins and without directing all those whom it commands to emphasize this proclamation of the forgiveness of sins.\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 334/361.}

The commandment that speaks into the present, for Bonhoeffer, also has eschatological dimensions that result in the possibility of the destruction of that which is not oriented to Christ. As Bonhoeffer puts it, the ‘commandment cannot come from anywhere except that place where the promise and fulfillment come from, namely, from Christ […] as the one who brings and promises the new world’.\footnote{DBW/E 11:2/14, 336-37/363.} The commandment reorients those who hear it, and ‘we are directed toward Christ. Through this, however, we understand the entire
world order of the fallen creation as directed only toward Christ through the new creation’.  
For Bonhoeffer, ‘all worldly orders exist only because they are directed toward Christ’ and 
they ‘receive their value completely from the outside, from Christ, from the new creation’.  
Orders are to remain only if they are open to Christ; ‘[every] order—be it the oldest and 
holiest—can be broken—and must be, when it is locked within itself, hardened, and when it 
no longer permits the proclamation of revelation’. In this way, through the demand that 
orders be broken, Christ stands over the world in judgment.

More will be said about Bonhoeffer’s early theology of orders, as it is expressed here, 
in Chapter 4. For now, however, I would point out that Bonhoeffer, at this juncture, is not 
unpolitical. Christ’s call is a word for all spheres of life, and all spheres of life can change 
their orientation and ends. In this way, Bonhoeffer’s ethics is one of repentance in Barth’s 
sense: it is a new way of thinking and a new orientation of the world that comes through its 
orientation to Christ. In this we see Bonhoeffer moving away from his principled ethics 
toward one that is Christologically concentrated, and one where the situation of the German 
church is not determinative of ethical decision-making; rather, the situation on Germany is 
now the concrete context into which Christ speaks through the church.

As I pointed out above, the situation in Germany was already part of the conversation 
between Bonhoeffer and Rößler; Rößler had introduced into that conversation a political 
eschatology that had no need of repentance. But once Bonhoeffer begins to get more specific 
about the nationalist movements to which Rößler was sympathetic, he does so in a political 
eschatology that is focussed on Christ’s judgment over political orders, and firmly underlines 
the necessity of both forgiveness and repentance, in a way that allowed him to gain more 
critical traction over nationalist movements and to undermine volkisch sentiment as a 
determining ethical factor.

This way of turning attention to the specifics of the political situation in Germany 
would not have found much purchase with Rößler, considering his optimism about the social 
developments that were happening in Brandenburg, and his insistence that any understanding 
of the spheres of human life should be characterized primarily by hope and love rather than 
penance or the possibility of their destruction. Further, one can imagine that Rößler would 
feel the need to respond to these claims, because though Bonhoeffer had taken his advice, 
becoming more attentive to what is happening ‘in the trenches’, it leads Bonhoeffer 
away from Rößler’s own sympathies.

\[291\] DBW/E 11:2/14, 337/363.  
\[293\] DBW/E 11:2/14, 337/364.  
Rößler’s response to the address came in a letter that is not extant, though we do have Bonhoeffer’s reply to Rößler’s response, which came on Christmas Day, 1932.\textsuperscript{295} We do know that Rößler pointed out in his letter that for him, the church cannot utter a concrete commandment, because Bonhoeffer wrote in his reply a summary of the conversation so far, saying that they both agree that the church of their day could not ‘utter a concrete commandment’.\textsuperscript{296} Bonhoeffer is even more resolute on the question of eschatology, another ongoing topic of debate between them. But Bonhoeffer, responding to Rößler’s claim in the missing letter, thinks the question was about \textit{why} the church cannot utter a concrete commandment, writing that ‘the question is whether this lies in its nature—that is, within the inherent limitations of the \textit{eschata}—or represents apostasy [Abfall] and loss of substance’.\textsuperscript{297} It is a rhetorical question that Bonhoeffer had already answered in the ecumenical address, and against Rößler’s idea that the encroachment of eschatological love should lead to the end of any need for repentance. For Bonhoeffer, it is not about an encroachment of \textit{eschata} upon spheres of life that limit the church’s inability to utter a commandment; the church can utter the commandment because it is Christ in the flesh, and has the authority of Christ whose commandment, through repentance, reorients the world to him and his new creation. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the inability of the church to utter a commandment is certainly a question of apostasy and loss of substance.

This response, for Bonhoeffer, is connected to Rößler’s initial accusation that Bonhoeffer held himself above the fray. Bonhoeffer replies directly to Rößler, saying that his ‘disinterestedness’ in politics was one that he had once claimed for himself; Bonhoeffer writes, however, that in retrospect ‘[it] was only meant to indicate the parameter within which I see the problems through the objective reality of the church’.\textsuperscript{298} But the lecture, and Bonhoeffer’s reply to Rößler, are not only clarifications of what appeared to be ‘disinterestedness’; they were a development of Bonhoeffer’s ethics in a concrete way, a point which he underlines in this same letter to Rößler, writing that ‘just as the individual is supposed to hear the concrete commandment […], so should a congregation or a nation [Volk] also be the subject, the hearer of God’s commandment’.\textsuperscript{299} As we have seen, the commandment has become, for Bonhoeffer, not one of the abstracted political possibilities he

\textsuperscript{295} DBW/E 12:1/22, 38-41/82-85. The DBW editors (DBW/E 12:1/22, 38/82 n2) tentatively point out that the letter was a reaction to Bonhoeffer’s lecture; the tentativeness of this judgment by the DBW editors is unnecessary. As we will see, the content of the exchange between Rößler and Bonhoeffer clearly connects the lecture to their epistolary conversation.
\textsuperscript{296} DBW/E 12:1/22, 39/83.
\textsuperscript{297} DBW/E 12:1/22, 39/83. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{298} DBW/E 12:1/22, 41/85.
\textsuperscript{299} DBW/E 12:1/22, 40/84.
outlined in Barcelona, but a commandment against the nationalist movements that were changing the face of German politics at that moment in history.

Bethge thinks that the reference, in this letter, to the church’s ability to utter a concrete commandment is a criticism directed at Barth; but to see this as a response to Barth is only partly true. It makes more sense to place this within the conversation Bonhoeffer is having with Rößler, seeing it as a response to the earlier claims made by Rößler, in the letter that is not extant, but whose content is verified in Bonhoeffer’s following letter and his summary of their conversation, which included the subject of concrete commandments paired with a continuing conversation about political eschatology and repentance. The argument makes most sense if we see the reference to Barth as part of their disagreement, with Bonhoeffer seeing Barth’s call to repentance in terms of a reorientation of social orders to Christ and his new creation, and Rößler disputing Barth’s account as unnecessary because Christ is to be preached as hope and love, rather than in terms of repentance or the reorientation of orders. In this way, Barth is part of the conversation, but the disagreement itself is taking place between Bonhoeffer and Rößler. The dispute over the possibility of the church uttering a concrete commandment is simply the next part of their engagement with one another over the relation between social orders and eschatology, forgiveness, and repentance.

Looking at the situation from the perspective of his arguments and disagreement with Barth, as Bethge does, helps make sense of one of the ways that Bonhoeffer disagreed with Barth. Bethge is right to say that Bonhoeffer eventually changed his position on concrete commandments in favour of Barth, softening his language to speak of God’s counsel rather than God’s command. But the immediate context of the letter’s is a conversation on the same themes with Rößler. Overlooking this immediate context helps with the big picture of Bonhoeffer’s theological development, but at the same time overlooks a significant part of that development, which is, in this case, being worked out with Rößler, making Rößler, through their disagreement, the impetus for the clarification of Bonhoeffer’s position. First, we can see Bonhoeffer taking into account the real situation of German nationalism, asking the ecumenical movement to boldly speak against it after Rößler had written a letter to Bonhoeffer about his own sympathy to that same nationalism, and accusing Bonhoeffer of a ‘high vantage point’ that did not take into account what was happening ‘in the trenches’. Second, Rößler introduced to their conversation an optimistic eschatology of hope and love, without need for repentance, and Bonhoeffer responds with a Christological eschatology.

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300 Bethge, Bonhoeffer: A Biography, p. 183.
where political orders are to be orientated to Christ and the new creation through the enabling conditions of repentance and forgiveness, and a Christologically oriented ecclesiology that allows the church to speak as Christ to the world. In these two ways we can see this conversation, and theological friendship, as one of the factors at play in Bonhoeffer’s theological development.

Their correspondence, and their friendship, are significant for more than an understanding of Rößler’s role in Bonhoeffer’s theological growth. It also speaks to the nature of friendship for Bonhoeffer. In addition to the possibilities of Sanctorum Communio—where friendship is lasting, and potentially redemptive and for others—Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship was also dialogical, and one that could maintain significant theological disagreement. Further, the theological conversation partner was both someone to whom you spoke about your theological interests and positions, and a person who could further shape your theological positions on account of what the theological friend was saying to you in response.

This period of correspondence also speaks to the state of the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, and the reasons why it became so precarious. For Bonhoeffer, theological dialogue has its limits; on its own, dialogue and mutual influence might not be sufficient to save the friendship. Bonhoeffer’s letter on Christmas, 1932, expresses this fact, Bonhoeffer writing that he and Rößler might be ‘bound to go separate ways’ on account of being ‘so differently constituted spiritually’.302 Their differing spiritual constitutions led them to very different ways of thinking theologically about the church and the world: Bonhoeffer to an ethics of critical engagement with political and social movements, and Rößler to sympathetic engagements with those same political and social movements.

In a sense, it was an unfortunate impasse. Renegotiation of reparation payments was one of Rößler’s concerns; the pressure to pay back war debt had led to levels of inflation that were having corrosive effects on the German economy as a whole. In this way, one can see the good in Rößler’s love and hope that does not depend on repentance, if repentance led to the kind of suffering that Rößler tells Bonhoeffer he is seeing. Rößler cared for his pastoral charge, in this sense, even theologically. But Bonhoeffer was not in this kind of theologically generous mood; he was more concerned to maintain his theologically critical approach to nationalist socialist movements as a whole, which led to a faltering friendship, though one that had yet to end.

302 DBW/E 12:1/22, 38/82.
3.4 GERMAN PASTORS ABROAD AND THE END OF A FRIENDSHIP

For a time, the theological differences between Bonhoeffer and Rößler—and the political ramifications of those theological differences—were bearable within the context of their friendship. Rößler’s sympathy to the nationalistic tendencies of his Brandenburg parish, and Bonhoeffer’s re-oriented political ethics, had stressed their friendship but not broken it. But the ecclesiastical-political significance of the argument between Bonhoeffer and Rößler becomes clearer during an exchange that begins in November 1934 when they were both pastors abroad, Bonhoeffer in England, and Rößler in Holland. As we will see, their differences eventually become unbearable, and their theological commitments lead to concrete decisions about the legitimacy of the Reich church, decisions that themselves lead to the end of the friendship.

Both Bonhoeffer and Rößler, as pastors abroad, were under the oversight of Theodor Heckel, director and bishop of the newly instituted Church Foreign Office of the German Evangelical Church. Heckel was a German Christian sympathizer who fell in with Ludwig Müller, Hitler’s personal adviser and then Reich Bishop. Bonhoeffer and the London congregations had a history of conflict with Heckel; and on 15 January 1934, the London pastors sent a telegram and a letter to the President of the German Reich asking for the removal of the Reich Bishop Müller, threatening secession. This prompted Heckel to visit London in February 1934 with the hope of returning to Berlin with a declaration of loyalty from the German pastors. They refused to sign, even under an accusation of treason, because after Barmen and Dahlem, and largely under Bonhoeffer’s influence, the London churches aligned themselves with the Confessing Church, and agreed to a declaration of secession from the Reich Church.

In response to the declaration, Heckel wrote a circular letter to the German pastors abroad, including Bonhoeffer and Rößler. It was, in part, a response to the resolutions to

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305 Scholder, *Preliminary History*, p. 304.
308 DBW/E 13:1/56, 76-78/83-84.
secede made by the London congregations earlier that month. For Heckel, the churches abroad did not need to take a side in the struggle taking place in Germany:

[It] is not as though our German churches abroad had to choose between different groups within the home church or had to make decisions themselves with regard to church politics. The German Evangelical Church abroad is called upon to act in concert, in unity and unanimity, since it is in greater danger from the erroneous decisions of individuals than any one of them, looking out from his particular outpost, can judge. Affiliation with the Foreign Office of the home church does not indicate that one has taken a political stance within the church for or against a particular church system. The work of the churches abroad, like the Church Foreign Office, stands over and above these contradictions.312

Heckel’s desire was for the unity of the churches abroad through not taking a side, and for him, affiliation with the Church Foreign Office did not mean that any of the congregations had necessarily sided with the Reich bishop and against the Confessing Synod.

Two days later, Rößler took this letter as an opportunity to write a confidential letter of his own to the pastors of the same congregations, including Bonhoeffer.313 Rößler tells the pastors that he had just been to Berlin ‘to negotiate with the Church Foreign Office’, writing: ‘[this] gave me the opportunity to learn in detail about the state of the critical disputes in our church.’314 Rößler’s main concern was that the battle over governance between the Confessing Synod and the Reichskirche would lead the Reich to dissociate from church affairs entirely, leading to the establishment of free churches, like those seen in America, and ending ‘the tie that has existed since Luther’s day between the Evangelical Church and the German State’.315 According to Rößler, the question of governance ‘is of minor importance compared with the certain prospect that state subsidies for all church bodies and activities—the Protestant theological faculties, confessional schools, and work among the German communities abroad—[which] would be in jeopardy’.316 The unification of the German church under the state authorities was necessary to pre-empt this, for Rößler, through ‘a legal reorganization of the existing church government that preserves the continuity of the unified constitution and administration and its tie to the state authorities’.317 Heckel, according to Rößler, was ‘defending the independence of the German churches abroad’ from the conflict

taking place in Germany, and that the churches abroad have been ‘spared the internal dissension within the church’.\footnote{318 DBW/E 13:1/168, 233/247.}

So for Rößler, the association of the German churches abroad with the Reichskirche was practical, in that it safeguarded their subsidies; but he would also say that disassociation would be dangerous and treasonous. Rößler directed this fire towards London, Bonhoeffer, and Bonhoeffer’s fellow pastors: ‘I can well understand that many colleagues in the ministry might have a sense of belonging inwardly to the Confessing Church and would not understand why they shouldn’t simply give way to it. But as things are now, to do so would be ‘to stab the Church Foreign Office in the back’,\footnote{319 DBW/E 13:1/168, 233/248.} and ‘individual demonstrative acts by congregations abroad could do more harm than good’.\footnote{320 DBW/E 13:1/168, 234/249.} The Church Foreign Office, according to Rößler, ‘is struggling to find a real solution for the whole church that does not necessitate the complete disintegration of what now exists’.\footnote{321 DBW/E 13:1/168, 233/248.} The London parishes were threatening disloyalty to the Foreign Office, the Reichskirche, and treason against Germany; echoing Heckel, Rößler says: ‘quite aside from the fact that congregations abroad that intervene in internal German church disputes may at any time easily incur accusations of treason and have a hard time refuting them’, and revealing his longstanding sympathy with the Deutsche Christen, also says that he wants to see and to fight for ‘a unified German Evangelical National Church […] within the Third Reich and for the sake of Protestant German culture worldwide’.\footnote{322 DBW/E 13:1/168, 234/249.} In a final bit of solidarity with Heckel, he asks that the German congregations abroad ‘refrain as long as possible from making decisions, and if they cannot be postponed, do not in any case announce them without contacting the Church Foreign Office!’\footnote{323 DBW/E 13:1/172, 238/252.}

But for Bonhoeffer, the time of reconciliation and cooperation had passed after Barmen and Dahlem, and so Bonhoeffer responded with a letter to Rößler that picks up an existing thread of conversation about the concrete commandment. Bonhoeffer, in a thinly veiled accusation that Rößler was in league with Heckel, and referring to the need for the German churches abroad to decide for the Confessing Church and against the Reichskirche, wrote: ‘I know these voices, and I know that objectively there is nothing behind them except the attempt to avoid making the decision that is demanded’.\footnote{324 DBW/E 13:1/172, 238/252.} For Bonhoeffer, the practical path outlined by Rößler and Heckel was a path of good tactics, but not good faith, and if
anyone was being disloyal it was the Church Foreign Office and Heckel, who were ‘betraying our congregations abroad to a pseudochurch for the contemptible purpose of getting the pastors paid’. Bonhoeffer points out that the Church Foreign Office was implicated with, not distant from, the Reich Church, with Heckel giving his blessing to the Reich Bishop; this revealed to Bonhoeffer that Heckel was associating himself not with Christ, but with ‘Beliar’. Thus, ‘[w]hat is called for here is an immediate, uncompromising No’, writes Bonhoeffer. ‘There is no more communion between us and this kind of a church, and since that is so, we should say so. We have waited long enough’. 

As this difference over the legitimacy of Reich Church became clear, Bonhoeffer began to think that a parting of the ways with Rößler might be necessary, just as had happened with Heckel, someone Bonhoeffer ‘used to have quite good relations with […] almost of friendship’; but after Heckel’s unwillingness to clearly speak and work against the Reich, that friendship had ended. And the friendship with Rößler did end not long after. Rößler wrote a response to Bonhoeffer, a letter to which Bonhoeffer decided not to respond. In the letter, Rößler admitted to being in league with Heckel, and disputed the claim, made by Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church, that it was the true church. Rößler wrote that the ‘Confessing Church isn’t any more the true church than the German Christian Church. The true church lies hidden within each of them’, and that Heckel’s strategy ‘offers just what we are hoping and secretly longing for, the vision of a church that is equally distant from both the German Christians and the Confessing Church, the church that is to come’. But this was a weak endorsement of the Confessing Church, and a weak claim for distance from the German Christians. Rößler had in essence distanced himself from the Confessing Church, and allied himself with Müller and Heckel.

In one final volley, Rößler revisited his accusation that Bonhoeffer was always at a distance, and not involved in the struggle as he would be if he were in the middle of parish life in Germany. As I point out above, Bonhoeffer, in response to Rößler, had already made his ethics more concrete, taking into account the situation of the German church and its nationalistic tendencies. But there was, for Bonhoeffer, one more step to take. Unknown to Rößler, Bonhoeffer had decided in September to return to Germany, take up a post as the

director of the Finkenwalde seminary, and to put himself directly into the fray of the Church Struggle.\footnote{Bethge, \textit{Bonhoeffer: A Biography}, p. 411.}

Bonhoeffer, however, would not have an opportunity to tell Rößler. Rößler finished his letter, saying, ‘I will close \textit{for now}, having simply marked out my position in our discussion. How are you personally? I hope we will soon be able to have a good talk; we really need it.’\footnote{DBW/E 13:1/181, 253/266. Emphasis in original.} They never had that talk. Rößler wrote, at the top of his own copy of this letter, in his own handwriting: ‘My (painful) parting of the ways with D. Bonhoeffer in the Church Struggle’.\footnote{DBW/E 13:1/181, 253/266 n1.} Rößler’s letter was the last contact between them.

The friendship between Bonhoeffer and Rößler ends within the patterns of reasoning Bonhoeffer used in his Barcelona lecture and his ecumenical address. Bonhoeffer had gone ‘beyond’ Rößler, in the terms of the Barcelona lecture, a situation that meant the separation of friends. The potential for the destruction of a sphere of life that was not oriented the new creation in Christ, as described in the ecumenical address, plays out in this smallest of social spheres, a friendship. While Bonhoeffer and Rößler disagreed about concrete commandments, the friendship could continue, even though it was faltering. Disagreement did not mean the end of friendship. But once it came to an actual commandment spoken concerning the relative authority of the \textit{Reich}—which happened for Bonhoeffer at Barmen and Dahlem, but not for Rößler—their differing convictions led to their ecclesial separation. Upon finding themselves in different ecclesiastical communities as a result of differing conclusions about the limit of state authority over the church, it meant—at least for Bonhoeffer—the end of the friendship.

\section*{3.5 Gandhi, Inter-Faith Friendship, and Rößler’s Last Word}

Rößler’s last word, in this friendship, was one of hope. We see this hope first in his desire that the two might ‘have a good talk’, as I point out above; but it seen in another way as well. Rößler himself did not agree with Bonhoeffer about the possible need for the friendship ending, and made his own argument for its continuation. In doing so, Rößler refers to another thread of their conversation: their mutual interest in India, which acts for Rößler as an entry into a case for friendship across difference; for my purposes here, it also acts as an entry into a critical assessment of Bonhoeffer’s willingness to end the friendship.
Plant, in his introduction to *Letters to London*, writes that for Bonhoeffer some

...differences of opinion—but not all—are possible between friends.\textsuperscript{333} We can see this in the Rößler correspondence. There is a lot of disagreement that does not break the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Rößler. Plant also asserts that friendship is Christocentric for Bonhoeffer, because it ‘has Jesus Christ at its centre: he it is who is the true basis of friendship because he is the Lord of truth and enemy of falsehood’.\textsuperscript{334} We can see this, too, in this correspondence. The dividing line between Bonhoeffer and Rößler is, as Bonhoeffer puts it, between Christ and Belial. As I have argued above, Rößler’s eschatology is not sophisticated enough to allow hope and love to be present alongside repentance, which in turn—for Bonhoeffer—would not provide the church with the right conditions to utter a concrete commandment; Rößler himself did not think it was necessary for the church to speak such a commandment. This led Rößler and Bonhoeffer in different political directions. So, in a sense, for Bonhoeffer, friendship does have Jesus Christ at its centre, if the church that speaks the concrete commandment in Barmen and Dahlem is *Christus Praesens*; this would mean that to ignore what this church has to say would be to take a side against Christ, and an unwillingness to associate oneself with the Confessing Church would be to be placed outside Christ.

The Christocentricity of friendship needs some qualification, however; and we have evidence that Bonhoeffer did not understand this Christocentricity in terms of Christian exclusivity in his correspondence with Rößler. A conversation about India had begun between them in Rößler’s letter describing the challenges of being a pastor in rural Germany. ‘I was alarmed to hear’, writes Rößler about a lecture he had heard, ‘that the process of nationally grounded syncretism presently poses the most serious temptation of the Christian mission in India’.\textsuperscript{335} Bonhoeffer, already interested in going to India to meet Gandhi, responded:

> One large country I would like to see, if perhaps the great solution will come from there—India. For otherwise it seems to be over; the great dying out of Christianity seems to be here. Is our time over? Has the gospel been given to another people, perhaps proclaimed with completely different words and actions?\textsuperscript{336}


\textsuperscript{334} Plant, ‘Letters to Ernst Cromwell’, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{335} DBW/E 10:1/164, 240/284.

\textsuperscript{336} DBW/E 11:1/14, 33/55.
This remark illustrates something curious about Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on India: Bonhoeffer appears to be claiming that the gospel might be revealed to, and then proclaimed by the non-Christian.

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Gandhi and India according to his own Christian categories can sound exoticized and inadequate because there is little evidence of understanding Gandhi, or India, on Indian or Hindu terms. But this is not a facile engagement with another faith; rather, Bonhoeffer sees an analogy between his own thought and Gandhi’s. At the Fanø conference, for example, Bonhoeffer wondered how peace would come, and who might make a call to peace that the world might hear. Bonhoeffer thought the ecumenical movement could, and if it did, the peace of Christ would be proclaimed ‘against the raging world’; but for Bonhoeffer, those who were heeding the ‘radical call to peace’ were the ‘non-Christian peoples in the East’,  those in Gandhi’s movement whose work was an ‘exemplification of the Sermon on the Mount’,

What we can see in this ‘call to peace’ is something analogous to a concrete commandment. In Bonhoeffer’s manner of thinking, the way the church speaks a concrete command to the world, and which results in certain kinds of action—like the ‘No’ to the Reich church, which leads to resisting the Reich church in the Confessing Church—Gandhi and his movement were making a ‘call to peace’ that led to certain kinds of political action. In this way, a pattern that is internal to Bonhoeffer’s own faith is recognisable by him in the faith of another: the command is analogous to the call. Further, the content of the call was analogous as well: it was a call or command to peace, a call to peace that Bonhoeffer shared with Gandhi and his movement, and one that was leading Bonhoeffer to visit India and to share work toward that peace.

Rößler, in his final letter to Bonhoeffer, hinted at this sort of possibility, writing to Bonhoeffer about friendship across difference, including religious difference:

[W]ould you be able to be, and remain, friends with a Communist? Yes! With a Frenchman? Yes! With a Mohammedan, a Hindu, or a heathen of the Batak faith? I would think so. With a Christian, a German, who “betrays the gospel”? I would think so. But I protest with all my might against seeing the relation between the opposing sides in the church today as the fulfillment of Matt. 10:35. The differences lie deep as an abyss, but they have absolutely no effect on blood relationships and bonds of friendship; they are poles apart in matters of the mind, but not of faith! So even if you

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were a fanatic of the Confessing Church, while I saw the Lord’s promise today as being offered by the poor, really poor Lazarus (theologically, intellectually, and in human terms) that the German Christians represent, I would not take this to mean any destruction of our relationship with each other. I could not make any sense of that at all. My opinion of intellectual differences and battles is much too low, compared with my high estimation of the true mystery of our calling and mission in history, to allow me to think otherwise.\(^{341}\)

We do not have a response from Bonhoeffer. Rößler wrote this in the last letter between them, so we do not know what Bonhoeffer might have said about Rößler’s assertion about friendship with the non-Christian. We do know, however, that Bonhoeffer—seen in his actions toward Rößler—does clearly disagree with the suggestion that he could remain friends with a German who, for Bonhoeffer, ‘betrayed the gospel’. This was the dividing line for Bonhoeffer and represented more than ‘intellectual differences’. Bonhoeffer no longer shared convictions with Rößler; Rößler had sided with Heckel and the Reichskirche, and did not hear the commandment uttered by the Confessing Church to the German Protestant Church, and was outside the church that spoke as Christus Praesens. Without all of these things, even if Rößler thought he could remain friends with Bonhoeffer, Bonhoeffer could no longer be friends with Rößler so long as he did not hear the ‘No’ that Christ was speaking.

But Rößler’s invocation of the non-Christian, particularly of the Hindu, does offer some possibilities already present in Bonhoeffer’s life and work. One of the things that Rößler, Heckel, and the leaders of the Reichskirche lacked—resulting in the breaking of bonds of Christian friendship—was present in Gandhi’s movement. For Bonhoeffer, the ‘peoples of the East’ had heard a concrete commandment and shared that hearing with Bonhoeffer, and were fulfilling one condition of friendship. Rößler claims that despite the great differences between the non-Christian and the Christian, friendship is possible; and on Bonhoeffer’s terms, the condition of hearing God’s command is not a matter of difference, but of shared address, an address that even Bonhoeffer’s fellow Protestants did not hear. So, as Plant points out, friendship is Christocentric, and friendship is concerned with falsehood and truth, though Christ may not be immediately apparent in the religious practice of others that fulfil this condition of friendship.

So to say that Bonhoeffer’s interest in India and Gandhi is evidence of his departure from ‘Lutheran salvific exclusivity’,\(^{342}\) as Lovat puts it, is eccentric. On the one hand, Bonhoeffer did say that there is no salvation outside the church, not meaning the ‘Lutheran’ church but the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer, in this sense, still holds to a narrow

\(^{341}\) DBW/E 13:1/181, 253/266-67.

exclusivity, though it is an exclusivity governed by the fact that the Confessing Church, for Bonhoeffer, is obedient to the revelation given in Barmen and Dahlem. But on the other, Christ still gives the divine address, so Christ can address others such as Gandhi and his movement without calling into question the exclusivity of Christ’s salvific work. Bonhoeffer is generous about who might hear God’s address in Christ, without necessarily calling into question Christ’s salvific exclusivity.

What Rößler unintentionally does, in his letter on friendship, is to call attention to the conditions that made the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship fail, while also calling attention to a person who was fulfilling conditions that he himself was not fulfilling. Bonhoeffer and Rößler did not share a hearing of the same commandment concerning political and ecclesial order in the concrete ‘No’ to the Reich church; this led to the faltering and then the ending of the friendship by Bonhoeffer. But what we see, in Bonhoeffer’s assessment of Gandhi and his movement, is that those conditions for friendship were in place: Gandhi and his movement proclaimed a ‘call to peace’; Bonhoeffer shared a hearing of that call to peace with Gandhi and his movement, which led to Bonhoeffer’s desire to share work toward that peace. Friendship, on the terms that Bonhoeffer develops through his relational practice with Rößler, becomes a speculative possibility for Bonhoeffer with Gandhi and/or members of his movement.

There is an additional thread to Bonhoeffer’s interfaith curiosity in Gandhi that is pertinent here. Four months before the final correspondence from Rößler, on 8 July 1934, Bonhoeffer gave a sermon in London on repentance. The text was Luke 13:1-5, on the ‘Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices’, where Jesus tells the crowd to repent rather than judge these Galileans as ‘worse sinners’. Bonhoeffer sees the text as ‘only too much like the news of the day’, referring to the Röhm Putsch, where Nazis had murdered Hitler’s party rivals and Catholic leader Erich Klausener. Bonhoeffer asks his congregation, despite the desire ‘to accuse one person and exonerate the other’, that they repent, saying that ‘to repent and submit […] to God’s justice’ is to be ‘on dangerous ground. Now we are no longer bystanders, onlookers, judges of these events, but we ourselves are being addressed; we are affected [and] God is speaking to us.’

343 NRSV.
344 DBW/E 13:3/12, 365/365.
346 DBW/E 13:3/12, 368/367.
347 DBW/E 13:3/12, 370/369.
Bonhoeffer’s exemplar of a person who reserves judgment and repents is Gandhi. Bonhoeffer says of Gandhi that he is ‘great man of our time—who is not a Christian, but it is tempting to call him a heathen Christian’:

[Gandhi] tells a story, in his autobiography, that took place when he was a director of a school. He was doing everything in his power for these young people, and one day within this school community an injustice was done, which shook him to the core. However, he took this not as an occasion that called for him to judge or to punish anyone but only as a call to repentance [Ruf zur Buße]. So he went and spent long days in repentance [Buße], with fasting and all kinds of self-denial. What did this mean? It meant first of all that in the guilt of his pupils he saw his own guilt [Schuld], his lack of love, patience, and truthfulness. Then, it meant that he knew that there could be room for the Spirit of God only in the spirit of humble realization of guilt. Finally, it meant the recognition that faith and love and hope could be found only in repentance. We have not yet believed enough; we have not yet loved enough—can we be judges? Jesus speaks: I tell you, No. 348

This sermon is pertinent to a discussion of the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship in two ways. The first is that Bonhoeffer sees in Gandhi what he does not see in Rößler. Gandhi addresses injustice through an act of repentance and in the realisation of his own guilt. This is what Rößler is not able to do, seen in his position on the lack of the necessity for penance because of the primacy of God’s love and hope, or in the fact that he sees no need to change his mind about the Reich Church. Gandhi, on the other hand, repents. When we include Bonhoeffer’s conviction that Gandhi hears the commandment of peace and proclaims it, the same commandment Bonhoeffer hears and proclaims, the conclusion can be drawn that Gandhi fulfils another condition for friendship that Rößler does not: shared address, and the speaking of the concrete commandment spoken by the church in the case of the ‘No’ to Reich authority, and in the ‘completely different words and actions’ of Gandhi and members of his movement.

The second thing to draw from this sermon has to do with who repents, and who does not, in Bonhoeffer’s illustration. In the sermon, Bonhoeffer does not see the perpetrator of the injustice as the one who repents. It is Gandhi, the observer of the injustice, who repents in the ‘humble realization of guilt’. 349 Rößler played down repentance; but this did not mean that Bonhoeffer could demand Rößler’s repentance. Repentance might be necessary, but this does not mean it can be demanded. Instead, even according to the Bonhoeffer who preached this sermon, it was for him, as the witness of injustice, to carry guilt and repent personally for

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349 DBW/E 13:3/12, 372/370.
others, and thus taking his part in theological *Stellvertretung* and acting redemptively for the sake of his friend.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 2, I argue friendship was, according to Bonhoeffer’s thinking in *Sanctorum Communio*, lasting and redemptive. On these terms, it would appear that the friendship between Rössler and Bonhoeffer does not qualify. It did not survive the Church Struggle; neither is there evidence, in their correspondence, of acts of love and repentance. But this chapter is not intended to serve as an example of *Sanctorum Communio* in practice; rather, it is intended to look at a friendship, in its practice, as a way to bring a greater fullness to bear on the theology of friendship that I am developing. And the Rössler-Bonhoeffer friendship adds a greater fullness to a theology of friendship in two ways.

First, this friendship was *dialogical*. Bonhoeffer and Rössler valued the theological conversations that were part of the friendship, and Bonhoeffer was pressed in new theological directions on account of these conversations (despite that these theological directions were not the ones that Rössler himself might have hoped for). The friendship was clearly a factor in Bonhoeffer’s theological development: Bonhoeffer responds to Rössler’s criticism of Bonhoeffer’s distance from the real struggle of the German people, first by taking into account the real situation of German nationalism as the concrete context for ethics. The nationalism that once functioned as an abstract ethical determinant—as it did in the Barcelona lecture—is adjusted Christologically, and more fully takes into account the concrete context for that ethical deliberation, even if Bonhoeffer departs from Rössler’s sympathy for those nationalist movements. Bonhoeffer also develops his eschatological vision as part of a conversation and in response to Rössler’s optimistic eschatology of hope and love, an eschatology that had no need for penance. The connection between repentance and eschatology was introduced by Rössler to their conversation, and Bonhoeffer responds with an eschatology where an orientation to new creation in Christ is built upon the enabling conditions of repentance and forgiveness. In these two ways, we can see Bonhoeffer developing—at least in part—through his conversation, and theological friendship, with Rössler. This is not to claim that Bonhoeffer develops these theological convictions because of Rössler and Rössler only. But because these developments happen in conversation with Rössler, with Bonhoeffer responding to Rössler’s criticisms and adjusting his theology accordingly. This leads to the conclusion that Rössler—through their friendship—was part of that
theological development. Rößler, in this way, is one of Bonhoeffer’s under-appreciated theological interlocutors.

This way of looking at the friendship between Rößler and Bonhoeffer—as dialogical—speaks to two of the topics found in the friendship literature. There is a kind of mutuality to dialogue, where giving and receiving takes place in a theological conversation that enables thinking. This line of thought about theological dialogue as both mutual and as a way of theological knowing will come to bear especially on the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship in Chapter 5; but here, in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, we already see its presence in the way their conversations lead to Bonhoeffer adjusting and changing his theological course.

Secondly, this friendship has political dimensions. Friendship, for Bonhoeffer, is an ecclesial mode of sociality; this is seen in the way the friendship between him and Rößler ends when they no longer share the same ecclesial space. But because the inability for the two of them to share the same ecclesial space has to do with their differing convictions about the way the church relates to the world, it was not simply an ecclesial breach, but an ecclesial-political one. Bonhoeffer found himself in the Confessing Church, and Rößler remained in the Reich Church; but the reason that Bonhoeffer found himself in the Confessing Church had to do with the illegitimacy of the Reich Church on account of National Socialist interference within it. Bonhoeffer’s disassociation from the Reich church, and Rößler’s co-operation with it—the factor that meant the end of the friendship—was as much about differing political convictions as it was about ecclesial separation.

In the previous chapter, I raised a question about whether Bonhoeffer’s strict differentiation between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft made sense as strictly differentiated categories. This was related specifically to the question of utility and whether a social phenomenon like friendship could be of utility in the present, and also open to God’s eschatological end. In this case, the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Rößler is concerned as much with the limits of Reich authority as much as it is concerned with the church, problematising the sharp distinction between Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft, if Gemeinschaft is an end in itself and therefore open to God’s purposes and Gesellschaft is determined by its utility in the present. This friendship is characterised by Bonhoeffer’s hope for its political utility in the present, and his hope for its orientation to Christ’s ultimate ends.

In another sense, we see Bonhoeffer develop, here, an understanding of orders as social phenomena that contribute to the political good in the present, and are nevertheless open to God’s eschatological end. In the friendship with Rößler, the friendship could only continue in the case that 1. Both of them shared convictions about the legitimacy of Reich interference in the church, and 2. They both a shared a hearing of the concrete command that
orients the church to Christ and his new creation. So, in this way as well, Bonhoeffer is beginning to move away from a strict differentiation between utility and eschatological orientation; instead, they both belong together; in this case, they belong together as part of a friendship. As such, friendship is a social and political good; there will be more to say about this, and in greater detail, in Chapter 4.

What the dialogical and political nature of the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship reveals, then, is that the friendship is more than what Sanctorum Communio allows: friendship, in practice, is not simply an ecclesial social relation that lasts, is redemptive, and for others. It is also a form of sociality in which theological dialogue and influence can take place, and which is concerned with present political situations and outcomes.

There are, nevertheless, two threads of theological continuity between the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship as it is found in Sanctorum Communio. First, as I argue in the previous chapter, friendship in Sanctorum Communio can be for others. One of the dimensions of friendship for others was that friendship is not simply for itself, but has significance for the political and social world in which the friendship is found. We see this here, in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, at least in a nominal way. The friendship could not continue without shared convictions about, and responses to, the Reich’s interference in the church. In this way, this friendship was not isolated from the political social world in which we find it.

The second has already been covered in part: in Sanctorum Communio, friendship, as a community oriented to God’s end, has eschatological dimensions. There, God’s eschatological end was present as an eschatological prolepsis in the form of an encounter with Christ in acts of love and repentance. Here, in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, eschatology is also present as part of Bonhoeffer’s political theology, where an orientation to Christ and the new creation results in the reordering of social orders; or, alternately, if a social order is closed to Christ and his new creation it can be destroyed. So in Sanctorum Communio, eschatological prolepsis leads to a friendship’s resilience; in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, an unshared orientation to Christ and his new creation leads to the end of a social order; in this case, one as small as a friendship.

This brings us to what appears to be lacking in the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship: acts of love and repentance, as they are described in Sanctorum Communio, as a means of friendship’s resilience; or, in the terms of this chapter, the friendship was not oriented to Christ and his new creation, and was therefore destructible. In the letters we have, we do not see that they offered themselves to one another sacrificially, in a partial or a complete way, neither is there evidence of the mutual forgiveness of sin, intercession, or repentance. This
lack would corroborate the idea that friendship is lasting under certain conditions. First, Bonhoeffer and Rößler—at least according to Bonhoeffer—no longer shared ecclesial space together; and not sharing that space, *Stellvertretung* as a redemptive practice, in Bonhoeffer’s mind, is not as clearly available. Thus the eschatological foretaste of redeemed and sanctified sociality Bonhoeffer described in *Sanctorum Communio*—and the overcoming of alienation from God and one another in the present—as avenues for reconciliation are closed off. The healing of the friendship, through the gift of God that Bonhoeffer describes in his Barcelona lecture, is thwarted and hindered; the result of this hindrance was its destruction because the friendship was no longer oriented eschatologically to Christ. In this way, a political friendship like Bonhoeffer and Rößler’s will be more fragile than a friendship that had recourse to practices beyond shared convictions, such as practices of *Stellvertretung* in which healing and reconciliation can take place.

We can place some of the responsibility for the friendship’s end with Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer speaks of *Stellvertretung* in two ways that could have been part of the friendship’s reparation. Bonhoeffer thinks of intercessory prayer as taking on the afflictions of another who is not necessarily within the church-community; this is precisely the situation that he finds himself in with Rößler. Bonhoeffer considered himself to be within the church, and Rößler without, and that presents an opportunity for Bonhoeffer to intercede for Rößler in hope of drawing him into the church. Further, Bonhoeffer points out in his sermon on Gandhi that repentance is not necessarily the work of the one who commits the offence. As one repents for others, one can take on the guilt of another. In this sense, it was for Bonhoeffer to repent for the sake of the friendship. This would have moved the friendship in new directions, to be sure; but Bonhoeffer, even if he were eventually vindicated for saying ‘No’ to the Reich Church, this vindication would not absolve Bonhoeffer for abandoning a friendship where avenues of reparation—such as intercession and repentance—were yet available.

This is a cautious conclusion, because these acts of love and repentance may have taken place without having been recorded in the correspondence. But there is plenty of evidence of acts of love and repentance elsewhere in Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship; enough to say that if acts of love and repentance were taking place, it is very likely we would see it in the letters. This possibility, however, will have to wait until Chapter 5, where an investigation into the acts of love and repentance, as found in the correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, will take place.

Before we turn to the Bonhoeffer-Bethge correspondence, however, there is another task more immediately at hand. The Bonhoeffer-Bethge correspondence will, in part, shed light on Bonhoeffer’s political and social theology because his political and social theology is
worked out, by Bonhoeffer, as he reflects on friendship with Bethge. But the concept that Bonhoeffer develops there, with Bethge—the concept of *der Spielraum der Freiheit*, and friendship’s relation to it—is a topic that needs to be investigated in detail. So now, before we turn to the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, we turn to the *Spielraum* and friendship’s place in Bonhoeffer’s social and political theology of the mandates.
PART II: BONHOEFFER AND BETHGE ON FRIENDSHIP, 1935-1973
ORDERS, MANDATES, FREEDOM, AND FRIENDSHIP

I wonder whether—it almost seems so today—it is only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education, friendship, play). [...] Who in our time could, for example, lightheartedly make music, nurture friendship, play, and be happy? Certainly not the ‘ethical’ person, but only the Christian.  

We began, in Chapter 2, with an abbreviated form if this epigraph, because it sums up Bonhoeffer’s conviction that the Christian has a particular ability to nurture friendship; we return to it here to consider Christian friendship’s political dimensions. Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Rößler offers evidence of Bonhoeffer’s conviction that friendship has political significance: so long as Bonhoeffer and Rößler did not hold the same convictions about the Reich and the Reich church, the friendship could not continue. This line of thought—that friendship has political and social significance beyond itself—is articulated conceptually, and in a much more sophisticated way, later in Bonhoeffer’s life in the Tegel correspondence. In that correspondence, and through the influence of Eberhard Bethge, a conversation about friendship’s place in his political and social theology ends with a dense, exploratory passage on what Bonhoeffer calls der Spielraum der Freiheit, ‘the sphere of freedom’, a realm closely associated with the church and in which friendship finds a place in the mandates. The first part of my argument in this chapter is that this concept of the Spielraum—and friendship within it—is not an idiosyncratic development of Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates. Rather, friendship offers a way for Bonhoeffer to further develop some of his longstanding political and social concerns. The second part of my argument is related to the first, and contributes to the larger argument of the thesis: that friendship can be for others. In the concept of the Spielraum, friendship finds a place in Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought as something more than a private good to be shared between friends; and as a result, when friendship has social and political significance beyond itself, friendship can be for others.

Despite the reference to the mandates—on which there is a great deal of research—there is not a great deal of commentary on the Spielraum’s place in Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates, nor has the Spielraum been put to much theological use as a way to speak to friendship in Bonhoeffer’s life and theology. Bethge writes on friendship and the Spielraum in his essay on Bonhoeffer and friendship, but does not make the connection between the

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350 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
351 On my use of ‘political and social’ as the most appropriate way to approach Bonhoeffer’s thought, see my Introduction.
352 DBW/E 8:2/102, 290-92/267-69.
Spielraum, friendship, and Bonhoeffer’s social and political thought as a whole. De Gruchy uses the concept of the Spielraum in his work on aesthetics, but does not speak to the relation between friendship and Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought. Elsewhere, de Gruchy does make a connection between the Spielraum and Finkenwalde; we will look at this more closely below. Pangritz’s treatment is the most comprehensive, and includes a very helpful discussion of friendship, though it is a compressed discussion of a subject that deserves a discussion that reaches across Bonhoeffer’s thought as a whole. Most surprisingly, de Graaff—in a monograph on Bonhoeffer, politics, and friendship—makes no mention of the Spielraum at all. Rather than looking to Bonhoeffer’s own resources on friendship and politics, which are rich enough in their own right, de Graaff is guided by secondary sources which he then deploys in his reading of Bonhoeffer, leading to a neglect of Bonhoeffer’s own thoughts on the subject of politics and friendship.

The reason for this relative lack of attention to the concept of the Spielraum may its complexity. It is a difficult concept to negotiate, and it is no wonder that Bethge says, in reference to the Spielraum letter, that ‘Dietrich intends that his theology of the mandates […] should be kept open in fruitful illogic’. But a complexity that can verge on illogicality does not mean that the concept should be uninvestigated, though it does mean that its complexity needs to be brought under some degree of control.

One way to bring some shape and form—and with that shape and form, to bring some limit to its ‘illogic’—is to look at various aspects of the concept in Bonhoeffer’s thought more generally. When we do this, what we find is that the idea of the Spielraum—and friendship’s place within it—is a development that we can trace in three related and long-standing concerns in Bonhoeffer’s thought. For Bonhoeffer, the Spielraum was 1. Comprehensive: it is a ‘sphere of freedom [Spielraum], which encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates’, the political and social spheres of life that Bonhoeffer had described in the Ethics manuscripts. The Spielraum also had to do with 2. Freedom, a freedom that was 3.

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357 De Graaff, Politics in Friendship, pp. 11-38.
359 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
Reparative: the existence of such a sphere was important for Bonhoeffer because, for him, freedom had been ‘pushed into the background’ of his social and political world; nevertheless, Bonhoeffer hoped that in the ‘concept of the church […] we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education, friendship, play)’. So in the way that practices like friendship restore freedom to the world, those practices perform a reparative function in a social and political world that, for Bonhoeffer, was overly characterised by obedience.

The first avenue of investigation, then, is mereological. If the Spielraum is comprehensive, and ‘encompasses [umgeben] all three spheres of the divine mandates’—that is, it brings a comprehensive wholeness to the spheres of the political and social world—what place does the wholeness of the political and social world have in Bonhoeffer’s thought? And what is the place of friendship, as it relates to wholeness of the political and social world? The second avenue has to do with the correlation of freedom and obedience. For Bonhoeffer, the ‘Prussian world is so strongly defined by the four mandates that the whole sphere of freedom has been pushed into the background’, and wonders if ‘it is only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education, freedom, play)’. The Spielraum, then, is closely related to the church, and represents freedom in a social and political world marked by obedience. But what do art, education, friendship, and play have to do with one another? How do they bring freedom out of the ‘background’?

The third avenue has to do with reparation, a term that needs some conceptual clarification. My use of ‘reparation’ is not Peter Ochs’ use of the term; for Ochs, ‘reparative’ is a specific kind of reasoning. My use of ‘reparation’ does not refer to philosophical discourse or reasoning, but to political and social environments that are in need of some kind of social and political adjustment or repair. For Bonhoeffer, writing of the Spielraum, the political and social world ought to be characterised by both freedom and obedience; and if freedom has been ‘pushed into the background’, as Bonhoeffer thought, to restore practices of freedom to the world, would be to repair that world. And if, for Bonhoeffer, the Spielraum is reparative to the social and political world—what place does reparation hold elsewhere in Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought? These questions point to a strategy of Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought where he identifies something in need of repair in the political and social world.

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360 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
361 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
362 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
363 See, for example, Peter Ochs, ‘Reparative Reasoning: From Pierce’s Pragmatism to Augustine’s Scriptural Semiotic’, Modern Theology, 25 (2009), pp. 187-215 (pp. 189-90).
social world, followed by proposals that would, if carried out, perform that reparation. I am
describing reparation here in terms of freedom and obedience, but as we will see, this strategy
of identifying ways the political and social world is in need of repair, followed by a strategy
for that repair, is found in other parts of Bonhoeffer’s work as well.

What I will show is that Bonhoeffer’s Spielraum—despite the fact that it is a new
concept introduced late in the prison letters—has precedent in three earlier periods of
Bonhoeffer’s life and thought. The first period is when Bonhoeffer develops his theology of
the orders of preservation; the second period is at Finkenwalde; and the third begins with
Bonhoeffer’s Ethics manuscripts and his theology of the mandates. And, if friendship finds
its place in Bonhoeffer’s political and social theology through the concept of the Spielraum,
friendship can be seen as part of the development of Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought;
and in the way it finds its place in Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought more generally,
friendship will be seen as a social relation that is not limited to its internal goods, and a
relation for others.

4.1 WHOLENESS AND REPARATION IN BONHOEFFER’S ORDERS OF
PRESERVATION

Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates—a theology that Bonhoeffer would still be
developing when he writes to Bethge on friendship and the Spielraum—has an early iteration
in his theology of the orders of preservation. It takes the form of a response to a particular

364 Terms such as ‘doctrine of the mandates’ communicate the idea that Bonhoeffer
had a complete and finished theological product in his political and social theology. This
chapter, however, argues that it was a line of thought in development, leading me to employ
the less overwrought term ‘theology of the mandates’ in the effort to communicate the
flexibility and development that we see between the Ethics manuscripts and the prison letters,
and the fact that even in the prison letters Bonhoeffer is in an experimental frame of mind
in this regard. For examples of the use of this term, see Green, Sociality, p. 323; Clifford J.
Green, ‘Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition’, in Ethics, ed. by Clifford J. Green
(Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), pp. 1-44 (p. 21); Michael P. DeJonge, Bonhoeffer’s Reception
of Luther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 132. Pangritz uses the term, but puts it
in inverted commas, communicating some distance from the idea that the mandates are an
established and consistent doctrine in Bonhoeffer’s thought; see Andreas Pangritz, Karl Barth
in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 67-68; Andreas
Pangritz, ‘Point and Counterpoint—Resistance and Submission: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on
Theology and Music in Times of War and Social Crisis’, in Theology in Dialogue: The
Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought. Essays in
Honor of John W. de Gruchy, ed. by Lyn Holness and Ralf K. Wüstenberg (Cambridge:
Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 28-42 (p. 35); Pangritz, “Spielraum der Freiheit” und “Heilige
Ordnung”, pp. 214-17.
reception of Luther’s political thought, and where Bonhoeffer shows concern for the wholeness and reparation of the social and political world.

In Bonhoeffer’s Germany, Luther’s differentiation between spiritual and secular authority had an influential sway upon and discussion of political and social theologies. The political inheritance left by Luther is actually complex, diverse, and is not easily reducible; Bradstock, for example, points out that Luther’s own political thinking was occasional rather than systematic, and that even though Luther—as an occasional political theologian—looked to state authority to help his ecclesiastical cause, Luther’s work was part of the very different political development of the dignity of the individual in modern democracy.³⁶⁵ But it was Luther’s division of the world into distinct spheres—a division with its theological beginnings in *Von weltlicher Oberkeit* (1523) and Luther’s understanding of the separation of spiritual from secular authority—that occupied German political-theological discourse.³⁶⁶ Though Luther’s spheres complement one another, Luther stressed separation of the spiritual from the secular in the church and the state, where different moralities are at work, and where worldly authority is tasked with the ordering of society.³⁶⁷ Jesse Couenhoven, in an essay on Luther’s political theology, writes:

[Luther’s distinctions have] the tendency to result in a dualism between a worldly state and the Christ-based church, as well as a split in the lives of individual believers, who live in both spheres but find it hard to unite them. Since the law, as Luther usually understands it, contains nothing positive, it does not point the state towards the fullness of life found in the gospel.³⁶⁸

I will return to the idea that this kind of thinking about spheres can result in a ‘split in the lives of the individual believers’; for the moment, however, what I would point out is that Luther’s inheritance included both the question of the possibility (or, according to Couenhoven, the non-possibility) of an evangelical reparation of the state through its orientation to the fullness of life found in the gospel, and the mereological problem of spheres, their differentiation, and their unity.

³⁶⁶ The translation of Luther to which I refer is Höpfl’s, and found in Martin Luther, ‘On Secular Authority’, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. and trans. by Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-43 (pp. 12, 14, 23, 34, and throughout).
³⁶⁷ Bradstock, ‘Reformation’, p. 64.
This reception of Luther on spheres took the form of a discourse, in the 1930s, around what came to be called the ‘orders of creation’. Brunner, for example, had begun to write on the idea of orders of creation from a Reformed perspective as early as 1927, and in his 1932 volume, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*, he systematically approached ethics from the concepts of the divine command and the ‘Divine orders of creation’. Bonhoeffer also took part in this conversation about the orders of creation, beginning as early as April 1932. In 1934, Paul Althaus wrote his pamphlet *Theologie der Ordnungen*. And the Marburg *Gutachten*, signed by every member of the Marburg theological faculty on 20 September, 1933, spoke of a ‘true order of creation’.

Althaus in particular was influential, in part because he elevated the *Volk* to an order of creation. According to Probst, Althaus offered an attractive theological cover, at that time, for other Protestant anti-Judaic and antisemitic thinking. But Althaus did not argue that the German *Volk* was an order of creation that was fixed. Althaus himself saw that an argument for the presence of *Volk* at creation was slim, and that an argument for the presence of the German *Volk* at creation non-existent, and took his cue from Luther: the creation of the human person meant that according to Althaus himself, as a German living in the 1930s, he was surely created by God too, but created within a *Volk*, and that this racial identity was inalienable from his own createdness. This is what elevates *Volk* to an order of creation, not a pseudo-historical past creation and a supposed concretisation in the past. Althaus may have been following Brunner here, who also did not see orders of creation as something static and

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371 The conversation took place at the Theological Conference of the Provisional Bureau for Ecumenical Youth Work, April 29-30, 1932, in Berlin, and was written up in a report and published in *Die Eiche* that same year; DBW/E 11:2/13, 317-27/346-55.
374 Christopher J. Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 168. Althaus was not the only Lutheran theologian working on and developing a theology of the orders of creation, and while Althaus was lending support to an ideology of ‘blood and soil’, other theologies of the orders of creation did not necessarily elevate the *Volk* to the status of an order. The Marburg *Gutachten*, for example, criticised the classification of race and nationality as orders of creation. See Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, pp. 38-9.
fixed; instead, for both Brunner and Althaus, orders are part of an ongoing historical process that is open to certain kinds of development such as the appearance of the German Volk.

Looking at Bonhoeffer’s theological interlocutors on this point is illuminating, and leads to the need to readjust some of the literature on Bonhoeffer’s theological relation to theologians like Althaus and Brunner. According to de Gruchy, for example, Bonhoeffer adopts a Christological interpretation of the Bible, in Creation and Fall, in an attempt to undermine the use of the doctrine of the orders of creation in support of the Nazi ideology of ‘blood and soil’. The result of this kind of interpretation, according to de Gruchy, meant that for Bonhoeffer, ‘creation does not provide a basis for autonomous orders—state, family, culture—that function independently of God’s revelation and redemption in Christ; instead the orders must be understood from the perspective of that very revelation and redemption’. De Gruchy is right to say that in Creation and Fall we find the first reference to orders of preservation, and where Bonhoeffer develops the idea of the orders being preserved by God from descending into chaos and orients them eschatologically toward redemption. I will say more on this in due course.

But de Gruchy misreads Bonhoeffer’s opponents, trusting Bonhoeffer’s own assessment of his interlocutors. According to de Gruchy, Bonhoeffer chooses the term ‘orders of preservation’ in Creation and Fall in order to argue that the orders are neither given in creation nor ‘cast in concrete forever afterward’. But neither Brunner nor Althaus thought of the orders of creation as ‘concretized’. Rather, for both Brunner and Althaus, the orders are part of a world that sees historical and cultural development, change, and

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376 McGrath, Emil Brunner, p. 80. In Brunner: ‘We are summoned at all times to take our place humbly and gratefully in the spirit of service, within the actual social environment in which our life is placed, and in it we are to do the duties it requires as the work of God has given us to do; at the same time we are summoned to protest against the lovelessness which it contains, and to seek to realize a better order’. Brunner, Divine Imperative, p. 339. Though the orders are not static and fixed, this did not prevent Althaus from thinking in an autocratic way about them. Althaus did think that people should be obedient even if the orders were implemented by evil men. See Ericksen, Theologians under Hitler, pp. 100-1.


380 As found in the Ciernohorské Kúpele lecture and the ‘Concrete Commandment and the Divine Mandates’ Ethics manuscript; see DBW/E 11:2/14, 335-36/362-63 and DBW/E 6, 393/389.

betterment, a world of which the orders are a part. Even for Althaus, the *Volk* was not somehow ‘concretized’ at creation; in this sense, both Brunner and Althaus were open to the possibility that the orders could change through cultural adaptation.

Bonhoeffer certainly saw the theology of the orders of creation as misguided and dangerous when he encountered others like ‘Pastor Peter’, a German Christian and member of the Nazi Party, who in a meeting with Bonhoeffer had asserted an understanding of the connection between *Volk* and the orders of creation in which the orders of creation are inflexible.382 But Bonhoeffer, more than he himself admits, is in some agreement with Brunner and Althaus when it comes to the contextual flexibility of the orders, though his vision is much more radical. For Bonhoeffer, the orders are oriented to creation, though fallen; and they are oriented to an eschatological promise, calling them ‘orders of preservation’ [Erhaltungsordnungen]. In Bonhoeffer’s July 1932 lecture in Ciernohorské Kúpele, for example, he said that Christ, ‘the one who has fulfilled God’s commandments for us’, is ‘the one who brings and promises the new world’.383

Only there where the law is fulfilled, where the new world of God’s order exists […] we hear the commandment. With this we are wholly directed toward Christ. Through this, however, we understand the entire world order of the fallen creation as directed only toward Christ through the new creation.384

This eschatological orientation of the orders does not constitute an abandonment of creation as an ethical category. Rather, it is the affirmation that creation is fallen, and that it cannot be relied upon to clearly reveal our ethical obligations. So, even though ‘all [worldly orders] stand alone under God’s preservation as long as they are still open for Christ’ and ‘receive their value completely from the outside, from Christ’, this act of preservation is one that ‘guarantees the possibilities of a new creation’.385 In this way, through their eschatological

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382 DBW/E 11:2/13, 325/353-54. This was two years before Althaus’s more nuanced exposition.
384 DBW/E 11:2/14, 337/363. Philip G. Ziegler writes on the importance of Bonhoeffer’s eschatology in understanding the *Ethics*, and I will return to Ziegler’s work in the next section. The importance of eschatology to Bonhoeffer’s theology of political and social life, however, is already seen here in Bonhoeffer’s theology of the orders of preservation. See Philip G. Ziegler, ‘Christ’s Lordship and Politics: Visser ‘T Hooft and Bonhoeffer’, in *Bonhoeffer, Religion and Politics: 4th International Bonhoeffer Colloquium*, ed. by Christiane Tietz and Jens Zimmermann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 55-80 (pp. 76-78).
orientation, orders have a kind of flexibility and adaptability. God’s revelation cannot be taken as concretised or absolute, but rather as something that ‘must always be given anew’.

The radicality of Bonhoeffer’s eschatological understanding of orders leads him to say that they are also open to a ‘radical destruction’ that can be demanded in the interest of the of the new creation. We encountered this radicality already, in Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Rössler. Part of the reason for the discontinuation of the friendship was on account of unshared convictions about the Reich. But those political convictions—the ‘No’ to the Reich church—arose from the ‘commandment […] from Christ […] who brings and promises the new world’. Their unshared convictions were a result of an unshared orientation to Christ and his new creation, and as such, the friendship was destructible. Similarly, orders must remain ‘forms of purposeful formation against sin in the direction of the gospel’, to ‘stop the radical decline of the world in death and sin’ and to ‘be in a position to hold open the way of the gospel’. If they cannot fulfil this purpose, for Bonhoeffer, understood from the perspective of their eschatological end, the orders are also open to destruction.

For Bonhoeffer, it is the church that ‘must judge the orders of the world’, and this judgment is part of the church’s reparative role within social and political life. This judgment is not reparative in the sense that it might be understood in the context of creation, as if there were an original wholeness that is somehow degraded and which would be restored if the world were to adjust its political practices through the church’s judgment for or against certain political practices or institutions. Rather, through what Bonhoeffer calls the church’s ‘venture and decision [Wagen und Entscheiden] for or against an order of preservation’, a kind of reparation becomes possible through judgment, but one that takes into account the fact

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386 DBW/E 11:2/14, 335/362.
387 DBW/E 11:2/14, 338/364. Despite the fact that Bonhoeffer is clear that destruction can be demanded, Green neglects to mention its possibility, writing that God’s Kingdom ‘acknowledges and protects the order of preservation of life and preventing destruction, restraining the breakdown of human communities through arbitrary individualistic action, and protecting people by civil law from lust for power’. Green, Sociality, p. 204.
that in history certain developments can take place which prevent the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and as such are no longer open to Christ and the new creation. In this sense, the church, as it hears the divine commandment, does not attempt to restore what once was. Instead, through its ‘venture and decision’—its judgment about what political practices or institutions contributes to God’s eschatological end—the church takes part in constructively repairing social and political orders for the sake of human life and the stemming of death and sin, and thus countermanding death and sin. Similar to the way the church’s Stellvertretung assumes a kind of human agency that is not in competition with the Stellvertretung of Christ in his saving work, Christ sustains and preserves the orders while human agents, in their ‘venture and decision’, respond to the commandment and take action in the effort to preserve, construct, and even to destroy according to an order’s ability to preserve for the sake of Christ and the new creation, and through that preservation, construction, or destruction take part in the reparation of the social and political world.

Bonhoeffer, enigmatically in the Ciernohorské Kúpele lecture, says that the commandment ‘can demand the most radical destruction for the purpose of the one construction [Aufbauenden].’ But if we look more broadly in Bonhoeffer’s work, or to the Marburg faculty statement on the orders of creation, we find signs of what he might mean by this. The Marburg faculty, unlike Luther who emphasised differentiation, saw a single ‘true order of creation’ which was comprehensive and whole, proclaiming ‘God’s own reign over all whom He has created, and His redeeming judgment of sins, to which all are subject’. And as Zerner and Plant suggest, Bonhoeffer’s own concern for political, social, and ecclesiastical unity and wholeness—the ‘one construction’ of the Ciernohorské Kúpele lecture—reaches at least as far back as his visit to North Africa in 1924. In Tripoli, Bonhoeffer came into contact with Islam, and was impressed by the integration of ‘life and religion’, and there Bonhoeffer appears to be aware of what Couenhoven calls a ‘split in the lives of individual believers’, a ‘split’ he did not see in Tripoli’s Muslims.

Lovin, then, can only be partly right to say that Bonhoeffer’s orders are ‘a politics of boundaries’. They are a politics of boundaries in that Bonhoeffer does differentiate between

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the powers of the state and the powers of the church; but Bonhoeffer shows a concern for their unity as well. For Plant, the Islam Bonhoeffer witnessed offered a critical foil to both Catholicism and Protestantism, where religious devotion can become a stumbling block to responsible living in the world. But, according to Plant, this ‘dishonesty, this dualism, was something that did not seem to pervade the lives of the Muslims he met briefly in North Africa’. 397 Plant goes on to name India, despite the fact that Bonhoeffer did not have a good sense of the religious diversity there, as another symbol of the unity between the religious and the secular that Bonhoeffer did not see in the Christianity he knew, 398 the social and political world that the Marburg faculty also sought to describe as a unity under the reign of God.

The unity and wholeness of political, ecclesiastical, and social life does not mean that spheres operate without a certain degree of independence and integrity, and Strohm is right to place Bonhoeffer’s theology of the orders of preservation within the larger context of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of relationship between the state and the church. 399 Both Strohm and Green 400 suggest looking to Bonhoeffer’s essay ‘Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God’s Kingdom on Earth’, based on a lecture given on 19 November 1932—approximately five months after the ecumenical address and while he was giving the Creation and Fall Lectures—as the place to find Bonhoeffer in a more conventional mode of reflection on the relation between church and state, but nevertheless a reflection linked to his orders of preservation. Bonhoeffer, unsurprisingly, assesses the questions of divine command, and of the appropriate context for understanding Volk and Staat, through the Lutheran division between the regiments, calling the state an ‘order’ and the church a ‘miracle’. 401

But the language is not simply Lutheran; it also is familiar from the Ciernohorské Kúpele lecture. Strohm correctly points out that Bonhoeffer is concerned, in ‘Thy Kingdom Come!’, with Staat as an order of preservation. 402 In language that clearly echoes his ecumenical address, Bonhoeffer writes:

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400 Green, Sociality, p. 203.
402 Strohm, Theologische Ethik, p. 51.
The kingdom of God takes form in the state insofar as the state recognises and maintains the order of preservation of life [die Ordnung der Erhaltung des Lebens] and insofar as it accepts responsibility for preserving this world from collapse and for exercising its authority here against the destruction of life.  

Strohm goes on to say that such things as Volk and marriages are subsidiary to the state, and as a result not orders of preservation in and of themselves. In Strohm’s reading of Bonhoeffer, the state is a singular order; within that order, other things such as marriage are derivative. Charles West similarly sees ‘one order of preservation’ at work in Bonhoeffer’s mind in this essay.

This is where Strohm, and West, go awry; Bonhoeffer’s mereology is far more sophisticated than they allow. The state is a unity, and the hope for unity that Plant sees in Bonhoeffer’s assessment of North Africa and India carries on in similar fashion here, as Bonhoeffer looks to Staat. But the unity of the state does not necessarily mean that it is one colossal order; rather, it is comprised of wholes within a whole. In this lecture Bonhoeffer refers to a number of things, including communities, as Ordnungen, in the plural. For Bonhoeffer, God ‘preserves [erhaltende] the Earth with its laws, communities [Gemeinschaften], and its history,’ calling ‘order’ (along with miracle) as the form of God’s kingdom; within the state ‘the orders [Ordnungen] of existing communities [Gemeinschaften] are maintained [erhalten werden] with authority and responsibility.’ In the state, then, there are a variety of orders, within another order. The fact that Bonhoeffer can imagine orders within an order should not come as a surprise, however. Structurally, this is similar to the way Bonhoeffer understood the relation between Einzelgemeinden and the Gemeinde of the universal church: as wholes within a larger whole. We also know that Bonhoeffer treated his friendship with Rößler as a community, one that, without appropriate orientation to Christ, was destructible; so even a social phenomenon as small as a friendship is treated as a kind of ‘order’. Here, too, social structures within larger social structures can share the same features as the larger social structure in which they are embedded, without calling into question the overarching authority and unity of the sphere to which they belong.

403 DBW/E 12:2/11, 273/293.
404 Strohm, Theologische Ethik, p. 49. Green is also unconcerned with a ‘catalogue of orders’, but true to form, his remarks take psychological/existential form, and he sees the greater issue being that ‘[i]n estrangement from God, neighbors, self, and nature, the sinful creature has no unmediated relationships to the primal creation nor any access to truth and liberation except through the revelation of Christ the Mediator’; see Green, Sociality, p. 205.
407 DBW/E 12:2/11, 274/293.
So Bonhoeffer has something more nuanced in mind than a monolithic state order. Rather than seeing the state as a monolithic order of preservation—and other social practices and institutions as subsidiary to a single order—Bonhoeffer is thinking here of social practices, communities, and institutions as distinct orders of preservation, without threatening the governing role of the state.408 In this sense, the conversation reaches back to the argument of Chapter 2: communities, insofar as they are oriented to creation and the eschaton, remain open to God’s purposes. But here, once they are no longer open to Christ’s new creation, as ‘orders’, they need not be preserved. They need not necessarily be destroyed, either, because that would mean Gesellschaft, as a social phenomenon that is not eschatologically oriented, would necessarily be destroyed.

Bonhoeffer’s theology of the orders of preservation offers a number of ways to understand his later concept of the Spielraum, and friendship’s place within the Spielraum. Already here, in 1932-33, Bonhoeffer is thinking of a political and social theology that involves some kind of reparation. Bonhoeffer sees the church, in its ‘venture and decision’, as taking part in that reparation, where the church offers a way for the social and political world to orient itself to the new creation; not to take on the church’s judgment against certain orders would be allow death and sin to flourish. In this way, Bonhoeffer is a theologian who shares an interest in orders that are reparable, contextual, and flexible, much like Althaus and Brunner. But for Bonhoeffer, the concrete practice is one of ‘venture and decision’, a judgment for or against particular social and political phenomena in the church’s proclamation of repentance to the world. It is, in a way, a passive reparation, because through its proclamation, the church offers an opportunity for the world to repent and change its ways for the sake of the gospel and human life; or alternately, choose not to repent and thus to allow sin and death to flourish. It is a judgment passed, and a solution offered, but not necessarily one taken up. This is not yet the reparative role that Bonhoeffer will see the church playing through practices like friendship, where freedom is restored to a world of obedience through the church’s social practice. But it is a strategy of reparation, where the church takes part in offering a way for the social and political world to choose life and human thriving, rather than death and sin, through an orientation of social and political orders to the gospel and the new creation of Christ.

We also see, in Bonhoeffer’s theology of the orders of preservation, an interest in the integration and wholeness of various spheres of life, similar to the concern for wholeness seen in the Marburg faculty’s single order of creation. But Bonhoeffer’s treatment of wholeness is

408 This apparent threat to the governing role of the state appears to be Charles West’s central concern; see West, ‘Ground’, p. 247.
much more sophisticated. Communities, as orders unto themselves, remain distinct while assuming that they are part of a larger order or social phenomenon; that is, social phenomena can have their own wholeness, integrity, and distinguishability while they are part of a larger whole. This idea that a sphere of social and political life can have an integrity of that is not threatened by being a part of a larger whole with its own integrity is something that we will see expressed in Bonhoeffer’s concept of a Spielraum that both exists as a distinctive Raum, but one that also comprehends other spheres of social and political life within it; this will be important in seeing friendship as a social phenomenon that both belongs to the church, and yet has a place within the whole of the social and political world.

But the Spielraum, for Bonhoeffer, does not only refer back to concerns about wholeness and reparation as they are found in his theology of the orders of creation; the Spielraum is der Spielraum der Freiheit. And the freedom of the Spielraum is something best seen in life at Finkenwalde; and so it is to this period of Bonhoeffer’s life that we turn to next.

4.2 FREEDOM AND OBEDIENCE

Part of Bonhoeffer’s analysis of his social and political world, as he saw it from Tegel, was that ‘[I]t is indeed not easy to classify friendship sociologically’, because friendship belongs ‘not in the sphere of obedience but rather in the sphere of freedom, which encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates’.409 But for Bonhoeffer, his ‘Prussian world is so strongly defined by the four mandates that the whole sphere of freedom has been pushed into the background’, and he wonders if ‘it is only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education, friendship, play)’.410 So for Bonhoeffer, friendship—along with art, education, and play—belong to the sphere of freedom; and because Prussian obedience had come to the fore, this sphere of freedom has been relegated to the background.

There are a number of issues already arising in this passage, not least the numbering of the mandates, and how the sphere of freedom is related to the ‘three mandates’ and the ‘concept of the church’; I will address those issues more directly in the next section on Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates.

But before Bonhoeffer returned to a more straightforward discussion of the reparation and wholeness of social and political spheres in his theology of the mandates, he took up his post as head of the Finkenwalde preacher’s seminary where Bonhoeffer met Bethge. My

409 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
410 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
proposal for this section is to look to Finkenwalde primarily, but also to Hegel and Bonhoeffer’s thought on freedom more generally, in order to investigate the particular problem of the relation of freedom to friendship and the Spielraum. Looking retrospectively to Finkenwalde, in the context of Bonhoeffer’s thought and through the lens of Hegel’s understanding of freedom, offers the best way to understand what Bonhoeffer was getting at when he wrote about the Spielraum and friendship within it. Finkenwalde, for Bonhoeffer, was where freedom was evident in practice, one of those practices being friendship; and friendship, as a practice of freedom, was for Bonhoeffer a way that freedom could be restored to a world where it has been pushed into the background, thus bringing freedom into social correlation with obedience.

4.2.1 Hegel

Before we get to Finkenwalde, however, we begin with the correlation of freedom and restraint in Hegel. Hegel’s correlation of freedom and restraint is found primarily in his introduction to Elements of the Philosophy of Right where he begins with three moments in the understanding of freedom. In the first ‘moment’, freedom is understood as the ‘pure indeterminacy’ of the self, free from restriction. This is, for Hegel, a ‘negative freedom’. But because freedom also means the ability to take part in particular communities which have their own necessary commitments and restraints, this leads Hegel to his second ‘moment’: the ability to engage in particular activities with their concomitant commitments and restraints.

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For Franco, this freedom is not ‘the Hobbesian (or Benthamite) and wholly empirical notion of freedom as the “absence of external impediments” [found] in pursuing whatever we have a desire to pursue’. Instead, ‘[f]or Hegel, negative freedom is ultimately concerned with the source of human actions, whether they emanate from and ultimately express one’s self or not. And it has nothing to do with the unfettered pursuit of our empirical desires and inclinations but precisely abstracts from all such determinacy and particularity’. For Franco, this is ‘not the empiricist tradition of Hobbes and Bentham that Hegel has in mind when he talks about negative freedom but, rather, the rationalist tradition of Kant and especially Fichte’. But Franco is getting ahead of himself to say this at this juncture; while Hegel is heading toward an abstraction from determinacy and particularity as part of his argument about freedom as a matter of the will in itself, this too is only part of an argument that is heading, in the end, to claim particular commitments as a necessary aspect of freedom properly understood. See Franco, Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom, p. 160.
This second moment does not necessarily mean setting negative freedom aside, however; a commitment to a particular activity can preserve negative freedom by accounting for the possibility of withdrawal from the commitment made, and thus, the second moment preserves both negative freedom and the freedom to make commitments.

But Hegel is critical of this second moment of as well. Freedom, as a freedom from restriction and the freedom to make particular commitments from which one might withdraw, relies on certain conditions. The choices upon which this kind of freedom rests are determined by given factors such as circumstance, or chance, or nature; further, these choices are made or rejected according to desire rather than the rational will. So for Hegel, the freedom to choose is not real freedom, because choices, and their commitments, are limited by what is given; and, on account of the choices being made according to desire, this kind of freedom is not derived from the reasoning will and not determined by that will, and thus freedom is dependent on an ‘inwardly or externally given content and material’.  

Hegel’s solution to this problem is for the will to no longer be dependent on that which is given, but rather for the will itself to be a determining factor. When the will wills its own freedom, it is truly freedom because it is not dependent upon or limited by that which is already given. But even this will is not free from commitment or restraint, because in order to preserve the freedom of the will, the freedom of unlimited choice is itself given up in order to allow the freedom of the will to determine the character of that freedom, a freedom that is committed to that which commands the recognition of any free will. For Hegel, this leads to necessary commitments to rights and laws, and a ‘new valuation of the particular’.  

Thus, for Hegel, freedom is not, in the end, Kantian and Fichtian rational autonomy. Freedom, for Hegel, leads to participation in the ‘specific practices and institutions’ of community, including the family, civil society, and the state. Further, these necessary commitments to others means that Hegel’s idea of freedom is not a speculative freedom remote from experience; instead, for Hegel, we have access to it in ‘friendship and love’. 

For our purposes, then, Hegel’s understanding of freedom does not mean freedom from limits that might be placed by others through participation in institutions that make up

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413 Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 48.
415 Franco, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Freedom*, p. 156.
416 Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 42. This last quotation comes from Eduard Gans’s ‘Additions’ to Hegel’s text, based on student lecture notes; while the provenance of the ‘Additions’ raises some questions about their accuracy with regard to Hegel’s own thinking, they’ve been part of the reception of Hegel since 1833 and were part of the Gasson edition with which Bonhoeffer would have been familiar; see H.B. Nisbet, ‘Translator’s Preface’, in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), (pp. xxxv-xxxvi).
modern life. Instead, for Hegel, freedom itself, properly understood, leads to necessary commitments. In this way, to be subject to the rules and norms of communities and institutions—through commitment to those communities and institutions—is the result of freedom rather than an erosion of freedom. Freedom, then, is not the absence of forms of obedience, nor does obedience mean a lack of freedom. Freedom and obedience are not mutually exclusive and can exist side-by-side in social life; and, friendship is part of Hegel’s understanding of freedom’s practice.

4.2.2 Freedom and Commitment in Bonhoeffer’s Pre-Finkenwalde Thought

While friendship would not become part of Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s discourse on freedom until the prison correspondence, the correlation of freedom with forms of commitment and restraint has a place in Bonhoeffer’s pre-Finkenwalde thinking, and is seen in varying forms in Sanctorum Communio, Act and Being and Creation and Fall:

Sanctorum Communio. In his first thesis, Bonhoeffer wrote about freedom in relation to matters of theological discipline. For Bonhoeffer, once the church has spoken on a matter of doctrine, the theologian owes obedience to the church with respect to the matter in question, pointing out that this kind of ecclesiastical obedience is relative, and implies a relative freedom, because relative freedom is only checked by obedience to the word. So for Bonhoeffer, ‘the relative freedom becomes absolute’ and the ‘relative obligation to the church can be broken […] if it stands in the way of [an] absolute commitment to the word’. 417 Thus, in the case of conflict between word and ecclesiastical pronouncement, a person is absolutely bound to the word and free from that particular ecclesiastical pronouncement and the authority of the church. There is continuity here with Hegel; freedom, for Bonhoeffer, can exist alongside commitment to a community that demands forms of obedience. There is one difference, however, worth noting here because it will become increasingly important to Bonhoeffer’s conception of freedom: freedom is not a matter of the will, but something given in the external word. Further, this freedom is seen in certain practices such as the breaking of an obligation to the church.

Act and Being. In Act and Being, Bonhoeffer writes again of human freedom in terms of freedom’s correlation to obedience. For Bonhoeffer—making use of Luther—the heart is turned inward to itself, and thus reason is corrupted by the fall, which makes any appeal to reason, as a way to make an argument for human freedom, suspect. 418 For Bonhoeffer, it is

417 DBW/E 1, 172-73/251.
418 DBW/E 2, 40/46; 52/58; 74/80.
revelation that makes a person free, because it is something that comes from the outside and independent from human reason. Bonhoeffer has Hegel in his sights here; for Bonhoeffer, Hegel’s understanding of the reasoning ‘I’ is an example of human reason that is not free, but necessarily in bondage to itself on account of the fall.

But this freedom of the human person, in their ‘placement’ in revelation, is only one of the ways Bonhoeffer speaks of freedom in Act and Being: in a less critical Hegelian mode, Bonhoeffer wrote of human freedom as a kind of freedom that leads to necessary commitments to others. Bonhoeffer begins this discussion of human freedom with some remarks on the freedom of God, making a correlation between God’s freedom and his binding of himself to others in revelation:

In revelation it is not so much a question of the freedom of God—eternally remaining within the divine self, aseity—on the other side of revelation, as it is of God’s coming out of God’s self in revelation. It is a matter of God’s given Word, the covenant in which God is bound by God’s own action. It is a question of the freedom of God, which finds its strongest evidence precisely in that God freely chose to be bound to historical human beings and to be placed at the disposal of human beings. God is not free from human beings but for them.419

This freedom of God, for Bonhoeffer, has anthropological and ecclesiological consequences. God is free, as Anne Nickson puts it, in a freedom that “‘finds its strongest evidence precisely in that God freely chose to be bound to historical human beings.’ Only one who is truly free can freely give of him or her self”.420

For God, this is not a freedom from the human beings he has created; the word is given, and as such, God freely chooses to be bound to human beings, and by doing this, God is free for human beings, relationally.421 The anthropological-ecclesial consequence of God binding himself to human persons is that God also binds humanity together in the Christ who exists as community: ‘the person of Christ draws together in itself all whom Christ has won, building and committing Christ to them and them to one another […] which manifests what God’s freedom is: that God binds God’s self to human beings’.422 So the freedom that God offers in Christ is more than a freedom from bondage to the cor curvum in se, it is a freedom for others where human persons are bound to one another in the community of the church.

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419 DBW/E 2, 85/90-91.
421 Nickson, Bonhoeffer on Freedom, p. 30. Nickson mistakenly claims here that it ‘is always freedom for, not freedom from the other, just as God is free for the world’. Unfortunately for Nickson Bonhoeffer will write of freedom from, and in a positive sense, in Life Together; see DBW/E 5, 30/43.
422 DBW/E 2, 109/112.
this way, we again see the correlation of freedom with social commitment and ‘binding’; so again, freedom can include obligation to others.

*Creation and Fall.* In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer continues to develop the idea of freedom in terms of the human creature, but now from the standpoint of creation. Human beings are made in the image of God, and thus enjoy the kind of freedom that God enjoys: freedom for others. But in what way is God free? Again, God’s freedom is freedom for his creatures; ‘God creates in complete freedom’ and ‘binds [creation] to God’.

And because humankind is made in ‘the very image of God’, it means that human beings are also free, bound to God in freedom for God. But this freedom is more than a freedom for God, it is also a relational freedom where ‘one human being is free for another human being’. Again, in Hegelian mode, Bonhoeffer ties freedom specifically to obedience, writing that ‘[h]uman beings have life […] in their obedience, in their innocence, in their ignorance; that is, they possess it in their freedom. The life that human beings have happens in an obedience that issues from freedom’.

So what we see, in *Act and Being* and *Creation and Fall*, is a conception of freedom in which a ‘binding’ to others is a consequence of freedom, not an erosion of freedom. In this way, freedom is not at odds with social commitments to others, including commitments that lead to forms of obedience. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, freedom and commitment to others can be correlated; and in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer thinks that this correlation takes place in the theological and social life of the church.

4.2.3 Freedom and Obedience at Finkenwalde

The correlation of freedom and forms of obedience becomes important to understanding life at Finkenwalde, and this investigation begins with a look to the way church and education come together with regard to this correlation; this begins, for us, in April 1936, when Bonhoeffer gave the address where he infamously deployed Cyprian’s phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

The address, when it was published, drew a great deal of well-deserved attention for its implication about the relationship between the Confessing Church and the *Reichskirche*. Bonhoeffer began this line of thought by saying that proclamation presents the world with a decision about where the boundary of the church lies; the boundary of the church, for

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423 DBW/E 3, 38-39/41.
424 DBW/E 3, 59/64.
425 DBW/E 3, 60/64.
426 DBW/E 3, 79/84.
Bonhoeffer, is not marked by a decision by the church ‘to identify [its] members by name, to count them, and to distinguish them from those who did not belong to the church or who merely pretended to belong’.427 ‘Such was the Reformation message concerning the church’, wrote Bonhoeffer; ‘[h]ere is the true church. Might it also be found elsewhere? That is not the question. It is here that God has granted it to us as a gift’.428 The question of boundaries was one that came from the outside, from a world—and specifically a Reichskirche—that excludes itself from the church by ‘not hearing and not believing’.429

But Bonhoeffer also had a great deal to say about what extra ecclesiam nulla salus meant, and did not mean, for confessional difference within the Confessing Church, and contextually to theological education at Finkenwalde; what was happening at Finkenwalde, and in the Confessing Church more generally, was that Lutheran and Reformed churches and congregations were sharing the same space. This was, of course, already true in Germany. Lutheran and Reformed churches was already sharing ecclesiastical space together, as Gollwitzer points out in his response to Bonhoeffer’s lecture.430 But for Bonhoeffer, the reason that the churches were sharing this same space was different from what it once was. Lutheran and Reformed churches were sharing the same space, including at Finkenwalde, because the world had made that boundary by not hearing the divine commandment. As Bonhoeffer puts it, since Barmen, ‘the Lutheran and Reformed churches are quite significantly coming even closer together’, making synodical declarations together, and ‘[w]hat were formerly schismatic creedal antitheses now no longer make it impossible to conduct Confessing synods’.431 Historical German ecclesiastical practice was not equipped to fully address the problem of the Reichskirche, the problem that the confessing church found itself needing to negotiate at synods such as Barmen and Dahlem. At the same time, confessional difference, on the ground at these synods, was not preventing rapprochement.

What Bonhoeffer does, as a way to negotiate the relative importance of confessional difference, is to treat confessional difference as something that does not necessarily lead to schism or division. This way of negotiating confessional difference reaches back to Bonhoeffer’s comments on relative and absolute theological freedom in Sanctorum

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427 DBW/E 14:2/19, 656/657.
428 DBW/E 14:2/19, 657-58/658.
429 DBW/E 14:2/19, 659/660.
430 DBW/E 14:2/19, 689-90/687-88.
431 DBW/E 14:2/19, 670/669. Lovin points out that this was intentional for Barth at Barmen. Barth, according to Lovin, did not try to reconcile differences between Lutheran and Reformed positions but to articulate what they held in common because the ‘German Christian movement marked a defection from the faith and a danger to the church’; see Robin W. Lovin, Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 106.
Communio. The idea that the word disciplines the theologian and the church is hardly new to Bonhoeffer; but what I am drawing attention to here is that Bonhoeffer is writing on the church as a sphere of freedom. But it is also a sphere that is disciplined and obedient because it is under the relative authority of the church’s pronouncement and the absolute authority of the word; in this way, freedom and obedience exist side-by-side within the church. Despite this sphere being fenced by relative and absolute obedience, freedom in its relative sense is nevertheless present in the church as sphere of theological manoeuvrability that is not in conflict with the disciplinary aspect of canonical documents, or the word that sits in judgment over the relative pronouncements of the church. Thus, in the context of ecumenical theological education at Finkenwalde, the authority of historical confessional documents is relativised, because these competing historical confessional statements—as historically troublesome a problem as that might be—are not necessarily where the world is doing battle with the church, a battle represented in Barmen and Dahlem. Bonhoeffer is not unconcerned, but not overly concerned either, that Barmen was in conflict with the Augsburg confession and could not stand up to the letter of it; one can reject the Confessing synod from the perspective of the Augsburg Confession, according to Bonhoeffer, but because the Barmen synod was under the word, he would rather accept Barmen’s articles ‘with astonishment and humility and leave it to God to make of them what he will’. 432

Gollwitzer was a respondent to Bonhoeffer’s lecture, which provoked a counter-response by Bonhoeffer that underlines the point I am trying to make here. Gollwitzer claimed that confession is ‘the testimony of the church to God’s word’; but Bonhoeffer, recalling Sanctorum Communio, replies that synods do have relative authority, but that they remain ‘under the word’. 433 What this effectively means is that the Confessing Church is tasked to revise the judgments of Lutheran confessions, even Augsburg. The authority, even of Augsburg, is relative, and Bonhoeffer argues that the synods and confessional documents can be revisited—even the Augsburg Confession—because the confessions are already under the authority of that word. Scripture is the ‘sole rule and norm’ for the confessions themselves, and synods and confession cannot be elevated over the word. 434 But Barmen, in this case, is elevated to ‘the testimony of God, demanding obedience […] a true confession to the Lord Jesus effected by the Holy Spirit’; because synods like Barmen speak truly, they are much like the concrete commandment, carrying the authority of the word but for a new historical moment.

432 DBW/E 14:2/19, 671/670.
433 DBW/E 14:2/19, 696/694.
434 DBW/E 14:2/19, 697/694-95.
What Bonhoeffer is doing here, in underlining the relative freedom the church has with regard to documents like the Augsburg Confession because the church is under the absolute authority of the word, is best illustrated in a programmatic statement found in an early draft of Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt’s 1936 Pentecost Statement. There, in an unusually direct reference to freedom in the Finkenwalde writings that pre-date *Life Together*—and in continuity with the way Bonhoeffer had written of the word, freedom, and the binding together of community—they write again of a word of *freedom*: ‘Do not allow your speech and actions to be bound by any alien law; instead entrust yourselves to the word of truth that is at work in the church alone and that makes us free’. To understand this statement in the context of Bonhoeffer’s preceding thought on freedom, is to say that the freedom of the church, under the word, is a freedom that binds people to one another in the church, a commitment that results in forms of obedience, and that the freedom of the church is not at odds with forms of obedience. As such, in the ‘concept of the church’, as Bonhoeffer would say later in prison, the ‘understanding of freedom’ is regained, a freedom regained specifically in Finkenwalde’s theological education through a visible practice of latitude in ecumenical theological reasoning in the face of an unbelieving world.

In prison, the freedom of the *Spielraum* was described by Bonhoeffer, in conversation with Bethge, as something found in art, education, friendship, and play. De Gruchy specifically links the *Spielraum* letter to Finkenwalde:

[Bonhoeffer] must have thought back to such times at Finkenwalde, and perhaps especially of his friend Bethge, when [music, literature, and games] had been such a rich part of their shared experience. In the midst of the church struggle and the political upheavals, which included arrests, conscription, and death, the Finkenwaldians experienced life together as a sphere of freedom in which they could enjoy the polyphony of life without losing their core commitment to discipleship and witness.

De Gruchy does not say more than this, but it is worth taking the time to flesh out what he says here. I have already, above, written at length about freedom and education, specifically theological education. Theological education at Finkenwalde is our first case, because theological education at Finkenwalde is already well-developed by Bonhoeffer; and as that investigation proceeded, we saw a pattern that 1. Included freedom as something that is correlated to binding and obedience, and 2. That this correlation comes with accompanying and visible forms of freedom. But it is only one of a set that includes, for Bonhoeffer, art, play, and friendship. As de Gruchy points out in capsule form, all of these constituent

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435 DBW/E 14:1/75, 157/178.
practices of the Spielraum were present at Finkenwalde. But I will say a bit more, based on the pattern of education at Finkenwalde: the constituent practices of art, play, and friendship also correspond to modes of obedience, following the pattern established by Bonhoeffer in his understanding of ecclesiastically-grounded theological education.

Singing and art in the form of music: In Life Together—a book based on what he learned from life at Finkenwalde—Bonhoeffer gave strict rules to follow when it comes to singing:

Because it is completely bound to the Word, the singing of the congregation in its worship service, especially the singing of the house church, is essentially singing in unison. Here words and music combine in a unique way. The freely soaring tone of unison singing finds its sole and essential inner support in the words that are sung. It does not need, therefore, the musical support of other parts. [...] The essence of congregational singing on this earth is the purity of unison singing—untouched by the unrelated motives of musical excess—the clarity unclouded by the dark desire to lend musicality an autonomy of its own apart from the words; it is the simplicity of unpretentiousness, the humanness and warmth, of this style of singing. [...] Whether or not a community achieves proper unison singing is a question of spiritual discernment. This is singing from the heart, singing to the Lord, singing the Word; this is singing in unity.  

Bonhoeffer specifically counsels against ‘improvised’ parts that ‘kill both the words and the sound’.  

Bonhoeffer’s counsel on singing is part of the ordered life of Finkenwalde; the brothers were to sing like this as part of their shared life, and is part of what it meant to make a commitment to this kind of community. But the musical life of Finkenwalde was richer than what Life Together might suggest. If improvisation was banned from the singing of hymns, it was not banned from Bonhoeffer’s gramophone player on which spirituals and jazz were played; instead, Bonhoeffer’s ‘collection of gramophone records [...] was at everyone’s disposal; the rooms often rang with then little-known Negro spirituals such as “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” And, according to Bethge, there were “[t]wo Bechstein grand pianos [that] found a place in the music room and were in constant use”. There was, in this way, freedom to pursue music in ways that were not strictly ordered according to the brothers’ commitment to their common life; music was also something freely played, including music of which improvisation was a vital part. The freedom of the spiritual and the improvised continuo was something that could exist alongside the unison singing of worship at Finkenwalde.

437 DBW/E 5, 51/67.
438 DBW/E 5, 51/67.
Work and play: In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer writes that ‘[a]fter the first morning hour, the Christian’s day until evening belongs to work’. Bonhoeffer’s main concern here is that prayer and work are not in competition with one another; but the result of a day of prayer and work is that ‘[t]he whole day now acquires an order and a discipline gained by the winning of the day. This order and discipline must be sought and found in the morning prayer. It will stand the test of work’, and this work ‘comes from the knowledge of God and God’s command’. While *Life Together* describes a day of ‘work’ for its more general audience, this work, at Finkenwalde, took the form of lectures and study.

This regimen of daily work and study, however, was something that was liable to be interrupted or cancelled. Bonhoeffer set the example: even in difficult circumstances, he ‘never gave up his leisure time’ and though a hard worker, had an ability ‘to interrupt work for play’. Bethge reports that ‘[s]ometimes in fine weather [Bonhoeffer] might suddenly cancel a class and go with his students to the woods or the coast. On Sundays he didn’t permit any class work to be done, but organized all kinds of games.’ Schlingensiepen reports something similar:

> On warm afternoons [Bonhoeffer] was known to call off work altogether in favour of a swim in the sea and community sports. The more ambitious sportsmen among the ordinands were not too happy to discover that their director could run faster than they could and was almost unbeatable at table tennis.

Part of this play was musical as well, with Bonhoeffer once cancelling instruction to ‘conduct a choral piece for four voices by Josquin des Prez’. So the commitment made by ordinands to work and study was not exclusive of play, including chamber music; both could exist side-by-side, with Bonhoeffer occasionally feeling free to have play take priority over work and instruction.

Brotherhood and Friendship: The relational term that Bonhoeffer uses in the context of ordered ecclesiastical life—and throughout *Life Together*—is brotherhood. This relation

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441 DBW/E 5, 59/74.
442 DBW/E 5, 60-61/76.
443 For a description of the curriculum see Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, pp. 441-60.
449 See DBW/E 5, throughout; ‘brotherhood’ is such a ubiquitous term that the DBWE 5 editors, in the Index of Subjects, point the reader looking for references to ‘Brotherhood; Christian’ to ‘52 et passim’; DBWE 5, 209.
between ordered ecclesial life and ‘brotherhood’ is especially clear in the *Bruderhaus* and the
‘new kind of monasticism’ shared by a small number of the Finkenwalde seminarians. According to Bethge, ‘[t]he communal life envisaged in the proposal was to take the form of a daily order of prayer, mutual exhortation, free personal confession, common theological work, and a very simple communal life.’ And for Bonhoeffer, this was part of learning ‘how to live in a communal setting with strict daily obedience to the will of Jesus Christ’. This ordered life of brotherhood was part of daily life beyond the *Bruderhaus*, and of all Finkenwalde ordinands. Bethge wrote:

[Bonhoeffer] asked the ordinands to observe only one rule—never to speak about another ordinand in that person’s absence or to tell that person about it afterward when such a thing did happen. […] Bonhoeffer was able to impose this discipline on the seminary because he also left sufficient room for pleasure and outspoken discussions.

For Bethge to say that there was ‘only one rule’ is odd; Bonhoeffer also kept Finkenwalde in a strict routine of beginning and ending the day with ‘long services’; the morning service was followed by ‘a half-hour meditation’. So the Finkenwalde students were bound together as a brotherhood in which their day included a pattern for all to share; some of this daily pattern included worship, and some of it had to do with the way one would speak of another. But it adds up to one shared ‘rule’ of daily, regimented, and shared patterns of life to which all the ordinands, as brothers, were expected to participate in and be committed to.

Hegel saw friendship as one of the ways freedom takes concrete form; and Finkenwalde is where Bonhoeffer’s most significant friendship, with Eberhard Bethge, began, the friendship that will eventually be called necessarily free in the *Spielraum* letter. In retrospect from prison Bonhoeffer can see, as de Gruchy points out above, friendship as a practice of freedom. De Gruchy links the music that Bonhoeffer and Bethge played together to their friendship, writing that it ‘undoubtedly helped to cement their friendship’. In addition to playing music together, Bethge’s theological capabilities were also part of this emerging friendship at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer quickly recognising Bethge’s exegetical skills and that Bethge would not simply be the student of Bonhoeffer’s after ‘Bonhoeffer

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452 DBW/E 14:1/88, 175/196.
455 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
quickly sensed that Bethge had much to offer him", and Bethge’s critical engagement with Bonhoeffer would become a shared practice of theological reflection where Bonhoeffer would test ideas with Bethge, and where Bethge’s influence on Bonhoeffer’s theology began. In this way, the friendship with Bethge was one that integrated elements of free theological discourse, and play together in the form of music.

So it is not difficult see the connection between Finkenwalde and der Spielraum der Freiheit, Finkenwalde being a time deeply concerned with order, discipline, and obedience in singing, work, and relationships, while simultaneously being a place of freedom in theological education, art, play, and friendship. And if the necessity of evidence of freedom is not clear in Hegel’s own correlation of freedom and obedience, Bonhoeffer pushes this conception in a practical way; Hegel mentions friendship, but Bonhoeffer sees art, education, and play alongside friendship as freedom instantiated in a concrete social form.

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We can see, here in the Finkenwalde literature, Bonhoeffer return to the question of both the wholeness and the reparation of social and political spheres. For Bonhoeffer, the political and social world is already a unity, because the boundaries between the church and the world outside the church is not recognised as a boundary by the church; practically, however, the world does mark a boundary through its inability to hear the divine command. But something else comes to light in looking to the relation between the church and the world outside it as Bonhoeffer understood it at Finkenwalde: we find some insight into the Spielraum’s potentially reparative role in Bonhoeffer’s ‘Prussian world’. Freedom, for Hegel, leads to the limitations imposed by the commitments one makes as a result of that freedom, a freedom seen in ‘love and friendship’. One of the ways to bring freedom out from the background is through those sorts of practices that are free, without usurping obedience or discipline; instead, concrete instantiations of freedom, for Bonhoeffer, can take part in restoring freedom to a world that had become characterised, in Bonhoeffer’s mind, by obedience alone. In this way, friendship—as a constituent practice of the Spielraum—is a reparative social relation, in that it takes part in the Spielraum’s reparation of a world marked by obedience. While it is important to note, here, that Bonhoeffer was looking back to Finkenwalde and his friendship with Bethge when he was formulating the concept of the Spielraum, there was a development in Bonhoeffer’s social and political thought that took

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457 De Gruchy, Daring, Trusting Spirit, p. 17.
place between Finkenwalde and the prison correspondence; and it is to this period of reflection to which we turn next.

4.3 REPARATION AND WHOLENESS IN BONHOEFFER’S MANDATES

Despite the abandonment of his theology of the orders of preservation by 1933, it was not the end of Bonhoeffer’s theological work on the ordering of political and social life. While his concern with social and political life were at work in the background of his thinking at Finkenwalde, they come more clearly to the fore in the Ethics manuscripts; but the Ethics are also where Bonhoeffer sets up two problems for himself in the way he describes the sociality of the mandates. One problem is the way he understands the wholeness of social and political life at this juncture, as it relates to the sociality of the mandates. Before we do turn to that problem, and its solution in the concept of friendship and the Spielraum, however, we turn to the first problem Bonhoeffer causes for himself: the relation between reparation and sociality in the mandates, and the way Bonhoeffer thinks of this sociality in terms of hierarchy and non-reciprocity.

4.3.1 Reparation in the Ethics

In the Ethics, Bonhoeffer’s interest in political and social reparation continues, though he does move away from reparative judgment; instead, in the Ethics, reparation takes place in Stellvertretung as a hierarchical and non-reciprocal social practice. In the ‘Concrete Commandment and the Divine Mandates’ Ethics manuscript, for example, the commandment ‘seeks to encounter human beings with an earthly relationship of authority’ in the mandate, leading to a description of Stellvertretung in terms of social hierarchy, where ‘above and below […] belong together in an inseparable and mutually delimiting relationship […] [but] refer not to a relation between concepts and things, but between persons’. For Bonhoeffer, ‘[t]he bearer of the mandate acts as a vicarious representative’, and these bearers ‘are in a strict and unalterable sense God’s commissioners, vicarious representatives, and stand-ins’. This hierarchical form of mandate-oriented Stellvertretung is also clear in the second ‘History

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458 DBW/E 6, 394-95/391. Green disagrees, saying that ‘Bonhoeffer is emphatic in standing with the Enlightenment in favor of the equal dignity of all people as ethical beings, and against feudalism and aristocracy and privilege’. Bonhoeffer may think in terms of ‘equal dignity’, but the fact that he uses the terms ‘above and below’ means that equal dignity and hierarchy are not mutually exclusive for Bonhoeffer; see Green, Sociality, p. 323.
459 DBW/E 6, 393/389.
460 DBW/E 6, 394/390-91.
and Good’ manuscript, where Bonhoeffer thinks of the Stellvertreter ‘as a father, as a statesman, or as the instructor of an apprentice’.\footnote{DBW/E 6, 256-57/257.} The non-reciprocal way of thinking of Stellvertretung is most evident in Bonhoeffer’s paradigmatic ‘father’ who ‘acts on behalf of his children’.\footnote{DBW/E 6, 257/258.}

In addition to being hierarchical and non-reciprocal, Stellvertretung is also theological, in Sanctorum Communio’s use of ‘theological’; Stellvertretung, as it is found in these relations, depends on Christ the Stellvertreter who ‘bears the selves of all human beings [...] All that human beings were supposed to live, do, and suffer was fulfilled in him’; and since ‘he is life, all of life through him is destined to be vicarious representative action’.\footnote{DBW/E 6, 258/258-59.} In this sense, the Stellvertretung of the Ethics manuscripts now has a less stringent ecclesial association in that it takes place within the mandates of family, state, and work; but it is nevertheless theological, in that the Stellvertretung that takes place in all life—the family, state, and work—also takes place through ‘Jesus [...] the Son of God who became human’,\footnote{DBW/E 6, 257/258.} and where the Stellvertreter stands in as Christ for others.

Bonhoeffer has been under significant criticism for the hierarchical nature of his theology of the mandates, beginning as early as the betrothal letters shared between him and Maria von Wedemeyer. Bonhoeffer did not think of wives and husbands as equals, something clear in his wedding sermon for Renate and Eberhard Bethge’s wedding;\footnote{DBW/E 8:1/18, 76-78/84-86. It is possible Bonhoeffer thinks that Stellvertretung in the context of the mandates entails a kind of freedom, rather than a strictly hierarchical relation entailing obedience. Bethge for example, thought the mandates ‘permitted responsible freedom’; see Bethge, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Theology of Friendship’, p. 96. And Bonhoeffer does say, in the Ethics manuscripts, that God’s commandment commands freedom, a freedom that is generated by the commandment; see DBW/E 6, 386/382-3; related to this see Pangritz, ‘“Spielraum der Freiheit” und “Heilige Ordnung”’, p. 214; Christopher R. J. Holmes, “The Indivisible Whole of God’s Reality”: On the Agency of Jesus in Bonhoeffer’s Ethics’, International Journal of Systematic Theology, 12 (2010), pp. 283-301 (p. 296). But Bonhoeffer associates obedience with the mandates in the Spielraum letter, writing that ‘[s]omeone who doesn’t know anything of this sphere of freedom can be a good parent, citizen, and worker, and probably also be a Christian, but whether such a person is a full human being (and thus also a Christian in the fullest sense) is questionable to me. Our “Protestant” (not Lutheran!) Prussian world is so strongly defined by the four mandates that the whole sphere of freedom has been pushed into the background’; DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268. As such Bonhoeffer sees the intra-mandate sociality as one of obedience, and an obedience that, even if it is the kind of commitment that Hegel sees as the result of freedom, nevertheless needs to be reparatively correlated to freedom in practice.\footnote{Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer, Love Letters from Cell 92} this became evident again when Von Wedemeyer suggested that husbands and wives could be friends,\footnote{DBW/E 8:1/18, 76-78/84-86.}
provoking Bonhoeffer to dismiss the idea in favour of a ‘pure and divine’ order. Von Wedemeyer’s response to Bonhoeffer’s letter is critical of the necessity for differentiation and hierarchy in family relations, and told Bonhoeffer that her only real friend had been her father. Barth was critical of Bonhoeffer’s hierarchical ordering as well, and would detect ‘not just a suggestion of North German patriarchalism’ in Bonhoeffer’s structures of authority in his mandates, wondering: ‘[w]ould it not be advisable then [not to rush] on to the rigid assertion of human relationships arranged in a definite order, and the hasty assertion of their imperative character?’ West’s accusation is similar, calling Bonhoeffer ‘the ultimate aristocrat’ in this regard. And as Ziegler points out, in the context of the mandates, Bonhoeffer did think that obedience to Christ was the proper way to understand the task of government.

The accusation rings true because Stellvertretung, in the context of Bonhoeffer’s mandates, is clearly hierarchical and concerned with authority. But Stellvertretung’s hierarchical shape is understood, by Bonhoeffer, as a kind of care for the weak; and while this does not save it from all its less-than-fashionable assumptions about marriage and family, it does orientate Stellvertretung to God’s rule of care. Thus Stellvertretung is not identical with earthly power relations for Bonhoeffer:

Under no circumstances may the more powerful simply invoke the divine mandate in their dealings with the weaker. It is, on the contrary, part of the nature of the divine mandate to correct and order the earthly power relations in its own way.

More will be said in Chapter 5 about the practice of Stellvertretung in the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge. This will call into question whether hierarchy, and the closely related non-reciprocity implied by Bonhoeffer’s understanding of hierarchy, is necessary to Bonhoeffer’s theology of Stellvertretung, and whether Barth and West’s assessments are entirely fair if we were to look beyond the Ethics manuscripts. Important at this juncture, however, is that this social practice was reparative in Bonhoeffer’s mind, in that it ‘correct[s]
and order[s] the earthly power relations in its own way’. If earthly relations were ordered according to the advantage of the powerful, Bonhoeffer’s application of Stellvertretung to social ordering undermines that advantage; instead, if one were to apply Stellvertretung appropriately to the sociality of the mandates, they would be reoriented away from advantage and toward God’s care of others. Thus, to take Bonhoeffer’s counsel seriously on Stellvertretung, in a world of power and advantage, would mean the reparation of what, for Bonhoeffer, was a broken social order.

4.3.2 Unity and Wholeness in the Ethics

Unity and wholeness, rather than reparation, are much larger concerns in the Ethics manuscripts, concerns that take form in the way the mandates are understood in relation to one another through Christ and their eschatological orientation.

In the ‘Christ, Reality, and Good’ manuscript, for example, Bonhoeffer sees all of reality, ‘the reality of God and the reality of the world’, as reconciled ‘in Christ, that is, in ultimate reality.’ But this reconciled reality takes form in political and social life, and is significant for ethics; according to Bonhoeffer, ethical thought had wrongly been determined by the assumption in Lutheran two-realms thinking that the ‘autonomy of the orders of this world is proclaimed against the law of Christ’. Instead, for Bonhoeffer, there ‘are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is God’s reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world.’

The unity of reality, however, ‘does not remove the difference between church-community and world.’ Bonhoeffer’s critique of two-realms thinking does not mean he thinks there is an undifferentiated unity in social and political life; instead, Bonhoeffer says that, in addition to the problematised differentiation between church and world, there are four differentiated spheres, the ‘mandates of God’ called ‘work, marriage, government, and church’, mandates that are distinct, but ones that nevertheless have their unity in their ‘origin, existence, and goal in Jesus Christ’. So for Bonhoeffer, there are spheres of social and political life, ones that find their unity in an overarching Christological reality.
Ziegler describes the autonomy of the mandates as a ‘relative autonomy’\footnote{Ziegler, ‘Christ’s Lordship and Politics’, p. 72. Emphasis in original.} on account of this grounding in Christ, a unity that is eschatological. The mandates, for Ziegler, anticipate their unity in the ‘one heavenly city’:

To set the state within the one “Christ-reality” is to relate it and its calling decisively towards Christ’s reign and its fulfillment, not only as a technique of preservation but perhaps also as anticipation. In other terms, under pressure (rightly!) from his eschatological affirmation of the present lordship of Christ, he is led to imagine that the state even now suffers the effect of its final cause, and Christians can expect it to be en route toward fulfilment of its telos, which as Bonhoeffer says forthrightly, is assumption together with the church into the one heavenly city.\footnote{Ziegler, ‘Christ’s Lordship and Politics’, p. 76. Emphasis in original.}  

Though Ziegler writes specifically on the state, Bonhoeffer thinks this way about all the mandates; the unity of mandates is found in their ‘origin, existence, and goal in Jesus Christ’.\footnote{DBW/E 6, 57/70. Emphasis is mine.} The logic of the communities in Sanctorum Communio,\footnote{Charles West also sees the logic of Gemeinschaft at work in Bonhoeffer’s mandates, though he relates it to the will. See West, ‘Ground’, pp. 235-273.} and of the orders of he describes in the 1930s, is repeated here through their dual reference to creation and the eschaton, but now as spheres that are clearly brought into unity through their relation to Christ and Christ’s Lordship. This eschatological grounding leads to forms of life in the present informed by the mandates’ end in Christ, his new creation, and as an anticipated whole. 

The subject of Christological unity has also been investigated by DeJonge, in Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation, but from a different perspective than Ziegler’s eschatological reading of the Ethics. DeJonge looks to Bonhoeffer’s earliest theological influences, and in particular to Bonhoeffer’s Lutheran Christology in comparison to Barth’s Reformed Christology; it leads him to find the unity of the mandates in Bonhoeffer’s Lutheran, incarnational, and person-centred Christology. In this respect, DeJonge asserts that for Barth, God’s reconciliation is something ‘on the other side of eternity which merely manifests itself in history’, but for Bonhoeffer, this reconciliation ‘is in history in the person of Christ. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of revelation and incarnation in terms of person
emphasises the already accomplished reconciliation of God and humanity’.\textsuperscript{485} This leads DeJonge to say that this emphasis on the accomplished reconciliation of God and humanity in Christ is hermeneutical, a term which, for DeJonge, does not describe theories of interpretation in this case, but the ‘understanding of parts and wholes that stands behind such theories’.\textsuperscript{486}

DeJonge points out that Christ’s personal unity also presses Bonhoeffer’s ethics towards its own kind of unity. Oppositional ethical positions are unsatisfactory, for Bonhoeffer, because they rest on abstract distinctions that separate what belongs together in the reality of Christ; for DeJonge, Bonhoeffer argues this way because Christ’s person is the unifying ground of irreconcilable opposites.\textsuperscript{487} This rests, for DeJonge, on Bonhoeffer’s definition of reality, as a reconciled Christ-reality; but DeJonge emphasises the ‘person-structure’ of this reality, and where reality is the ‘unity of opposites in history’.\textsuperscript{488} DeJonge traces this description of reality back to Bonhoeffer’s Christology lectures of 1933:

Just as Bonhoeffer appeals in “Christology” to the person of Christ to foreclose references to God or humanity apart from their unity in Christ, so Bonhoeffer appeals in \textit{Ethics} to the Christological, person-structure of reality to foreclose references to God or the world independent of Christ-reality. With language that reaches back to his “Christology” lectures, Bonhoeffer writes, “From now on we cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ”.\textsuperscript{489}

For Dejonge, this unity of the world in Christ moves Bonhoeffer’s ethics in a concrete direction. According to DeJonge, this Christological unity is part of Bonhoeffer’s challenge to the ‘pseudo-Lutheran’ understanding of Luther’s two kingdoms doctrine and the reason for Bonhoeffer’s continual interest in the wholeness and unity of \textit{ethical} life.\textsuperscript{490} This concrete ethic ‘takes into account this reconciled Christ-reality[.] […] On the practical level, ethical action, or what Bonhoeffer’ calls “responsible action,” is action in accordance with reality. Bonhoeffer’s project of concrete ethics is the attempt to think and act from the reality of the reconciliation of God and the world in Christ’.\textsuperscript{491} One of the consequences of ethics becoming concrete also leads DeJonge to speak of Bonhoeffer’s ethics as existential, much like Couenhoven writes of the ‘split in the lives of the individual believers’: ‘[o]n an existential level’, writes DeJonge, ‘the oppositional structure produces conflict by fuelling a tragic

\textsuperscript{485} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 9. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{486} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{487} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, pp. 136-7.
\textsuperscript{488} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{489} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{490} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{491} DeJonge, \textit{Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation}, p. 137.
existence in which warring principles rend apart ethical being and acting’.492 So, without a strategy for speaking of the integration of social and political life, multiple mandates—like Luther’s division of spheres mentioned by Couenhoven—would lead to a kind of social and personal disintegration. But, if one were to consider the social and the political whole as integrated, acting ethically with the governing assumption that the social and political world is a unity would be a bulwark against the disintegrative tendency of sphere-thinking; it would be reparative by uniting ethical acting and ethical being, and therefore overcoming the ‘tragic existence’ that warring principles create.

DeJonge’s analysis is important and penetrating, bringing some clarity to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the relation of wholes to parts, but it neglects two important things. First, his distinction between Barth’s Reformed Christology and Bonhoeffer’s Lutheran Christology leads him to an unhelpful distinction between ‘eternity’ and ‘history’. Bonhoeffer’s consistent concern in his political and social theology was not, in the reading I am presenting here, one in which Bonhoeffer favours ‘history’ rather than ‘eternity’. The consistent concern for Bonhoeffer—in his understanding of Gemeinschaft, and in his understanding of the orders of preservation—is eschatology. Ziegler presents a better reading of Bonhoeffer on this point, where he sees the trajectory of Bonhoeffer’s eschatological concern continue in the Ethics, and where the eschatological unity of all spheres of life in Christ is what informs Bonhoeffer’s thinking on the unity of social and political spheres in the present.

Secondly, DeJonge does not take into account the fact that Bonhoeffer’s own first expression of political, social, and ecclesiastical unity, as a good, is found in his description of Muslim North Africa. As a result, if we were to write a genealogy of the concept of unity in Bonhoeffer’s thought, there is precedence in his positive valuation of integrated Muslim life well before the Christology lectures. This early regard for political and social wholeness points to that unity being part of Bonhoeffer’s hope for lived reality that DeJonge can only take into account in an abstract way. DeJonge points to the existential cost of the division of spheres, but neglects to explain just how an abstracted unity of those spheres might impact a person’s lived social reality; by following Bonhoeffer’s Ethics, DeJonge is at the mercy of Bonhoeffer’s own limitation to social realities that remain segregated within the mandates themselves.

492 DeJonge, Bonhoeffer’s Theological Formation, p. 139.
4.3.3 The Spielraum and the Unity of the Mandates

This limitation to the Ethics is costly for DeJonge because for the Bonhoeffer of the Ethics, the social practice of Stellvertretung is confined to family, political, and work hierarchies; DeJonge is caught in a problem that Bonhoeffer has created for himself by segregating the mandates from one another according to the internal social relations of those mandates. But if we were to look to the prison letters, we would find that the hermeneutical strategy that privileges unity is in play when Bonhoeffer writes of the Spielraum, and that this hermeneutical strategy is more than a way of understanding the unity of the world and its spheres. The Spielraum qualifies the social theology of the mandates of the Ethics in a way that takes into account the possibility of a social and lived unity of the spheres of the mandates, because the Spielraum is a sphere that is comprehensive and ‘encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates’.\footnote{DBW/E 8:2/102, 290-91/267-68.}

But before looking to the Spielraum as a strategy of bringing a lived and social unity to the social and political world, there is one problem that needs addressing: Bonhoeffer’s seemingly inconsistent numbering of the mandates, because the numbering of the mandates affects which mandates Bonhoeffer is referring to as part of the comprehensive Spielraum. For example, Bonhoeffer writes:

Marriage, work, state, and church each have their concrete divine mandates, but what about culture and education? I don’t think they can simply be classified under work, as tempting as that would be in many ways. They belong not in the sphere of obedience but rather in the sphere of freedom [Spielraum], which encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates.\footnote{DBW/E 8:2/102, 290-91/267-68.}

So the context of Bonhoeffer’s comment on the encompassing nature of the Spielraum is a list of four mandates—‘[m]arriage, work, state, and church’—but the Spielraum seemingly only encompasses three.

Both Bethge and Pangritz have attempted solutions to this numbering problem. Bethge thinks Bonhoeffer is in a ‘flexible’ state of mind, and that this is seen in the ‘number of mandates, three or four (or even five?)’\footnote{Bethge, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Theology of Friendship’, p. 92. Later in his essay, Bethge will add ‘(or four)’ when he quotes Bonhoeffer’s own text, which originally read that the Spielraum ‘encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates’; DBW/E 8:2/110, 291/268. This interpolation serves Bethge’s argument, but is not exactly faithful to Bonhoeffer’s own text. Bethge will also call the Spielraum a ‘mandate’; see Bethge, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Theology of Friendship’, p. 94. But this does not allow the Spielraum to maintain its comprehensive} Pangritz, too, suggests that Bonhoeffer’s
Inconsistency on the number of mandates here is because Bonhoeffer is in an experimental state of mind as he writes this letter. For Pangritz, the concept of culture had broken open the theology of the mandates, and the Spielraum emerges beyond the individual mandates themselves. But Pangritz does suggest another possibility in addition to Bonhoeffer’s flexible and experimental state of mind: for Pangritz, there is also the possibility that Bonhoeffer lists three mandates instead of four because of an association between the church and the Spielraum, though in the end Pangritz thinks this is unlikely because the church should rather be associated with obedience rather than freedom.

But as I argue in Chapter 3, the church is not simply a sphere of obedience, it is a sphere of freedom as well. So Pangritz is wrong to say that the Spielraum should not be identified with the church on account of the church being a sphere of obedience; rather, the church can be identified with the Spielraum because the church is where one might find the practices of freedom found at Finkenwalde.

Further, if we look to what Bonhoeffer says about the church, there is a logic to Bonhoeffer’s listing of three mandates as part of the Spielraum. The church, for Bonhoeffer—as I argue above from Finkenwalde literature—is itself a comprehensive realm in its claim, if not in the eyes of the world; there is a similar structural understanding of the church in the Ethics manuscripts. While Bonhoeffer, in ‘The “Ethical” and the “Christian” as a Topic’ manuscript, wrote that the ‘church, family, work, and government mutually limit one another, he also, in the manuscript titled ‘On the Possibility of the Church’s Message to the World’, wrote that the ‘church community’ is in ‘a relationship of responsibility for the world’. On the whole, then, the church is both part of the mutually limiting system of mandates while it remains responsible to the whole world. Similarly, in the ‘Christ, Reality, and Good’ manuscript, Bonhoeffer wrote that in the church’s ‘witness to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ[,] […] [t]he church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ’. Bonhoeffer goes on to say that though the mandates are in a kind of mutual delimitation, the church does not act as though this delimitation affects its witness:

nature. Bonhoeffer himself, while calling it a Raum, does not refer to it as the more strictly defined ‘mandate’.  

499 DBW/E 6, 384/380. Bonhoeffer, in the ‘Concrete Commandment and the Divine Mandates’ manuscript, described this mutual delimitation with the terms Miteinander, Füreinander, and Gegeneinander; see DBW/E 6: 397/393.  
500 DBW/E 6, 359/357. Emphasis in original.  
501 DBW/E 6, 50/64.
One must be aware that this space has already been broken through, abolished, and overcome in every moment by the witness of the church to Jesus Christ. Thus all false thinking in terms of realms is ruled out as endangering the understanding of the church.  

So the church—even as it inhabits its own space with regard to the other mandates—does not recognise, in its responsibility and witness, boundaries that are already broken on account of the proleptic eschatological unity of all things in Christ. And this is the best way to understand the listing of three mandates—work, family, and state—as mandates that are encompassed by the mandate of the church.

The encompassing nature of the church begins to make more sense of what Bonhoeffer wrote, for example, about the church in relation to the other mandates in the prison letters:

I wonder whether—it almost seems so today—it is only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the sphere of freedom (art, education, friendship, play). This means that ‘aesthetic existence’ (Kierkegaard) is not to be banished from the church’s sphere; rather, it is precisely within the church that it would be found anew. [...] Who in our time could, for example, lightheartedly make music, nurture friendship, play, and be happy? Certainly not the ‘ethical’ person, but only the Christian.

The church, here, is a distinct mandate, but one in which the practices of the Spielraum are found, the Spielraum that ‘encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates’. The church finds itself dispersed across the social and political world through ‘aesthetic’ practices like friendship, and where those practices become one of the ways that the church lives out its vocation of living in a world where the boundary between it and the world is one erected from the outside through the mutual delimitation of the mandates in the present, but a boundary and delimitation that is not recognised by the church’s proleptic witness to the eschatological unity of Christ. In this sense, the Spielraum is identified with the church, and is an ‘encompassing’ sphere through its relation to a church that encompasses the other three mandates.

This also makes sense if we were to integrate Bonhoeffer’s concept of Christ existing as church-community from Sanctorum Communio with what I have said here. Christ, for Bonhoeffer, integrates all of reality, and this results in an integrating hermeneutical strategy. And if Christ integrates reality, including social and political life, it makes sense that the

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502 DBW/E 6, 50/64.
503 DBW/E 8:2/102, 291/268.
Christ who exists as church-community will also press the relationship between church and the world in a reconciling direction. Thus Christ’s existence as church-community, and the desire to see the political, social, and ecclesiastical spheres as part of a whole, each come together in the *Spielraum* through social practices like friendship, because friendship is not isolated to a specific mandate. Rather, through friendship’s placement in the comprehensive *Spielraum*, friendship is a social relation unbounded to the division of the mandates as the social relations of father, statesman, or instructor are bounded to family, state, and work.

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The *Spielraum*, then, is well within the trajectory of Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought. In the concept of the *Spielraum* Bonhoeffer extends his interest in the wholeness of the political and social world that begins in North Africa, continues with his theology of the orders, is in the background if his Finkenwalde ecclesiology, and is expressed again in the *Ethics* manuscripts in his Lutheran Christological logic and the proleptic orientation of the mandates to their eschatological unity. Further, we see his concern with reparation taking place through judgment in his theology of the orders, a concern which takes a more granular relational turn in his theology of the mandates in the *Ethics* manuscripts. Bonhoeffer sees *Stellvertretung*, in the *Ethics*, as the way in which sociality is most appropriately ordered and performing a reparative function of correction by reordering earthly power relations. But this reparative strategy of listing relations as they exist within the spheres of the mandates does not contribute to the social wholeness of the mandates as they relate one to another, because the relations, as described in the *Ethics* manuscripts, are ones that take place within the mandate rather than between or among the mandates.

But with the *Spielraum*, we see a development in Bonhoeffer’s thinking about social reparation, relating this reparation to the unity of the mandates by solving the existential problem identified by both Couenhoven and DeJonge. The mandates are all related to one another, but even though persons inhabit more than one at a time, there is no sociality described in the *Ethics* manuscripts that would cross the boundary between them and offer a kind of social relation that unites them. In other words, Bonhoeffer’s strategy for *Stellvertretung* as social reparation in the *Ethics* exacerbates the problem of the lack of unity of the mandates through the location of those relations like father or spouse, master, or statesman, within the mandates of family, work, and state. In the prison letters, however, we see Bonhoeffer add a social relation that can cross those boundaries between the mandates, and bring them into a kind of lived social unity possible in a relationship—friendship—
which, as a practice of freedom, is part of a Spielraum that is ecclesially grounded and yet socially and politically and comprehensive: friendship finds itself planted in the world of the other mandates and alongside the intra-mandate social relations described in the Ethics. Bonhoeffer does not relate friendship and Stellvertretung, so we cannot yet say that friendship is reparative in the way he claims the hierarchical intra-mandate Stellvertretung is. What can be said, here, however, is that through the concept of the Spielraum, the problem of social unity is solved through the living practice of a kind of relationship that transcends the internal social ordering of the mandate itself, and a type of relationship that concretely brings to the mandates a reparative unity that is already present hermeneutically in Christ and proleptically in the heavenly city.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship, we saw one way in which Bonhoeffer treated friendship as a relation which was necessarily caught up in the social and political world in which it was found. But it was a friendship that could only provide a pointer to the fact Bonhoeffer acted as though friendship was caught up in his political and social world, and on its own does not provide much conceptual sophistication.

But in Bonhoeffer’s concept of the Spielraum, and friendship within it, we find a sophistication that has precedent in Bonhoeffer’s thought. To summarise: friendship is reparative in two ways. First, in the way that, as a practice of freedom, it offers evidence of freedom to a world in which freedom has been pushed in the background; and secondly, as a lived practice that crosses the boundaries of different spheres of life as they are represented in the mandates, it instantiates and gives witness to the comprehensive eschatological unity of all these spheres in Christ.

The larger point, however, is not simply that friendship is reparative, or that the Spielraum is consistent with Bonhoeffer’s larger concerns with freedom and obedience and the unity of the social and political world. What friendship’s place in the Spielraum tells us is that friendship is not a private or personal relation whose goods are limited to the friendship itself; rather, it is reparative to the social and political world in which it finds itself, and brings a measure of lived unity to that social and political world. We can now say with confidence that Bonhoeffer both acted and thought of friendship as something caught up in a greater good. This is not to say that friendship is public; though it is to say that it can be political. Thus friendship, for Bonhoeffer, through its reparative and unitive significance to the social and political world in which it finds itself, is not simply for itself; friendship is also for others.
Throughout this chapter, however, more things have come to light than friendship’s political possibilities. First, Bethge’s role in the development of Bonhoeffer’s thinking is beginning to emerge. Although we do not have any correspondence from Finkenwalde that offers textual evidence of Bethge’s influence on Bonhoeffer’s thought on obedience, friendship, and freedom as practice, there are connections that I would point out: the idea of *der Spielraum der Freiheit* had its conceptual roots at Finkenwalde where Bonhoeffer first met Bethge, and where their friendship first developed. The possibility that I would offer now, to be considered in more detail in the next chapter, is that though the conversation with Bethge at Tegel was the immediate context of Bonhoeffer’s development of the idea of *der Spielraum der Freiheit*, it was the friendship with Bethge—a friendship that began at Finkenwalde—that inspired the concept of the *Spielraum*; and that this friendship is one of the primary ways that Bethge influenced Bonhoeffer’s own theological development.

Secondly, in friendship—as a political form of sociality—we can further trace Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on eschatology and utility. Again, much like we saw in the Rößler chapter, for a friendship to be of utility in the present does not exclude an openness to God’s ultimate purposes; and similarly, for a friendship to be oriented to God’s ultimate purposes—in this case, the unity of social and political life—does not mean that it is without utility in the present. Instead, its present utility is possible because it is oriented to God’s ultimate purposes. And, as we will see in the next chapter, Bonhoeffer will return to eschatology as he describes his friendship with Bethge.

Thirdly, Bonhoeffer revisits the question of the boundaries between the church and the world, a line of inquiry that began Chapter 2 and continued in Chapter 3. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer wrote of the way that intercession crosses the boundary of the church, and leaves self-offering open to this possibility as well. And in Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on Gandhi—as a person who hears the commandment and acts accordingly, making a call to peace—we had a person with whom some of the conditions of friendship were being fulfilled, making inter-faith friendship a speculative possibility on the basis of shared conviction.

But there is an additional way in which we are beginning to see friendship as a relation that is of the church, but not necessarily bound to the church, though it will take putting three things side-by-side. 1. In Chapter 2, I argued that theological *Stellvertretung*, on account of the way Bonhoeffer describes it as mutual and particular, is especially appropriate to friendship. 2. In Chapter 3, I pointed out that Gandhi’s repentance for others—his *Stellvertretung*—was exemplary, yet took place outside the church; and now, in the *Ethics* manuscripts, Bonhoeffer detaches *Stellvertretung* from the church, though importantly, he does not detach it from Christ nor does he use the theological/ethical distinction he used
Sanctorum Communio. Instead, Stellvertretung is extra-ecclesial and takes part in God’s own care for others through a Stellvertretung in which a person stands in as Christ for others. 3. In this chapter, I point out that friendship, in the Spielraum, is part of a social practice that belongs in the world outside the church as part of the encompassing Spielraum. Together, this means that theological Stellvertretung, as it takes place in friendship, can take place in the social and political world as a whole.

The possibility of Stellvertretung in friendship, and its political and social significance, however, is not something that Bonhoeffer explores directly in Sanctorum Communio, Ethics, or his prison correspondence. Further, Stellvertretung, in the Ethics, is described in hierarchical terms, but friendship is reciprocal and mutual; it would seem, then, that Stellvertretung and friendship are incompatible with one another. But if we were to look to Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s practice of friendship—as we did with the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship—we would find a way forward with the problematic association of mutual and reciprocal friendship to the ‘above and below’ Stellvertretung Bonhoeffer describes in the Ethics manuscripts. In the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, we find 1. The practices of Stellvertretung as they are described in Sanctorum Communio, making the friendship redemptive and lasting; and 2. evidence of mutuality, especially in theological dialogue; and 3. evidence of goods that extend beyond the church, and beyond the friendship itself, making it political and a friendship for others.
I know from experience that your prayer for me is real power.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, 1 February 1941

To whom did [Bonhoeffer] write? [...] Bonhoeffer did not send the letters and the outline of his manuscript to the world at large, nor even to his Church; he shared his thoughts with a theological friend in the Confessing Church [...] what we have was addressed to a very limited circle of people who understood his intentions.

Bonhoeffer and Bethge met in 1935, at Finkenwalde. Theirs would become a friendship that included conflict and the need to resolve conflict; it would also become a friendship of shared political ends and of theological dialogue. As such, it was a friendship that took into account the redemptive possibilities of _Sanctorum Communio_ and the political and dialogical aspects of the Rößler friendship, and was the friendship that inspired the concept of the _Spielraum_. In this way, the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship best—though imperfectly—exemplifies a friendship that was lasting, redemptive, dialogical, and for others.

One would think that Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s theological biographers, being interested in both theology and the friendships that populate the pages of a biography, would have more to say on the connections between the acts of love and repentance that Bonhoeffer describes in _Sanctorum Communio_ and the friendship that Bonhoeffer and Bethge shared. But this connection is overlooked in Bethge’s biography, who underemphasises the significance the personal aspects of his relationship with Bonhoeffer. Schlingensiepen makes no mention at all of the connection between the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship and _Sanctorum Communio_’s acts of love and repentance, even at Finkenwalde. Marsh, too, despite his theological acuity, makes little mention the significance of acts of love and repentance to the friendship, focussing more on the what he sees as Bonhoeffer’s affections for Bethge.

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504 DBW/E 16:1/68, 125/136.
506 Bonhoeffer wrote ‘Ecclesiasticus 9:15’ in the Vibrans family guestbook on a return trip to Finkenwalde with Bethge in August, 1935, referring to a verse that reads, in the NRSV, ‘A new friend is like new wine; when it has aged, you can drink it with pleasure’. It is the first reference to their friendship. See DBW/E 14:1/21, 73/93; on this, see de Gruchy, _Daring, Trusting Spirit_, pp. 15-17; Schlingensiepen, _Bonhoeffer_, p. 179.
507 See, for example, Bethge on confession at Finkenwalde, where Bethge makes no mention of his role in hearing Bonhoeffer’s confession. Bethge writes: ‘[t]hen one day Bonhoeffer himself asked one of the brothers—one who was quite inexperienced in such matters—to hear his confession’. This anonymous ‘brother’ was Bethge himself. Bethge, _Bonhoeffer: A Biography_, pp. 465-56.
508 Schlingensiepen, _Bonhoeffer_, pp. 177-83.
509 Marsh, _Strange Glory_, pp. 231-41.
return to Marsh in more detail below. De Gruchy’s biography of Bethge tells us that Bethge knew of Bonhoeffer’s bouts of depression on account of hearing his confession, but de Gruchy’s account of the friendship is more concerned with their mutual dependence, and the effect of Bonhoeffer’s engagement and Bethge’s marriage on the friendship. Bethge and Bonhoeffer had a ‘spiritual commitment’ according to de Gruchy, and mentions their mutual prayer and Bethge’s continued role as Bonhoeffer’s confessor, but he does not explore its theological significance or its connection to Stellvertretung. The only sustained investigation into the relation between Stellvertretung and friendship is by Bobert-Stützel, who makes a strong distinction between brotherhood and friendship; her arguments are substantive enough that I will return to them below.

If we were to look to the correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, however, the relation between Stellvertretung and the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship is clear at two junctures in particular: first while they were apart from one another, with Bonhoeffer at Ettal and Bethge at the Gossner Mission in Berlin; the second while they were apart from one another on account of Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment. In these letters, the subject of friendship and the practices of Stellvertretung are intertwined on the page. Further, as this investigation into friendship and Stellvertretung proceeds, Bethge’s unique voice will emerge through the dialogical aspects of their mutual influence upon one another, and the political possibilities of this friendship—including Bethge’s work after Bonhoeffer’s death—will come to light as well.

5.1 STELLVERTRETUNG, MEDIATION, AND FRIENDSHIP IN DISCIPLESHIP AND LIFE TOGETHER

As it turns out, not long after Bonhoeffer and Bethge met at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer was thinking again about the church, Stellvertretung, and friendship. So before turning to the Bonhoeffer-Bethge correspondence itself, this material needs some attention. What we will see is that in Discipleship, Bonhoeffer still thinks of Stellvertretung in terms of Christ’s Stellvertretung as both extra nos and in Christo. When Bonhoeffer turns to the subject of Stellvertretung in Life Together, however, he does two things of interest: Christ’s

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510 De Gruchy, Daring, Trusting Spirit, p. 34.
Stellvertretung is understood as the foundation that makes Christ’s mediation of community possible, and this mediation is identified with freedom. Things get more complicated when Bonhoeffer turns to friendship in Life Together because Bonhoeffer describes friendship as a ‘self-centred’ community, raising the question as to whether Bonhoeffer’s theology, as it develops in Finkenwalde, is as sympathetic to friendship as a redemptive social relation as it was in Sanctorum Communio.

Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology in the Finkenwalde period, with regard to redemption, is easily recognisable from the pages of Sanctorum Communio. Redemption, in Discipleship, is extra nos, something accomplished for humanity by God: Christ is sent to ‘shoulder and carry all of humanity’; this Christ is ‘for us’ and ‘stands bodily before God in the place that should be ours’. But this promeity of Christ is also ecclesial for Bonhoeffer, and is seen in the church’s preaching and sacramental practice: the ‘body of Jesus is “for us” in the strictest sense of the word’, he writes, ‘on the cross, in the word, in baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper. All bodily community with Jesus Christ rests on this fact’. This body, in which Christ acts for us, is identified with Gemeinde: ‘[t]he body of Jesus Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has assumed. The body of Christ is his church-community [Gemeinde]’. And this ecclesial body of Christ is identified as Christ’s ongoing presence in the world: ‘[t]o be in Christ is to be in this Gemeinde, and to be in Gemeinde is to be ‘truly and bodily in Jesus Christ’, and the ‘life of believers in the church-community is truly the life of Christ in them’, and as members of his body, members ‘take part in Christ’s suffering and glory’ and in ‘daily dying’. Though he is not specific about particular ‘acts of love’, Bonhoeffer does speak again of a Christ who acts for others, extra nos and in the church, and an ecclesial life of Christ that takes place in the world in an ongoing way through its suffering, glory, and ‘daily dying’.

Bonhoeffer describes this ecclesial participation in Christ’s Stellvertretung as a human mode of action and experience that may redeem others:

Even though Jesus Christ has already accomplished all the vicarious suffering necessary for our redemption, his suffering in this world is not finished yet. In his grace, he has left something unfinished […] in his suffering, which his church-community is to complete in this last period before his second coming[.] […] Whether

514 DBW/E 4, 228/214.
515 DBW/E 4, 231/217.
516 DBW/E 4, 231/217.
517 DBW/E 4, 231/217.
518 DBW/E 4, 232/218.
519 DBW/E 4, 235/221. Emphasis in original.
this suffering of Christians also has the power to atone for sin [...] is an open question.\textsuperscript{520}

This \textit{Stellvertretung} is ongoing, and is Christ’s own, completed in church-community. So Bonhoeffer himself confirms the possibility—the ‘open question’—of Christ’s own atonement taking place by way of the members of the church, as an ongoing suffering atonement in the body of Christ as \textit{Gemeinde}. This, then, is more than a proemeity identified with Christ’s headship, and a Christ who ‘comes upon me from the outside’, as Ziegler puts it.\textsuperscript{521} It is also a cautious affirmation that church-community may be continuing the redemptive work of Christ.

I argued in Chapter 4 that freedom can be assumed when Bonhoeffer speaks of obedience at Finkenwalde; but in \textit{Life Together}, Bonhoeffer became more explicit about freedom, speaking about interpersonal relations in terms of Christ’s \textit{Stellvertretung} and a person’s freedom. For Bonhoeffer, ‘[b]ecause Christ has long since acted decisively for other Christians, before I begin to act, I must allow them the freedom to be Christ’s’.\textsuperscript{522} So because Christ has already acted for another, that person is free, and this freedom in Christ is taken into account through the ‘release [of] others from all my attempts to control, coerce, and dominate them with my love’.\textsuperscript{523}

The result of another’s belonging to Christ, and their resulting freedom, is that encounter takes place by way of a mediating presence. Mediation was not a new subject for Bonhoeffer; he had written about it a number of ways in \textit{Sanctorum Communio},\textsuperscript{524} even relating it to friendship, writing that ‘objective spirit [...] appears as independent and anonymous to the third person, who desires admission into a bond of friendship; the objective spirit also thrusts itself as a third entity right between the two who are bound together’.\textsuperscript{525} But in the Finkenwalde literature, Bonhoeffer no longer calls this mediating presence ‘objective spirit’. The mediator is Christ, and ‘we can encounter others only through the mediation of Christ’.\textsuperscript{526}

\textsuperscript{520} DBW/E 4, 236/222.
\textsuperscript{522} DBW/E 5, 31/44.
\textsuperscript{523} DBW/E 5, 31/44.
\textsuperscript{525} DBW/E 1, 62/98.
\textsuperscript{526} DBW/E 5, 31/44.
For Green, imagining a Christ that mediates leads to an ability to see others, and yourself, the way Christ does;\textsuperscript{527} Fergus sees effects on community as well, but in concrete terms in the healing of relationships.\textsuperscript{528} But both of these outcomes are reliant on Christ having acted first. Without Christ’s accomplished Stellvertretung, both renewed perception and healed relationships would be evacuated of what makes either a possibility: Christ’s own ongoing work in the community and in another person. Thus Feil, rightly, sees mediation in \textit{Life Together} as a concept that arises from Stellvertretung\textsuperscript{529} because for Bonhoeffer, Christ has ‘long since acted decisively for other Christians’, therefore ‘they should encounter me only as the persons that they already are for Christ.’ For Bonhoeffer, Christ having acted for others ‘is the meaning of the claim that we can encounter others only through the mediation of Christ.’\textsuperscript{530} Christ’s Stellvertretung, then, results in his ongoing work; Bonhoeffer calls this ongoing work Christ’s mediation; this mediation is a way of understanding others as already ‘for Christ’. Though Bonhoeffer does not use the word Stellvertretung or Stellvertreter here, the function of being ‘for Christ’ is the same because to be Stellvertreter is to act for others; here, similarly, another person—through mediation—acts ‘for Christ’. So, in this way, mediation is reliant on both Christ’s accomplished Stellvertretung and his ongoing work for others, in the human person, in the present. This point will become clearer when I turn to \textit{Beichte} below.

This mediation, where Christ continues to stand between ‘me and others’,\textsuperscript{531} leads to a prohibition: ‘I must not long for unmediated community with that person.’\textsuperscript{532} The reason for this prohibition of unmediated community is that for Bonhoeffer, unmediated community is self-centred and results in ‘human enslavement, bondage, rigidity’ rather than ‘the freedom of Christians under the Word’.\textsuperscript{533} Bonhoeffer calls it ‘seelischer Gemeinschaft’, ‘emotional community’,\textsuperscript{534} community that seeks immediate interpersonal relationships, a ‘complete intimate fusion’ between people.\textsuperscript{535}

\textsuperscript{528} Donald Fergus, ‘Finkenwalde—an Experiment to Restore a Failing Ecclesiology?’, \textit{Scottish Journal of Theology}, 69 (2016), pp. 204-20 (p. 214).
\textsuperscript{529} Feil, \textit{Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{530} DBW/E 5, 31/44.
\textsuperscript{531} DBW/E 5, 31/43-44.
\textsuperscript{532} DBW/E 5, 31/43.
\textsuperscript{533} DBW/E 5, 32/44. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{534} DBW/E 5, 32/45.
\textsuperscript{535} DBW/E 5, 28/41.
Unmediated, self-centred, and emotional community does exist despite this prohibition, and Bonhoeffer assumes that unmediated community will exist side-by-side with the spiritual community within the church; this brings us to Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on friendship in *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer begins with a description of an ‘undiscerning observer’ of communities that include such things as friendships:

The undiscerning observer may think that this mixture of ideal and real, self-centred and spiritual, would be most obvious where there are a number of layers in the structure of a community, as in a marriage, the family, friendship—where the element of self-centeredness as such already assumes a central importance in the community’s coming into being at all, and where the spiritual is only something added to humanity’s physical-emotional [leiblich-seelischen] nature. According to this view, it is only in these multi-faceted communities that there is a danger of confusing and mixing the two spheres, whereas such a danger could hardly arise in a community of a purely spiritual nature.536

Bonhoeffer is not entirely clear as to whether he means that 1. Friendships are ‘mixed’ or ‘multi-faceted’ in and of themselves, apart from being part of a larger ‘spiritual’ community; that 2. friendships are ‘self-centred’ and ‘emotional’ in and of themselves, and ‘spiritual’ on account of being embedded in larger communities that are shaped by additional relationships apart from the affections of friendship; or that 3. friendships are ‘multi-faceted’ in and of themselves, on account of the friendship itself being shaped by both its ‘self-centredness’ and as part of a larger ‘spiritual’ community.

There is good reason to think that friendships are ‘multi-faceted’ in and of themselves, and that they are shaped by both the affections of friendship and through being part of a larger community. Bonhoeffer reflects here on life in Finkenwalde, a community that was not founded by family or friendship; the intention was ‘the formation of a community based on the Sermon on the Mount’537 that was ‘part of the one, holy, universal Christian church’.538 This community, however, did include brothers and cousins,539 and is where Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge began; it was a community in the terms of *Sanctorum Communio*, where families and friendships take their place within the larger church-community.

Bonhoeffer, then, is thinking of friendship as both ‘self-centred’/physical-emotional’, but

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536 DBW/E 5, 33/46.
538 DBW/E 5, 32/45.
539 Bethge and Vibrans were cousins, and both began at Finkenwalde in 1935; Gerhard and Winfried Krause were brothers, both part of Finkenwalde’s 1937 session. See biographies and class lists in DBW/E 14, 1050/1022, 1053/1025, and the biographies in DBWE 14, 1186, 1155.
because they are part of larger ‘spiritual’ community, the ‘spiritual is something added’ to the 
friendship itself through its participation in the larger church-community.

As Bonhoeffer continues to describe this ‘mixed’ form of community, he says that the 
observer, who thinks that in a ‘mixed’ community there is a danger of confusing the sphere of 
the ‘spiritual’ with the sphere of the ‘physical-emotional’ and ‘self-centred’, is mistaken:

Such ideas [of confusing the two spheres in mixed communities] are a grand delusion. On the basis of all our experience—and as can be easily seen from the very nature of things—the truth is just the opposite. A marriage, a family, a friendship knows exactly the limitations of its community-building power. Such relationships know very well, if they are sound, where the self-centred element ends and the spiritual begins. They are aware of the difference between physical-emotional and spiritual community.\textsuperscript{540}

Sound friendships, marriages, and families—if they know the limits of their power to build community—are precisely where the discernment of ‘spheres’ takes place. The real danger is in communities that consider themselves entirely ‘spiritual’:

On the other hand, whenever a community of a purely spiritual nature comes together, the danger is uncannily near that everything pertaining to self-centeredness will be brought into and intermixed with this community. Purely spiritual life in community [Lebensgemeinschaft] is not only dangerous but also not normal. Whenever physical-familial community, the community formed among those engaged in serious work, or everyday life with all its demands on working people is not introduced into the spiritual community, extraordinary vigilance and clear thinking are called for.\textsuperscript{541}

For Bonhoeffer, healthy communities are not made through the rejection of family or friendship as self-centred, but through the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘self-centred’ living side-by-side, and within, relationships like friendships. The conscious and intentional inclusion of the forms of life that are self-centred and emotional, for Bonhoeffer, acts as an aid to discernment.

So for Bonhoeffer here, there are relationships like friendships and families that are ‘physical-emotional’ and ‘self-centred’; they know their limits; and they take part in communities that are ‘spiritual’. But ‘spiritual’ communities—without friendships or families that know their limitations and can integrate the ‘spiritual’ into them—are susceptible to their own self-centredness but without the ability to recognise it. Friendship and family, as ‘multi-faceted’, make communities that are tempted to be ‘spiritual’ aware of the reality of self-centredness. In this sense, friendships are of utility to the community of which the friendships are a part.

\textsuperscript{540} DBW/E 5, 33/46.
\textsuperscript{541} DBW/E 5, 33/46-47.
So Bonhoeffer’s understanding of friendship at Finkenwalde—despite the fact that he speaks in different terms—is in continuity with what he has already said. Gemeinschaft in Sanctorum Communio—including marriage, family, friendship—is open to God’s purposes, and is an intermediary collective person in the collective person of Gemeinde. Here, too, friendship is a distinct kind of social relation within the church-community, and one that is open to God’s purposes through its service of discernment.

Friendship, then, continues to be a theological and ecclesial topic for Bonhoeffer at Finkenwalde, and though he speaks of it as ‘self-centred’ and ‘physical-spiritual’, friendship appears in the Finkenwalde literature as a constructive part of community life. Bonhoeffer is interested in friendship here as human, and in its ability to be ‘multi-faceted’ and to preserve a community from the fantasy of being entirely ‘spiritual’. He may be interested in the ends of community as a whole; but friendship, here, is part of that the community that Bonhoeffer is describing. Friendship is said to have its particular and legitimate demands, and the work that takes place in friendship is ‘serious’ and is part of community life. And though it is a serious charge to call these kind of relationships ‘self-centred’, they are considered valuable for their ability to offer the church clarity in its discernment between the spiritual and the self-centred, and as a place where ‘spiritual’ community, mediated by Christ and reliant on his having acted for the friend, can find a place.

We also see, in Discipleship and Life Together, an affirmation of Bonhoeffer’s theology of Stellvertretung from Sanctorum Communio. This is not the extra-ecclesial Stellvertretung of the Ethics. Though Christ has acted for others and on their behalf, an idea preserved in the Ethics, Bonhoeffer is in an ecclesial mode here, where the church lives Christ’s life in the world in an ongoing, redemptive way, and where members of that body ‘take part in Christ’s suffering and glory’ and in ‘daily dying’. It also marks two developments from Sanctorum Communio: the Stellvertretung of Christ extra nos is foundational to, and makes possible, his ongoing work of mediation between persons in the present; and, in a development that will help make sense of the connection between Sanctorum Communio’s Stellvertretung, as acts of love, and the reparative sociality of the Spielraum, this mediation is one of the ways persons are understood to be free.

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542 Harnack also had a lukewarm opinion of friendship, also preferring ‘brotherhood’ as well. It’s possible that this in Bonhoeffer’s mind, even if he does not follow Harnack’s own argument. For Harnack, friendship is (predictably) identified more with Greek philosophy than it is with Christianity. Though the reason that friendship does not gain currency in the church, for Harnack, was because brotherhood was ‘still more inward and warm’ as a designation. See Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. by James Moffatt (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 421.

543 DBW/E 4, 235/221.
The final difference between the language of *Sanctorum Communio* and that of *Life Together* is less substantive than it first appears. In *Sanctorum Communio*, a person acts as Christ for others; in *Life Together*, Christ is found at work between a person and others. This does not result in a substantive difference for us, because first, both kinds of vicarious action are dependent on Christ’s *Stellvertretung extra nos*, and this is the founding condition of the redemptive co-operation between Christ and the human person in the present. Secondly, it would be an error to categorically separate acting as Christ for others from Christ’s mediation, as both are forms of Christ’s ongoing, ecclesial, and redeeming work in which a human person acts. Christ comes ‘between’ one person and another in acts of love and repentance, in that the person is not effaced on account of Christ’s *Stellvertretung*; equally, Christ’s mediation is not an absolute differentiation between Christ and the person, in that Christ’s work nevertheless takes place in the other. This correspondence of *Stellvertretung* and mediation means that when we turn to the Bonhoeffer-Bethge correspondence, we can do so with combined terms: *Stellvertretung* as ecclesially-grounded acts of love and repentance, in friendship, acts which are characterised by suffering, glory, and daily dying.

5.2 FRIENDSHIP AND *STELLVERTRETUNG* IN THE BONHOEFFER-BETHGE CORRESPONDENCE

Though the evidence of theological *Stellvertretung*—as acts of love and repentance—are clear in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, recent attention to the friendship has centred on Charles Marsh’s claims in his biography of Bonhoeffer, *Strange Glory*, where he makes some strong inferences and conclusions about Bonhoeffer’s sexual orientation and the nature of Bonhoeffer’s love and affection for Bethge.\(^{544}\) So before I get to *Stellvertretung*, and the different kind love that I will be referring to here, Marsh’s claims will need attention.

There is an historical question that arises with Marsh’s claim. Is the claim about Bonhoeffer’s love and affection towards Bethge historically plausible? Marsh is not the first to ask a question about the nature of Bonhoeffer’s affection for Bethge; the earliest reference I can find dates from June 1946, when Gerhard Vibrans compared the loneliness that would be caused by the departure of Bethge from Bonhoeffer’s life to Vibrans’s own unmarried existence.\(^{545}\) And even though he denied this possibility when asked,\(^{546}\) Bethge did not always tell the entire truth about other things, particularly when the truth might affect the lives of

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\(^{545}\) DBW/E 14:1/87, 174/195.

others. I referred to Paul von Hase, in Chapter 2, as someone about whom Bethge said very little about the Nationalist Socialist company kept by von Hase in the interest of discretion for the sake of the family;\(^{547}\) Bethge treats Rößler similarly by not delving too deeply into Rößler’s political past. So it makes sense for Bethge not to call into question Bonhoeffer’s sexual orientation, because it would have led to even more unwanted attention paid to Maria von Wedemeyer,\(^{548}\) Bonhoeffer’s one-time fiancée, attention that Bethge tried to avoid in other circumstances.

On the historical question, Marsh does not make an argument about how the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship may fit within Berlin’s culture of same-sex affectionate and sexually active relationships, though he could have. Brian Joseph Martin, in his book *Napoleonic Friendship*, makes the case for erotic relationships among French soldiers between 1789 and 1916, a slightly different world from the one Bonhoeffer and Bethge inhabited in Weimar Germany. But if we were to see the Bonhoeffer family as one whose values were Wilhelmian and Prussian,\(^{549}\) and having strong military commitments—including two of the Bonhoeffer brothers fighting in World War I\(^{550}\)—the Bonhoeffer’s themselves were not that far from the nineteenth-century military culture that Martin describes. Further to this, as we look to the shape of the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, there are other similarities to what Martin describes in his work. Bonhoeffer and Bethge shared a common purse, as did some of the men in the relationships described by Martin; and, much like the friendships described by Martin, Bonhoeffer too thought of his friendship with Bethge as a life-long commitment.\(^{551}\) Finally, if we were to look to the sexual culture of Weimar Germany, one of the homosexual associations was called *Freundschaft*,\(^{552}\) one of the reviews written by and for the gay community was called *Die Freundschaft* (which was itself an amalgamation of two circulars, one called *Freundschaft und Freiheit*).\(^{553}\) Cognates of *Freund* are found in the names of other gay newspapers and associations.\(^{554}\) This suggests some continuity between

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\(^{547}\) Barnett, *Bonhoeffer Interpretation*.

\(^{548}\) On Bethge’s sensitivity to von Wedemeyer’s fear of ‘the sensational exploitation of her relationship to Bonhoeffer’, see de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, p. 124.


\(^{553}\) Tamagne, *Homosexuality in Europe*, p. 102.

\(^{554}\) Tamagne, *Homosexuality in Europe*, pp. 100-3.
the use of the *Freundschaft* to describe both sexually intimate and non-intimate same-sex relationships.

If we were to ask this question from the texts we have at hand, however, the possibility that Bonhoeffer held some kind of unrequited and unrecognised sexual desire toward Bethge, and hoped that their friendship could be more like either Martin’s military friendships or Weimar’s gay friendships, can only remain a tentative conclusion based on inference rather than material evidence. Marsh himself does not make his claim through either historically contextualising the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, or from material evidence, but from impressions gleaned from the letters Bonhoeffer and Bethge shared.555

Hauerwas sees this kind of assumption of a sexual relationship an ‘impoverished understanding of friendship’,556 and a look to the letters, and an investigation into how Bonhoeffer and Bethge themselves thought about and practiced their friendship, bears Hauerwas out. In reading the letters, the theological interests that I am investigating become much more clear. Though Bonhoeffer’s attachment to Bethge was real and sometimes overbearing, what becomes clear as we will see in the letters themselves is that Bonhoeffer did long for Bethge’s presence, but it was a presence for which he longed because it facilitated confession and intercession—not sexualised bodily intimacy—making *Stellvertretung* a much more obvious departing point, beginning with the Ettal/Gossner letters.

5.2.1 *Stellvertretung* in the Ettal/Gossner Correspondence

In February 1941, after returning from a short-lived opportunity for a safe life in New York, Bonhoeffer retreated to a monastery in Ettal to work on his *Ethics* manuscripts. Bethge, meanwhile, was in Berlin working in the Gossner Mission.557 With this, they were apart from...
one another for the first time on Bonhoeffer’s birthday,\footnote{DBW/E 16:1/67, 122/134.} which both Bonhoeffer and Bethge turned into an opportunity to write to one another about their friendship.

The first letter in this birthday exchange is from Bethge, written on 1 February 1941, beginning the conversation by wishing Bonhoeffer well, writing: ‘I […] wish you a good and fruitful use of your powers, […] and good coffee and tea in your new year.’\footnote{DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.} Bethge also wished, for himself, ‘frequent opportunities for us to get together.’\footnote{DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.} Bethge is also thankful, writing: ‘I offer you a summary of thanks—perhaps I can do this in writing—for your care and faithfulness, your kind work for me, availability in all personal and professional needs, […] [and the] sharing of neckties and shoes, imagination and encouragement’\footnote{DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.}

On that same day, Bonhoeffer wrote his own letter to Bethge; Bonhoeffer, too, was reflecting on the friendship, and the fact that the friendship between them was, at times, difficult. Bonhoeffer writes:

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You have also patiently withstood the severe tests of such a friendship, particularly with regard to my violent temper (which I abhor in myself and of which you have fortunately repeatedly and openly reminded me), and have not allowed yourself to be made bitter by it. For this I must be particularly grateful to you.\footnote{DBW/E 16:1/67, 125/136.}
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Bonhoeffer, like Bethge, is thankful; but this thankfulness is for Bethge’s forbearance as he recognises how difficult a friend he was. Bonhoeffer was penitent, in this sense, sharing his faults with Bethge.

The most fitting example of the ‘severe tests of such a friendship’ to which Bonhoeffer refers took place not long after Bonhoeffer and Bethge had met. While Bethge and Bonhoeffer were planning a trip to Switzerland in 1936, Bethge invited his cousin and fellow seminarian, Gerhard Vibrans, to join them, but Bonhoeffer was uninterested in another companion:

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[A]s far as the Swiss trip is concerned […] it would not be at all so simple for three people. I could borrow some money from a friend, but it would not suffice for three people. If Gerhard can get accommodations elsewhere, that would be another matter entirely.\footnote{DBW/E 14:1/103, 208/226.}
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Bonhoeffer does say that ‘the three of us making the trip would be wonderful’. But after this brief moment of generosity, he returns to his overriding concern about the disadvantages of three people: ‘every decision, every change of plans, etc., can cause more friction among three people than between two[,] […] in Switzerland Gerhard must have a place to stay[.] […] Moreover, we really cannot do much for Gerhard financially for the trip’. When the possibility of a fourth person was suggested, Bonhoeffer became concerned about the strain on the rear axle of the car because of the extra weight: ‘[t]hen the car itself. The axle already has to strain with three people in the car, and it certainly will with four. What can be done? And then in the mountains’. Bonhoeffer concludes: ‘In a word, it is difficult to make a decision here. I would like to make it as nice as possible for you and the other two and don’t want to be selfish. But it’s just that things could get complicated with four of us’.

Bonhoeffer did not get his way in the end, and Vibrans came on the trip. But it was a trying episode for all involved. Bethge approached Bonhoeffer about his behaviour on the trip, and as a result, Bonhoeffer wrote to Vibrans: ‘[l]et me say first of all that I now understand that I disturbed both of you while you were together and that I made things difficult for you, and that I am very sorry now’. But Bonhoeffer’s request for pardon came with some insouciance. ‘Hence I want to ask both of you to pardon me’, writes Bonhoeffer to Vibrans, ‘just as I already did when we parted’. And he makes excuses as well, writing: ‘[I was] really at the end of my strength[,][I slept very poorly indeed and then only briefly, and I was just worn out’. He then blames Bethge: ‘Eberhard […] was from the beginning irritated that I spoke with you about the conditions of our trip together’. He blames Vibrans, too: ‘It irritated me that you always referred to yourself as the third wheel on the cart and in so doing pushed us into a position none of us wanted’. Bonhoeffer recognises that his actions might have been seen in a negative light, but that his actions, ‘[r]ather than being a sign of unfriendliness, it was perhaps more the opposite, namely, an attempt to avoid potential problems’. He does, in the end, show regret: ‘[n]ow I have the feeling it was misunderstood. I am very sorry about that’, and he hopes that the episode can be put behind
them all: ‘I discussed it all with Eberhard, and we are done with it. I am now asking you to join with me and with us again on this matter. I could not bear it if anything serious came between us and were not addressed. Write me just a single word—nothing more is necessary—that you feel similarly. I beg you’. 575

Referring to this episode, de Gruchy is cautious and understated, calling Bonhoeffer a ‘demanding friend’. 576 He was that, and more: it was a severe test of friendship. Bonhoeffer does make some gestures toward reconciliation, but he began with an attempt to keep Vibrans from joining the trip; went on to make what appear to be absurd excuses about the strength of a car axle; acts unfriendly toward Vibrans on the trip itself; thus when Bethge asked him to reconcile with Vibrans, Bonhoeffer follows through with petulance, making a number of excuses for his behaviour while blaming others.

But in the Ettal letter, Bonhoeffer recognised how he tested Bethge. De Gruchy states, concerning this letter, that ‘[s]uch a friendship did not need theological justification; it was simply understood as a gift to be received, shared, and expressed’. 577 While the friendship may have not needed theological justification, it was a friendship, at this point, that was also theologically informed by Bonhoeffer’s theology of Stellvertretung and the practices that were able to mitigate how difficult Bonhoeffer made the friendship. So the realisation that his temper was destructive, in Bonhoeffer’s mind, was connected to Bethge’s prayer for him; and Bonhoeffer turned, immediately after his confession about his testing of the friendship, by writing: ‘I know from experience that your prayer for me is real power’. 578

Since Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer and Bethge had regularly taken time together for personal and mutual intercession. 579 Bonhoeffer recalls this practice again in a letter responding to Bethge three days later, referring to Bethge’s ‘personal intercession’ 580 over the years; but away from Bethge, at Ettal, Bonhoeffer was without Bethge’s intercession and the daily devotions they shared. Epistolary correspondence may capture some of their shared life of prayer and repentance, but without Bethge’s immediate presence he calls his day ‘without meaning and substance’, writing that other ‘signs of love need to appear in this light [of shared devotion and intercession], or they lose their splendor’. 581 This kind of splendour, for Bonhoeffer, is not easy to produce when one is alone because that splendour is found in a particular friend, and for Bonhoeffer, particularly in Bethge:

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575 DBW/E 14:1/114, 229/245.
577 De Gruchy, Daring, Trusting Spirit, p. 61.
578 DBW/E 16:1/68, 125/136.
580 DBW/E 16:1/71, 128/139.
581 DBW/E 16:1/71, 128/139.
Among other things, you wish me good stimulating friends. One can well wish such a thing for oneself, and it is a great gift today. And yet the human heart is created in such a way that we seek not the many but the one particular other and rest there. That is the challenge, the limit, and the treasure of authentic human relationship insofar as it touches the realm of individuality and is at the same time grounded fundamentally in faithfulness. There are individual relationships without faithfulness, and there is faithfulness without individual relationship. Each of these can be found among the many. But to find both (and this happens seldom enough!) one seeks the particular other, and blessed is the one ‘possessing that noble prize’.582

Bonhoeffer’s use of ‘faithfulness’ is not simply in reference to Bethge’s forbearance; there is more to the letter’s subject matter than forbearance. Their faithfulness takes the shape of intercession for one another, and Bonhoeffer’s opportunity to continue to confess his faults to Bethge. For Bonhoeffer, this faithfulness is found not in a general way for many others. It is the faithfulness of a particular other who hears his confession and intercedes for him; it is the ‘noble prize’ of a friend in whom particularity and faithfulness meet.

5.2.2 *Stellvertretung* in the Prison Letters Part I: Repentance, Intercession, and Forgiveness

By 1943, Bonhoeffer and Bethge were separated once again, this time on account of Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment; and, much like we see in the Ettal/Gossner letters, Bonhoeffer took their absence from one another as an opportunity to speak about their friendship. We find this most clearly in the letters of 18 and 20 November 1943, where Bonhoeffer covered friendship in his own recently written fiction,583 the conflict between marriage and friendship,584 and the complexity of friendship as a person gains friends after childhood.585

Because the correspondence was smuggled and was circumventing the prison’s censor,586 Bonhoeffer was also able to be more candid than he had been in earlier letters from prison. As a result, alongside friendship as a subject, Bonhoeffer turned to the more personal aspects of his practice of friendship with Bethge, writing to make sure that their intercessions were ongoing and mutual, and returning to the value he places on Bethge’s prayer for him: ‘[you] can pray for me like no one else. I want to ask you for this, and I also do the same for you every day’.587 Upon asking Bethge for prayer, and as a way to give content to Bethge’s intercessions, Bonhoeffer offers some details to his state of life and mind, of ‘some of the

582 DBW/E 16:1/71, 128/139.
583 DBW/E 8:2/73, 189/181-82.
584 DBW/E 8:2/73, 190/183.
585 DBW/E 8:2/73, 190/185.
586 DBW/E 8: 2/73, 186/178 n2.
587 DBW/E 8:2/73, 187/179.
things that you should know about me’. Bonhoeffer refers, in this request, to his ‘“acedia”-“tristitia” with its ominous consequences that have often haunted me’; his wonder as to ‘whether it is really the cause of Christ for whose sake I have inflicted such distress on all of you’; and to his self-reproach ‘for not having finished the Ethics’.

Bonhoeffer’s eschatology surfaces again in this letter, now in relation to intercession. At this point, Bonhoeffer was considering the possibility that he and Bethge would not see one another again; this leads Bonhoeffer to speak of their friendship as lasting:

Let us promise each other to remain faithful in intercession for each other[.] […] And if it should be determined that we never see each other again, then let us think of each other to the end with gratitude and forgiveness, and may God grant to us then that we one day stand praying for each other and praising and giving thanks with each other before God’s throne.

Ziegler, in an article on the eschatology of the prison letters, points out that William Hamilton, Larry Rasmussen, James Woelfel, and Ernst Feil find little or no evidence for eschatology in these letters. Ziegler contests this reading, finding Bonhoeffer’s eschatological thinking in his understanding of secularity. Here we have another example of Bonhoeffer’s eschatological thinking in the same letters, in this instance about prayer in the context of his friendship with Bethge. Like the eschatology of Sanctorum Communio, where communities in the present are informed by their sanctified form, Bethge’s prayer in the present is understood, by Bonhoeffer, in terms of its eschatological end.

Ziegler sees Bonhoeffer’s eschatology taking form in ‘elements of evangelical faith [that] provide proto- or antitypes which can and ought to direct the vocation of the mandates in the world’, and this is similar, though it’s not clear that Bonhoeffer is looking to the gospel, precisely, for a prototype of the vocation of friendship in the present. But similarly, the community of friendship does more than endure, for Bonhoeffer; it also looks, in the present, to an eschatological type, where the present shape of the friendship is informed by its eschatological end. The hope, in the face of their possible separation, that God will grant their eternal intercession for one another before God’s throne is related to their gratitude and

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588 DBW/E 8:2/73, 187/179.
589 DBW/E 8:2/73, 187-88/180-81.
590 DBW/E 8:2/73, 191/183.
593 Ziegler, ‘Christ’s Lordship and Politics’, p. 76.
forgiveness in the present. To hope for what will be, in Bonhoeffer’s eschatological imagination, means acting upon that hope now, in gratitude and forgiveness.

Bonhoeffer felt strongly that he did need forgiveness in the present; and as Bonhoeffer’s request for intercession became more personal, he turns back to how difficult a friend he was:

I had wanted to express to you there how grateful I was that with so much patience and forbearance you bore my tyrannical and self-serving manner, which often made you suffer, and everything with which I sometimes made your life difficult.\textsuperscript{594}

Much like Bonhoeffer’s penitent words in the Ettal/Gossner correspondence, Bonhoeffer speaks of his friendship with Bethge as the opportunity for him to be a difficult and demanding friend, and treats their friendship as an opportunity to find some resolution to his actions through the prayer of the very friend—and in a point I will return to below, not to a Christian who stood apart from the sin—who had himself suffered his difficult and self-serving manner.

At the end of Bonhoeffer’s renewed penitence over the ways he made Bethge’s life difficult, and following his request for prayer, Bonhoeffer makes a clear connection between intercession, confession, and absolution. Immediately after reminding Bethge that he ‘made [Bethge’s] life difficult’, he writes:

I ask you for forgiveness for this and yet know that—even if not physically—we were granted participation \textit{spiritualiter} in the gift of confession \textit{[Beichte]}, absolution, and communion, and may be very happy and at peace in this.\textsuperscript{595}

What Bonhoeffer did in the Ettal/Gossner correspondence—entering in a mode of confession and repentance as he asked for Bethge’s prayers, though not saying clearly that it was confession—he does now by identifying this clearly as confession and absolution. Bethge’s prayers of intercession followed his confession, and were part of the forgiveness of sins that comes through Bethge taking Christ’s place, for Bonhoeffer, in both intercession and absolution.

This was, in epistolary form, \textit{Beichte}, the private form of the forgiveness of sins that had been expected of the members of the Finkenwalde community. Even Bonhoeffer, as head of the seminary, was expected to take part in this practice; Bonhoeffer privately confessed his sin to Bethge.\textsuperscript{596} Bonhoeffer described this private confession, in \textit{Life Together}, as God’s

\textsuperscript{594} DBW/E 8:2/73, 188/181.
\textsuperscript{595} DBW/E 8:2/73, 188/181.
\textsuperscript{596} Bethge, \textit{Bonhoeffer: A Biography}, p. 506.
work through another: according to Bonhoeffer, “[t] hose who confess their sins in the presence of another Christian know that they are no longer alone with themselves; they experience the presence of God in the reality of the other”;\textsuperscript{597} like the confession of sins that Bonhoeffer describes in \textit{Sanctorum Communio, Beichte} was a meeting of God in another person. This kind of confession, then, through the person acting as God, is one of the ecclesial forms of \textit{Stellvertretung}—the mutual forgiveness of sins—but in personal and private form. Wilkes confirms this reading of \textit{Beichte}, describing it in terms of Bonhoeffer’s vision of \textit{Stellvertretung}:

\begin{quote}
[T]he confessor represents the church community and stands in the place of Christ, and as Christ, to the one who confesses and as such bears the sin and speaks words of absolution. […] Members of the Christian community must bear one another if they are together to act as a \textit{Stellvertreter} (vicarious representative) to the world. Indeed, Bonhoeffer commented: “Confession of sin is founded on the reality of the vicarious representative action of Christ.” Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on “being for” others was manifest first of all, on his account, in the willingness to take on the burden of another’s sin.\textsuperscript{598}
\end{quote}

Christ’s \textit{Stellvertretung} is the founding condition for the church’s ongoing ecclesial practice; here, that ongoing practice is the personal form of the confession of sin in which the member of the church community acts as Christ for another, bearing that sin and offering absolution as Christ. Christ’s work carries on in the practices of the church, carried out by individual persons for other individual persons; and in this case, carried out for a friend by a friend.

This connection between friendship and confession is also present in Bonhoeffer’s poem ‘The Friend’. Bonhoeffer wrote the poem to Bethge—the ‘daring, trusting, spirit’—to whom Bonhoeffer discloses his sin:

\begin{quote}
The spirit longs to cleanse itself 
from all hypocrisy
and trust itself to the other spirit 
totally open,
bound to that spirit,
freely and in truth.
Then, ungrudgingly, he will respond, 
will praise, 
will give thanks, 
will find joy and strength 
in the other spirit.\textsuperscript{599}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[597] DBW/E 5, 97/113. See also Willmer, ‘Costly Discipleship’, p. 183.
\item[599] Robertson’s translation as found in Hauerwas, “‘The Friend’”, p. 97.
\end{footnotes}
So for Bonhoeffer, the friend—specifically Bethge—is the one to whom he can speak openly, freely, and truthfully: that is, the friend is one to whom things can be disclosed.

This connection between friendship, disclosure, and confession marks a particularity that Bobert-Stützel cannot account for in her allocation of Beichte to the ecclesial relation of ‘Bruderschaft’ rather than ‘Freundschaft’.600 Bobert-Stützel turns to Bonhoeffer’s comment in NL B 11,5 (2)—Hans-Werner Jensen’s unpublished student notes from a lecture by Bonhoeffer on pastoral care from 1938-39—where Bonhoeffer says that one goes to God for forgiveness, not to a friend.601 Apart from the unreliable provenance of the quotation, even if it were genuine, this quote can just as easily be read as a confirmation of the idea that as Stellvertreter, a friend acts as God. This would be consistent with seeing this reference in the context of Life Together where friendship is ‘multi-faceted’; if one were to simply go to a friend instead of a friend acting as God, this would be an ‘unmediated’ relationship, not ‘spiritual’, and in Bonhoeffer’s mind, inappropriate.

More importantly, in both the Ettal/Gossner and the prison correspondence—and in response to Bobert-Stützel’s argument as a whole—friendship cannot be extricated from Bonhoeffer’s confession and allocated to ‘Bruderschaft’ rather than ‘Freundschaft’. Even if Bonhoeffer claimed something similar in a lecture, in practice Bonhoeffer is making this confession in a letter that is about friendship; friendship, and confession, are intertwined on the page. Further, as in both the Ettal/Gossner letters and the prison correspondence, the friendship itself intertwined with the trespass, the confession, and its resolution. Bonhoeffer could have gone to any other Christian to hear his confession about his tyranny toward Bethge; that would be a brother seeking out a brother and a more strictly ecclesiastical and ‘spiritual’ relationship, and rather than the ‘multi-faceted’ friendship. But as Bonhoeffer puts it in Life Together, Beichte is part of finding ‘the presence of God in the reality of the other’,602 not a finding of the presence of God despite the reality of the other; Christ’s mediation is not the effacement of the one who acts as or with Christ. Bonhoeffer goes to a friend to confess how inconsiderate he was to the friend hearing the confession. In this sense, the friendship with Bethge was the opportunity for the expression of Bonhoeffer’s tyranny and inconsiderateness, and also where this could be addressed. Bethge, as the Christ who bears Bonhoeffer’s sin against Bethge himself, does not bear Bonhoeffer’s sin as distant bystander. He bears them personally as the friend, and redemptively as a friend forgiving as Christ. If the friendship is so closely intertwined with the trespass, the confession, and the

602 DBW/E 5, 97/113. Emphasis mine.
absondition, there is no way for Bethge to lay aside his friendship in order to only be a brother in Christ.

And here, Fergus—who sees the mediation of Christ as something that results in the healing of relationships—makes better sense than does Green, who sees mediation as a way of seeing others. This is not a matter of seeing someone through the eyes of Christ, except perhaps as a secondary effect. It is Stellvertretung, Christ acting in or in-between oneself and another, where another forgives sin as Christ, with real reconciliation between God and human persons taking place because Christ himself is at work in this moment of redemption. Nor would Green’s suggestion that Christ was not the mediator in a dispute have been much consolation to Bethge. They did have disputes, at least in the sense here that Bonhoeffer was—in his own words—‘tyrannical’ and ‘self-serving’. It was Bonhoeffer’s own sin against Bethge that Bonhoeffer brought to confession, and the sin for which he asked forgiveness and absolution. ‘Seeing’ Bonhoeffer through the eyes of Christ might be a help, but to act as Christ, forgiving and bearing sin in a prayer and absolution as the Christ who forgives and bears sin, would be ‘real power’ and a way to reconcile the friend with God and the friend with the friend. This was a matter of forgiving concrete sins against the person hearing the confession, which may impact one’s vision of another, but renewed vision is not the same as Christ’s forgiveness.

So in both the Ettal/Gossner correspondence and the prison letters, we find evidence of Stellvertretung in practice between friends—where the particularity of the friend cannot be extricated from the act of Stellvertretung itself—and where Bonhoeffer confesses, and Bethge intercedes and forgives; and though Bonhoeffer is in greater need than Bethge for prayer and forgiveness, Bonhoeffer saw it as a Stellvertretung that was mutual, expecting Bethge to pray for him as he did for Bethge.

5.2.3 Stellvertretung in the Prison Letters Part II: Self-Offering

Alongside the acts of Stellvertretung in friendship seen above, Bonhoeffer also wrote to Bethge of his own self-offering. There are a number of ways to understand this more general and non-specific ‘act of love’ that Bonhoeffer calls ‘self-renouncing’; in Sanctorum Communio Bonhoeffer listed advocacy, so we could add, in this category of Stellvertretung in friendship, Bonhoeffer’s work in getting, and trying to keep, Bethge’s UK status, the

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603 Green, ‘Human Sociality’, p. 126.
604 DBW/E 1, 122/184.
classification that kept Bethge from being conscripted.\textsuperscript{605} Bonhoeffer also included financial offering in that list,\textsuperscript{606} in addition to shoes and neckties, Bonhoeffer and Bethge shared finances, and held goods in common.\textsuperscript{607} Self-offering was also part of the way Bonhoeffer described his reason to return to Germany in 1941. Bethge, however, referring to a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr,\textsuperscript{608} wrote that Bonhoeffer had returned for Germany and his people: ‘[w]hat had really caused him […] to return to Germany […] was simply his readiness to recognize that he was and would have to remain a German, fully accepting guilt and responsibility’.\textsuperscript{609}

But Bonhoeffer also gave an additional reason for his return, one that Bethge overlooks. In a letter to American ecumenist Henry Smith Leiper, Bonhoeffer wrote that he needed to go back for the sake of his friend Bethge, to ‘stand by him and to act with him, or to get him out and to share my living with him’.\textsuperscript{610} So Bonhoeffer’s self-offering, in this case, had a dual dimension to it: it was both for Germany, and for Bethge.

Self-offering is seen again in the friendship letter of 18 November 1943, where Bonhoeffer asked for intercession for his ‘tristitia’, and brings us to a more difficult aspect of self-renouncing in Bonhoeffer. This ‘tristitia’ is in reference to Bonhoeffer’s thoughts of suicide, a subject that Bonhoeffer covered in the \textit{Ethics} manuscripts.\textsuperscript{611} There, Bonhoeffer had said that suicide is often done out of ‘personal self-interest’.\textsuperscript{612} But nevertheless, Bonhoeffer writes (in a prescient passage):

\begin{quote}
[If] a prisoner takes his life because he fears that under torture he would betray his people, his family, or his friend […] [and] can spare them serious damage by freely taking his own life, the self-inflicted death is so strongly subordinate to the motive of sacrifice that condemnation of the deed becomes impossible.\textsuperscript{613}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{605} See de Gruchy, \textit{Daring, Trusting Spirit}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{606} DBW/E 1, 122/184.

\textsuperscript{607} Bonhoeffer, for example, mentions offering money to Bethge in DBW/E 14:1/95, 190/210; Bethge refers to the fact that their friendship ‘includes all of each other’s goods’, in DBW/E 6:2/94, 267/248; see also Bonhoeffer’s wills, where he leaves his estate largely with Bethge: DBW/E 8:2/60, 163/159 and DBW/E 8:2/75, 203/193.

\textsuperscript{608} DBWE 15:1/129, 210/210.

\textsuperscript{609} This quote marks a transition in the biography, and is found near the end of Part Two on Bonhoeffer’s return to Germany from New York; Part Three is titled ‘Sharing Germany’s Destiny’, a section of the biography that begins with Bonhoeffer’s ‘double-life’ as part of the resistance. While ‘sharing Germany’s destiny’ was one of the reasons Bonhoeffer returns to Germany, it is not the only one. For Bethge’s perspective, see Bethge, \textit{Bonhoeffer: A Biography}, pp. vii, 655, 681.

\textsuperscript{610} DBW/E 15:1/111, 189/184.


\textsuperscript{612} DBW/E 6, 197/200.

\textsuperscript{613} DBW/E 6, 197/201.
In the case, for Bonhoeffer, that killing oneself is a sacrifice for others, it is like the soldier who jumps in front of a bullet for another soldier, and judgment should be suspended, even though the difference between the use and misuse of this freedom is difficult to perceive and ‘often barely perceived by the human eye’.  

Bonhoeffer had clearly thought of suicide in prison, and he admits this to Bethge in his letter of 18 November 1944. There was a real possibility that to say too much to his interrogators would put his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, at risk, in prison himself and also under interrogation, a risk that would be mitigated if Bonhoeffer were to commit suicide. Though Dohnanyi himself had asked Bonhoeffer to ‘plead ignorance and assign all responsibility to him’, Bonhoeffer later had to be careful to keep his story on ‘Operation 7’ consistent with Dohnanyi’s testimony, and, with regard to a letter found by the Gestapo about Dohnanyi’s help in Bonhoeffer avoiding military service, had to avoid giving his interrogators evidence that would lead to Dohnanyi’s death sentence for ‘undermining Germany’s defences’. To say the wrong thing could also put Bethge’s freedom at risk, as Bethge was also under suspicion for ties with the Bonhoeffers, and had been imprisoned just a few weeks before, and interrogated a few weeks later. Similarly, Bethge had put himself at risk for Bonhoeffer during the interrogations when he falsely claimed that he did not recognise Bonhoeffer’s signature on an incriminating document. And Bonhoeffer himself, in his poem ‘The Friend’, called friendship something that could, ‘if needs be’, lead a friend to ‘sacrifice their life’s blood’. So the thought of dying at his own hand in order to save others, as he faced interrogation himself, was not a distant one.

Though Bonhoeffer did decide that he was not in the position to sacrifice himself in this way, he was thinking of it in similar terms to his return to Germany. In both cases, self-

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615 DBW/E 8:2/73, 187/180. See also DBW/E 8:1/12, 64/74. Schlingensiepen rightly makes the connection here between suicide and friendship, writing that for Bonhoeffer, ‘taking his own life would be preferable to betraying his friends’; Schlingensiepen, *Bonhoeffer*, p. 324.
619 Robertson’s translation as found in Hauerwas, ‘“The Friend”’, p. 93. Bethge recognises this as a reference to ‘the possibility of his own sacrifice’; Bethge’s interpretation of the poem, however, is unfortunately spare. See Bethge, ‘Bonhoeffer’s Theology of Friendship’, pp. 98, 102.
620 As Bonhoeffer puts it, he ‘would do neither human beings nor the devil this favor;
offering was not reducible to a personal good. There is personal good and benefit, in that a friend benefits from the sacrificial offering of the friend; but here, self-sacrifice as an act of love is implicated in the world which the friendship inhabits. To return to Germany was both ‘for Germany’ and ‘for Bethge’, which led to a situation in which Bonhoeffer was contemplating suicide, a suicide that would save the friend with whom he was politically implicated. To kill himself, then, would have been, again, for Bethge and for the Germany he was, through conspiracy, hoping to preserve from the ills of National Socialism under Hitler.

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In the evidence from the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, as seen in the Ettal/Gossner and prison correspondence, we see Bonhoeffer causing Bethge suffering; we see friendship understood in terms of God’s glory, where friendship endures eschatologically before the throne of God, an eschatological glory that shapes the practice of friendship in the present. We also see evidence of repentance, intercession, forgiveness, and self-offering. This correspondence, then, describes both the acts of love and repentance that are described in Sanctorum Communio and the ongoing redemptive work of Gemeinde as it’s found in Discipleship, making this friendship one of the ways God had acted redemptively in the world.

This evidence also leads to four conclusions. First, Stellvertretung can be mutual and reciprocal. I pointed out in Chapter 4 that Stellvertretung in the Ethics is where it was described by Bonhoeffer in terms of ‘above and below’ and as non-reciprocal; but Bonhoeffer thinks about acts of love and repentance, in his friendship with Bethge, in terms of mutuality. Bonhoeffer’s request for prayer—as a way to be repentant, and to seek intercession and forgiveness—was something he expected Bethge to do for him as well. Even if we were to look at Bethge’s intercession for Bonhoeffer, Bethge is implicated through his own need to intercede for the sake of the well-being of the friendship of which he is a part.621 In this sense, it is not a symmetrical reciprocity, but there is an offering on both sides: a request for the

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healing of the friendship through repentance, and an offering of forgiveness that is healing; the intercession, in this way, is of benefit to both.

Secondly, there is an irreducible particularity in play in these examples of Stellvertretung in practice: each of them takes place in the particular context of a friendship. Stellvertretung—as intercession, absolution, repentance, and self-offering—was not, here, to act for a stranger at a distance, nor does the friend and the friendship become spectral in order that Christ can become real. The friendship was the opportunity for Bonhoeffer’s temper to rise, and where Bonhoeffer’s behaviour tested Bethge’s forbearance; it was where Bonhoeffer showed his repentance; it was the context of the prayer that Bonhoeffer associates with his repentance. Bonhoeffer does not go to someone removed from what Bonhoeffer needed to confess, or ask for intercession from someone removed from what needs prayer. Bonhoeffer goes to his friend, Bethge, a person who is party to the confession, and to the prayer that comes as a result, and the sin Bonhoeffer confessed. Bethge’s faithfulness and suffering, and Bonhoeffer’s temper and disclosure, are each part of the resolution of that anger through Bethge’s prayer, and each known in the context of friendship. Their self-offering was made or contemplated for the sake of another known in particular ways; Bonhoeffer returned to Germany and sought out Bethge’s UK status so their friendship could flourish; as a result, Bethge was drawn more deeply into the conspiracy, a conspiracy that meant they put themselves at risk—or in Bonhoeffer’s case, contemplated suicide—for the sake of a friend with whom that conspiracy was shared. Thus, as Bethge intercedes and forgives, and as Bonhoeffer repents and offers himself, they do so as a friend who is acting to preserve the friendship to which they belong, or in order to save the friend with whom he is politically involved, and where God is found in the reality of the friend.

Thirdly, the friendship was political, in that it was significant for the social and political world in which it was situated. Bonhoeffer returned from New York both ‘for Bethge’ and ‘for Germany’, and Bonhoeffer considered suicide for his friend and for the sake of the Germany he sought to save from Hitler and National Socialism. Friendship, understood through these kinds of self-sacrificial love, is something that cannot be simply personal because the act for the friend and the act for others beyond the friendship cannot be extricated one from the other. To act for the friend, in this instance, was to act for others beyond the friendship; and to act for others beyond the friendship was to act for the friend.

But eschatology, mutuality, particularity and politics are not the only ways to understand friendship in Bonhoeffer’s life and practice. Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship with Rößler included a shared intellectual life; this is something we can also see in
Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge in a shared counsel that will again be understood as freedom.

5.3 BONHOEFFER AND BETHGE’S FRIENDSHIP AS DIALOGICAL

In Bonhoeffer’s poem ‘The Friend’, the stanza about the longing for cleansing and trust—a cleansing and trust that took place, in part, in Bonhoeffer’s confession and Bethge’s absolution—is immediately followed by a stanza about ‘counsel’:

Even under severe pressure
and strong rebuke
he willingly submits.
Not by command, nor by alien laws and doctrines,
but by good and earnest counsel,
which liberates,
the mature man seeks
from the true friend.
Far or near
in success and in failure,
the one recognizes in the other
the true helper
towards freedom
and humanity. 622

‘Counsel’ is the first way to describe Bethge’s influence upon Bonhoeffer, a counsel that influences through Bethge’s ability to clarify Bonhoeffer’s thinking. De Gruchy calls Bethge Bonhoeffer’s sounding board and clarifier, 623 Schlingensiepen writes that ‘Bethge had a capacity to enter into Bonhoeffer’s thinking, and to draw him out by means of questions, which Bonhoeffer found extraordinarily stimulating and which had a generally positive effect on the studies at Finkenwalde’. 624 Bethge, too, while making his own independent contributions, would find his theological conversations with Bonhoeffer enriching his own theological thinking. But there is more going on here than counsel and dialogue: Bonhoeffer, in the poem, also makes connections between friendship, counsel, and freedom.

The importance of shared counsel to the Bethge-Bonhoeffer friendship appears in the same Ettal/Gossner birthday exchange where we found evidence of Stellvertretung. In that correspondence, Bethge wished Bonhoeffer ‘success in articulating your new insights’ 625 and

622 Robertson’s translation as found in Hauerwas, “‘The Friend’”, p. 97.
624 Schlingensiepen, Bonhoeffer, pp. 179-80.
625 DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.
thanks him for his ‘intellectual and spiritual generosity and partnership’. This counsel, for Bethge, is summative of his good wishes and thanks: Bethge asked, ‘[h]ow shall I summarize? [With the] secure feeling of knowing someone with whom counsel and solutions are to be found in all circumstances.’ Even as he thanked Bonhoeffer for counsel, Bethge anticipated that his sentiments would encourage a response from Bonhoeffer: ‘Of course, you will think this is formulated much too broadly’. So for Bethge, an important part of his friendship with Bonhoeffer included hope for Bonhoeffer’s own continued theological development, an appreciation of Bonhoeffer’s own counsel, and the expectation that even this hope and appreciation would take part in their ongoing exchange.

In the letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge on that same day, Bonhoeffer reflected Bethge’s sentiments. Bonhoeffer wrote that Bethge knew him ‘both objectively and personally’, that the connection between them, in ‘work and in friendship’, was ‘a rather extraordinary joy for a human life’, and a connection that took form in Bethge being Bonhoeffer’s ‘faithful helper and advisor’. Bonhoeffer wrote: ‘in countless questions you have decisively helped me by your greater clarity and simplicity of thought and judgment’. For Bonhoeffer, the friendship came with Bethge’s counsel and Bethge’s ability to help clarify his thinking. So for both of them, the friendship was one of shared counsel and critical conversation.

In the prison correspondence, the dialogical aspects of the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge are made clearer. Their shared intellectual life included Bethge’s truthfulness with Bonhoeffer; we can see this in the way Bonhoeffer relied on Bethge for practical counsel about the way his future vocation might be affected by his connection to the Military Intelligence Office. Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge:

You are absolutely the only person with whom I can discuss this question for the time being, and if permission to visit is ever granted, perhaps we can talk about it. Give this some thought and please tell me the truth.

This telling of the truth was described by Bonhoeffer through the analogy of a water-purifying plant. According to Bonhoeffer, by telling the truth, Bethge clarified his thinking:

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626 DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.
627 DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.
628 DBW/E 16:1/67, 123/134.
629 DBW/E 16:1/68, 125/136.
630 DBW/E 16:1/68, 125/136.
631 DBW/E 8:2/86, 235-36/221.
If you had been here, Eberhard, you would have been the only one who would have done your duty as a friend and told me the truth. Tomorrow or the day after, so I am told, I will be able to talk to you. For the first time in nine months, I will be allowed to speak and hear the complete truth. […] Aren’t there such things as purification plants near lakes?—you are aware of my ignorance of technical matters—but such things do exist, and this is what you are for me.²⁶³

Bethge was happy to play this role, writing to Bonhoeffer: as he put it, ‘I would have liked so much to be your “spiritual clarification plant”’.²⁶³

This truthfulness in counsel was something that Bonhoeffer associated with their friendship. Bonhoeffer, for example, called their ‘spiritual companionship’ one of ‘intellectual-spiritual kinship’,²⁶⁴ and in ‘The Friend’, the stanzas on disclosure and counsel were preceded by one that makes a connection between counsel and friendship clear:

Then when the spirit moves a man
to great, serene, audacious thoughts
of heart and mind,
he may look the world in the face
with clear eyes and open countenance;
then, if action is joined to the spirit
—by which alone it stands or falls—
from this action,
sound and strong,
the work grows,
giving content to thought and meaning
to the life of the man;
then the active, lonely man
longs for
the befriending, understanding spirit of another.
Like a clear, fresh flow of water,
in which the spirit cleanses itself from the dust of the day,
cooled from the burning heat,
strengthened in the hour of tiredness—
like a fortress, to which after the dangers of battle
the spirit retires
to find safety, comfort and strength—
such is the friend to the friend.²⁶⁵

‘Cleansing’, above, was related to disclosure and trust; here, the cleansing takes place through the Bethge, who ‘[l]ike a clear fresh flow of water’, gives ‘content’ to the ‘thought and meaning’ of Bonhoeffer’s own ‘great, serene, and audacious thoughts’. So ‘counsel’ was a kind of conversation that clarified his ideas.

²⁶³ DBW/E 8:2/118, 345/313.
²⁶⁴ DBW/E 8:4/189, 565/507.
²⁶⁵ Robertson’s translation as found in Hauerwas, “‘The Friend’”, pp. 95, 97.
Counsel, in this sense, is more than offering guidance in practical life decisions, it is related to theological clarity, and the degree to which Bonhoeffer was a theologian who relied on friendship in order to carry out his own theological work. For a time, Hildebrandt had done some of this work for Bonhoeffer, as had Rössler, in his own way, until 1935; but by the time of Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment, Bethge had become Bonhoeffer’s primary theological interlocutor. Bonhoeffer, in a letter exploring some of his thoughts on the ‘world come of age’, ended with a hope that Bethge could fulfill this role in the future:

Forgive me, this is all still put terribly clumsily and badly; I’m very aware of this. But perhaps you are just the one to help me again to clarify and simplify it, if only by my being able to tell you about it, and to hear you, as it were, keep asking and answering me!637

Bonhoeffer would echo this statement about Bethge’s ability to clarify his thinking in his outline for a book he was preparing: there were problems that arose, for Bonhoeffer—related to being a “modern” theologian who has nevertheless inherited the legacy of liberal theology—to which only Bethge could provide ‘clarifying conversation’.638 For Bethge, too, Bonhoeffer’s letters were stimulating, and part of his own way of seeing things anew: ‘[a]ny letter from you is an event and gives rise to a host of questions, brings me to new stimuli and new ways of seeing things’.639 So this part of their intellectual life was mutual, and their theological conversation was one of reciprocal enrichment and influence.

The dialogical nature of their friendship, and the way that this contributed to Bonhoeffer’s own theological work, is especially evident in the epistolary conversation between them about the Spielraum. In Chapter 4, the concept of the Spielraum—and friendship’s place in it—formed part of a trajectory in Bonhoeffer’s political and social thought; but the idea itself came out of a conversation with Bethge about friendship that began with a discussion about necessity, and Bethge’s visit to Bonhoeffer in prison on 23 December 1943. After the visit, Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge:

There is a spiritual hunger for discussion that is much more tormenting than physical hunger, and I can speak in that way and about certain things with no one else but you. Entire complexes of questions are opened and clarified in a few words and hints. Our attunement, our familiarity with each other, achieved by years of not always frictionless practice, is something we must never lose. It is an unbelievable advantage and an extraordinary help.640

637 DBW/E 8:3/177, 537/482.
639 DBW/E 8:2/118, 335/313.
640 DBW/E 8:2/89, 257-58/240.
The visit was needed because Bonhoeffer relied so much on Bethge’s conversational practice in order to clarify his own thinking. But when Bethge does what Bonhoeffer hopes he will do—and asks a question that clarifies what *necessitas* means—the conversation turns to the difference between marriage and friendship. Marriage, not friendship, writes Bethge, ‘gets the outward consideration and recognition. Everyone, in this case the whole family, must take it into account and thinks it right that much has to be done, and should be done, on behalf of a married couple’. 641

Bethge is drawing on his experience of the Bonhoeffer family, who did not feel compelled to share Bonhoeffer’s letters with him, though they did share the letters with Bonhoeffer’s fiancée and brother. ‘It’s taken for granted’, wrote Bethge, ‘that your letters are passed to Maria, and almost as much that they go to Karl-Friedrich, but it takes an extra struggle for me to get them as well’. 642 Bonhoeffer may claim that his friendship with Bethge was necessary for his own well-being, but his family did not agree. ‘Friendship, even when it’s so exclusive and includes all of each other’s goods, as it is with us, doesn’t have any “necessitas”’, 643 counters Bethge.

This lack of recognition of friendship’s *necessitas* outside the friendship itself led Bethge to say:

Friendship is completely determined and sustained by its own inner content, and only this keeps it in existence. Marriage doesn’t have to be any more than just that; it is sustained by the formal recognition it enjoys [...] But even this [separation from Renate Schleicher, Bethge’s fiancée, on account of military service] still has the effect that the family thinks about things for the sake of the marriage, while no one has yet given any serious thought to how it might be made possible for you and me to do our service together. 644

Friendship, in the direction that Bethge developed it, has its own inner content. For Bethge, it is also private good governed by its own internal quality rather than regulated or supported by norms exterior to the friendship itself.

Bethge’s claim, in turn, prompted a response from Bonhoeffer, who was not content to leave the discussion there; Bethge may think of friendship as a private good; but for Bonhoeffer, friendship has a place in the larger social and political world. First, Bonhoeffer differentiates friendship from other relationships as a way to discover in which social sphere friendship might belong:

642 DBW/E 8:2/94, 267/248.
644 DBW/E 8:2/94, 267-68/248. Renate was Bethge’s wife.
In relation to this, I find that what you say about friendship—that unlike marriage and family relationships, it doesn’t enjoy any generally recognized rights but depends entirely on its own inherent quality—is a very good observation. It is indeed not easy to classify friendship sociologically. It probably must be understood as a concept subsumed within culture and education, whereas brotherhood falls within the concept of church and comradeship within the concepts of work and politics.\(^{645}\)

In response to Bethge, Bonhoeffer accounts for friendship ‘as a concept subsumed within culture and education’ and governed by a *necessitas* that is not accountable to external ordering in the same way that the divine mandates are, as something that belongs in a social sphere that transcends its own inner quality; and at this point, we come to *der Spielraum der Freiheit*:

> Marriage, work, state, and church each have their concrete divine mandates, but what about culture and education? I don’t think they can simply be classified under work, as tempting as that would be in many ways. They belong not in the sphere of obedience but rather in the sphere of freedom [Spielraum], which encompasses all three spheres of the divine mandates.\(^{646}\)

Where Bonhoeffer lands, at the end of the conversation with Bethge on friendship, is friendship as a political and social phenomenon that is part of a sphere of freedom, the *Spielraum* that, in the previous chapter, I showed to be a solution to longstanding concerns in Bonhoeffer’s political and social theology. My point, here, is that it was Bethge’s independent interjections that led to Bonhoeffer clarifying his ideas, and his most mature thoughts on friendship as a reparative social and political phenomenon.

In addition to what was said in Chapter 4 about the *Spielraum*’s theological content, the *Spielraum* conversation also reveals one of the forms of Bonhoeffer’s theological development. The Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship was one that included theological counsel and clarification, and where friendship was integral to Bethge’s influence on the development of Bonhoeffer’s theological ideas; similarly, Bethge’s own thinking is enriched by Bonhoeffer’s responses. They both thought of friendship as the place where they could speak truthfully to one another, and to seek the other’s counsel in the form of theological interjections and clarifications; thus, the friendship was one of mutual influence. Further, the content of the *Spielraum* conversation reflects its form: the friend’s theological counsel and clarification—a counsel that, in the poem ‘The Friend’, Bonhoeffer describes as another way in which the friend is a helper towards freedom—led to Bonhoeffer’s concept of a sphere of freedom in which friendship was its representative form of sociality.

\(^{645}\) DBW/E 8:2/102, 290/267.

\(^{646}\) DBW/E 8:2/102, 290-91/267-68.
Not long after this conversation and the writing of the friendship poem, Bonhoeffer was moved out of Tegel prison and subsequently executed at Flossenbürg. While this would inevitably mark the end of the theological conversation between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, it did not signal the end Bethge’s role as Bonhoeffer’s clarifier, a role that Bethge would associate with his friendship with Bonhoeffer, becoming for us another way to speak of their mutual influence upon one another.

5.4 BETHGE AFTER BONHOEFFER

During the struggle to end Apartheid, Bethge visited South Africa in order to give public lectures and seminars on Bonhoeffer’s life and thought. De Gruchy recounts Bethge’s visit in the following way:

As we listened to Bethge’s lectures on Bonhoeffer during his visit […] in 1973, it became increasingly obvious how relevant Bonhoeffer’s life and thought is for our situation today. Some laymen who attended a seminar on Bonhoeffer, but who had no previous knowledge of him, innocently required: ‘When did Bonhoeffer visit South Africa? He knows our situation from the inside!’

For de Gruchy, this was, in part, a moment when South African Christians came to see the importance of Bonhoeffer for South Africa: ‘there is a sense in which he has visited us and spoken to our situation’, he writes of Bonhoeffer, ‘through his own writings and witness’. De Gruchy describes this as a necessary recontextualisation of Bonhoeffer’s thought, because being true to Bonhoeffer’s legacy would mean allowing Bonhoeffer to speak to such things as Apartheid in South Africa, post-war theological dialogues on the Holocaust, and questions of racism. As de Gruchy puts it, to be true to Bonhoeffer’s legacy meant ‘engaging in the ongoing church and political struggles that followed the end of the war’; and de Gruchy’s essay on Bethge’s visitcatalogues the numerous ways that Bonhoeffer’s legacy spoke to South Africa and its struggle with Apartheid.

This recontextualisation, however, needed an interpreter. Bethge had already been doing something similar during Bonhoeffer’s life, through the way his interjections and interlocutions helped Bonhoeffer clarify his thinking. While Bonhoeffer’s letters showed an

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appreciation of Bethge’s friendship as a relation in which acts of love and repentance can take place, Bethge had placed more of an emphasis on friendship’s association with theological dialogue; as I point out above, while Bonhoeffer wrote his letter of confession from Ettal, Bethge was writing a letter to wish Bonhoeffer ‘success in articulating […] new insights’ and thanking him for his ‘intellectual and spiritual generosity and partnership’. It was this role that Bethge continued, doing so by speaking for Bonhoeffer and to his theology after Bonhoeffer’s death.

Initially, Bethge was more willing to downplay his part in understanding and knowing Bonhoeffer’s theological thoughts and directions. Others, like de Gruchy at the time of the South Africa lectures, made a connection that Bethge was initially unwilling to make; for de Gruchy, learning about Bonhoeffer and his potential contribution to South Africa’s struggle with Apartheid was a moment which could not be neatly distinguished from Bethge’s contribution. De Gruchy’s Bonhoeffer was one introduced to South Africa ‘through his close friend and interpreter, Eberhard Bethge’. But while Bethge did rely on his personal knowledge and time with Bonhoeffer for much of the biography, he was initially more comfortable in treating the Bonhoeffer-Barth friendship as paradigmatic, describing it in the biography according to the stages of Bonhoeffer and Barth’s theological conversations, disagreements, and disputes. So for Bethge the biographer, theological friendship included rigorous theological conversation; but the one he preferred to refer to in this light was not his own, but Barth’s.

Not long after the biography, however, the stakes in who was able to best interpret Bonhoeffer were higher; as I point out in the thesis introduction, Bonhoeffer had been deployed in a number of theologies that Bethge thought were not appropriately representative of Bonhoeffer’s thought. Part of this had to do with Bonhoeffer’s place in the politics of pre-war Germany; Bethge, in relation to this, took part in the increasingly important renegotiation of Jewish-Christian relations after the Shoah, working at re-interpreting Bonhoeffer in this light.

For de Gruchy, Bethge’s role as interpreter was in addition to his friendship with Bonhoeffer. For de Gruchy, ‘Bethge was far more than friend, and more than editor of Bonhoeffer’s works; he was also the major interpreter of his legacy, an interpreter

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655 Bethge, Bonhoeffer: A Biography, pp. 178-86.
656 See thesis introduction above.
extraordinaire’. But for Bethge, in the lectures given in South Africa, he spoke not as though his role as interpreter was something in addition to being Bonhoeffer’s friend; Bethge thought of himself as someone best suited to interpret Bonhoeffer because of his friendship with Bonhoeffer. So, when the time came for Bethge to defend his interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s theological legacy in those lectures, he specifically referred to his friendship with Bonhoeffer as the reason for his own hermeneutical priority. Speaking on the contested meaning of the prison literature, Bethge asked:

To whom did he write? […] Bonhoeffer did not send the letters and the outline of his manuscript to the world at large, nor even to his Church; he shared his thoughts with a theological friend in the Confessing Church […] what we have was addressed to a very limited circle of people who understood his intentions.

For Bethge, there are some who do understand Bonhoeffer and his intentions, and they are Bonhoeffer’s friends in the church, the ones who knew Bonhoeffer personally. And this friendship, according to Bethge, offers a unique insight into both the life and the theology of his subject. So Bethge’s interpretation of Bonhoeffer was part of being a friend to Bonhoeffer; rather than interpretation being something he did in addition to his friendship, friendship—including the way Bethge critically evaluated and independently engaged with Bonhoeffer’s thinking—was integral and part of the interpretation itself.

This claim about special knowledge of Bonhoeffer is a contentious one for Bethge to make. Bonhoeffer himself claimed the opposite about himself in his poem ‘Who Am I?’, where he asks, ‘[a]m I really what others say of me? Or am I only what I know of myself?’ These are unanswered questions for Bonhoeffer, but for one exception: ‘[w]hoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!’ But Bethge’s claim is germane to the subject matter at hand. What Bethge claims, here, is that on account of his friendship with Bonhoeffer, in Bonhoeffer’s absence he can stand in for him as the person best able to interpret the work of a friend.

So Bethge continued in the role of clarifier of Bonhoeffer’s thoughts, but in a new post-war context that Bonhoeffer would not know. Upon Bonhoeffer’s death, Bethge stood in Bonhoeffer’s place and re-interpreted his work according to a new time, a new context, and new theological need. But this ‘standing in’ for Bonhoeffer was not a repetition of Bonhoeffer’s thinking; it depended on Bethge’s ability to make his own critical judgments about Bonhoeffer’s work. While it would be a stretch to claim the same redemptive

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possibilities for this work, Bethge, as Bonhoeffer’s friend, does act as Bonhoeffer’s *Stellvertreter* in this way as well, accomplishing something that Bonhoeffer could no longer do on his own.

In the way Bethge stood in for Bonhoeffer, this kind of theological representation of a friend for a friend becomes a final way to speak of friendship for others. Bonhoeffer, in this sense, continues to enrich Bethge’s thinking, and Bonhoeffer’s thinking continues to be clarified; so despite Bonhoeffer’s death, both Bonhoeffer and Bethge continue to influence one another. Further to this ongoing mutuality—and by virtue of their friendship—Bethge also critically interprets and reinterprets Bonhoeffer for others; and Bethge did so for Christians renegotiating Christian antisemitism after the Shoah and for the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. In this way, through the theology that arose out of the friendship, the friendship was not simply for the sake of the friends, the friendship contributed to a political good beyond itself, making the friendship for others as well.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge serves as the best example of friendship, in all its forms, that I have put forward so far: the friendship was lasting, dialogical, redemptive, and for others.

This friendship was *lasting* in a number of ways. It was a friendship that was resilient, in part on account of Bethge’s patience. More important to my argument here, however, is that it was lasting and resilient on account of the practice of *Stellvertretung*. For Bonhoeffer to offer himself to Bethge by advocating for him meant that they could continue to be nearby to one another. And for Bonhoeffer to be repentant, and for Bethge to intercede and to forgive, meant that there were avenues of reparation available to them.

As *Stellvertretung*, however, this was more than taking practical steps to remain near to one another and in good standing with each other. It was a friendship that survived Bonhoeffer’s death in the way Bethge continued in his role as Bonhoeffer’s ‘clarifier’, and as Bonhoeffer’s intellectual *Stellvertreter*, Bethge took Bonhoeffer’s place and represented Bonhoeffer theologically for others. Finally, the friendship lasted with reference to the eschaton. *Stellvertretung* meant acting for one another as Christ; it was a reparation that was part of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation. In *Sanctorum Communio* reconciliation was described as proleptic, in that Christ’s presence to another was a re-ordering of relationships in the present according to an eschatological future, where social phenomena like friendships experience everlasting life. So for Bonhoeffer to imagine himself with Bethge ‘before the
throne of God’ makes sense; this was a vision of God’s eschatological future, in which he finds an image of a friendship enduring eschatologically. In this way, the condition that made the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship destructible—its lack of a shared orientation to Christ and his new creation—is present in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, both through Stellvertretung as a mode of Christ’s eschatological prolepsis, and through its orientation to its eschatological form.

It was a friendship that was *dialogical*. Each of them found the friendship to be beneficial, and as such was one of the ways the friendship was mutual and reciprocal, and part of the way they influenced one another’s theology; the result of their theological dialogue was that Bethge could continue as the friend best able to critically evaluate and interpret Bonhoeffer, a role that depended on their established practice of critical conversation. It was, in a way, much like Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Rößler: Bonhoeffer was a theologian who was habitually honing and developing his theology through others, even—and perhaps especially—through disagreements, like the one with Rößler over political eschatology and the one with Bethge over the social and political significance of friendship.

But in Bethge’s case, as opposed to Rößler’s, the friendship was lasting on account of Stellvertretung and its ability to make a friendship resilient. But the resiliency and enduring nature of the friendship was a result of a *Stellvertretung* that was *redemptive*. In *Stellvertretung*, Bethge was the friend who bore Bonhoeffer’s sin and forgave as Christ; similarly, Bonhoeffer was the friend who offered himself to his friend as Christ. The ministry taking place here, in *Stellvertretung*, was Christ’s ministry of reconciliation: of Bonhoeffer and Bethge to one another, and the both of them to God.

To see this friendship in terms of *Stellvertretung* is also a way to speak of agency. As Bethge intercedes and forgives and as Bonhoeffer repents and offers himself, they do so in a way that takes into account the particularity of their situation. Bonhoeffer repented of specific sins against Bethge, and Bethge responded to those particular sins in counsel, intercession, and forgiveness; Bonhoeffer offered himself according to Bethge’s relative need and according to a particular ethical dilemma engendered by a particular political situation. Thus, ecclesial *Stellvertretung* is not a rote repetition, but demanded a contextual creativity that arose out their particular situations. Because these are acts of theological *Stellvertretung*, it is a mode of God’s work in the world; thus *Stellvertretung* offers one way to speak of divine and human agency interacting in non-competitive ways.

The correspondence offers a word of caution, however, and the point about non-competition could be pressed too far. Bonhoeffer, after all, decided that to kill himself would have been a selfish thing to do, rather than it being something he would do for others; and, as
he describes this kind of offering in the *Ethics*, he says that such cases of death could not be clearly seen as self-offering, because the nature of such acts are inscrutable, being an expression of both self-interest and sacrifice. Nevertheless, in both *Sanctorum Communio* and in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer does not see the need to qualify *Stellvertretung* by saying that human agency is a contaminating factor in acting as Christ for another. If Christ does not mediate, the relation between human and divine agency becomes a much different question; but what Bonhoeffer’s reluctance to qualify *Stellvertretung* in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Discipleship* means is that under certain circumstances—in the church, for example—when one intercedes, forgives, and offers oneself for others, human agency is not a competitive or contaminating factor.

The question of mixed motivation in acts of love brings us back to the question of inappropriate expressions of love in friendship. As I pointed out in the introduction and in the conclusion to Chapter 2, in Augustinian understandings of friendship-love such as Meilaender’s, creaturely love can be exercised in inappropriate ways. For Meilaender, friendship-love is inappropriate because it is a preferential love for a particular other rather than a universal love, or a love that is reciprocal and thus demanding a return. I have already pointed out that even if it is particular, it need not be lesser than a universal love; to love a particular other is simply the creaturely way of loving as Christ. And, to say that this kind of love is reciprocal, is not to say that love is demanded in return and a way to undermine the greater love of someone for their own sake. If it is Christ who is active in the act of love, it can only be reciprocal or mutual by way of trust, because God cannot be compelled. For Bonhoeffer, creaturely love is inappropriate not when it is particular or mutual, but when that love is unmediated by Christ. In this way, if the love is one in which a person is Christ for another—in theological *Stellvertretung*—it is appropriately creaturely and divine. And we see this in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship: a love of a particular other, marked by a complex reciprocity and mutuality, but one that is mediated by Christ in theological *Stellvertretung*.

The friendship was also for others. Again, here, any strict differentiation between social forms that have utility in the present, and social forms that are ends in themselves and therefore open to God’s purposes, does not make sense of the evidence. We already saw that any strict differentiation between utility and eschatological ends was difficult to apply to the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship: Bonhoeffer and Rößler did not share the same eschatological hope, which meant that the friendship could not share a degree of political utility, and come to common agreement about what ethical and political decisions were most appropriate for the present.
And, like the Bonhoeffer-Rössler friendship, the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship was implicated in the political tumult of the time. But in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship we find practices of Stellvertretung—specifically Bonhoeffer’s self-offering for Bethge—in which the friend, as he acts for the friend, is simultaneously acting for others. In this way, Stellvertretung itself has political and social dimensions to it. Thus Stellvertretung—as a friend acting as Christ for a friend sacrificially, and where that acting for the friend is at the same time acting for others—God, in Christ, is at work in the world, in the church, and in political life. Further, this offering of oneself to the friend, and others, as Christ—if it meets the conditions of theological Stellvertretung—is a way that God redeems the world, making friendship the kind of relation in which God, too, is acting for the friend, for others, and for the political and social world in which the friendship finds itself.

The final point to make, in conclusion, has to do with the Spielraum: it is no wonder that Bonhoeffer’s concept of the Spielraum could arise out of a conversation with Bethge. First, the Spielraum was a sphere of freedom, and in Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge, he found freedom in two ways. Bonhoeffer and Bethge, together, were Stellvertreter to one another, and this Stellvertretung arose from Christ’s mediation, a mediation that sets a person free; and, this practice of Stellvertretung included offering truthful counsel, a counsel that was also freeing, for Bonhoeffer. Secondly, the Spielraum spoke of friendship as a reparative practice that brought a lived comprehensiveness to the social and political world more generally, and thus as a social phenomena that took part in a good that reaches beyond the friendship itself. Similarly, as Bonhoeffer acted for Bethge in self-offering, he was offering himself for a good that reached beyond the friendship, making this friendship, like friendship in the Spielraum, a friendship for others.
The theological and biographical resources investigated here—beginning with *Sanctorum Communio*, moving to Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Rößler, then to Bonhoeffer’s final words on the mandates and their relation to friendship in the *Spielraum*, and ending with Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Bethge—offer the following summary conclusions, both of them breaking ground in Bonhoeffer studies, and with regard to the theological significance of the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship.

First, *Stellvertretung* is appropriate to friendship, and a friend can be *Stellvertreter* for a friend. *Sanctorum Communio* offered the conceptual possibility that, in Bonhoeffer’s way of thinking, theological *Stellvertretung* can take place in an ecclesially grounded friendship. The best evidence of this possibility was that, in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, we see evidence of each of the acts of love and repentance that are listed in *Sanctorum Communio*. Further, the acts of love and friendship found in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship cannot be understood apart from the friendship itself for two reasons: 1. Because of the inextricable link between what took place in the friendship, the friends’ investment in the friendship, and the acts of love and repentance that brought healing and reconciliation to the friends; and 2. The acts of love and repentance were characterised by that which makes friendship a distinctive social relation, mutuality and particularity.

Secondly, friendship can be for others. Friendship, as significant to the political and social world in which it is situated, first becomes clear in the way Bonhoeffer treated his friendship with Rößler as one in which some degree of shared conviction was necessary; and then, in the concept of the *Spielraum*, we find Bonhoeffer thinking of friendship as a relation that takes part in the reparation of the whole of the political and social world of the mandates. Finally, we see that friendship can be for others in the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship in two ways. 1. The friendship was one in which the practice of *Stellvertretung*, as self-offering, meant that as Bonhoeffer acted for Bethge, he was also acting for others as well; and 2. The friendship’s ecclesial location meant that they were able to share in the practices of *Stellvertretung* that made it lasting in a way that the Bonhoeffer-Rößler friendship was not: in addition to being lasting during their lives, and thus open to its eschatological enduring, the friendship lasted in the mid-term. After Bonhoeffer’s death, but before Bethge’s, and on account of their friendship, Bethge was able to represent and stand in for Bonhoeffer theologically for South Africa and for Christians and Jews after the Shoah. In this way, for Bethge to act for Bonhoeffer, in friendship, was to act for others as well.
These conclusions, as they relate to the material as a whole, also offer a number of future possibilities for Bonhoeffer studies, readings of Bethge’s theology, and for theology more generally. With regard to Bonhoeffer studies, as early as *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer was developing a theology of friendship in Hegelian terms such as ‘objective spirit’; and late in his thought, Bonhoeffer spoke of friendship as a practice of freedom, which has pedigree in Hegel’s understanding of friendship as the ‘concrete concept of freedom’ in *Philosophy and Right*. Bonhoeffer also makes links between friendship and Kierkegaard’s aesthetics, and to Stifter’s fiction, in his prison letters. Friendship was a significant theme in Bonhoeffer’s fiction as well.659 This makes Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship part of a longer and larger history of philosophical and literary reception that would be of interest to both Bonhoeffer studies, and the topic of friendship as a philosophical, aesthetic and literary category.

While this work has relied heavily on Bonhoeffer’s theological resources, it has also relied on Bethge’s own letters and theological work in order to more fully consider the manner of Bonhoeffer and Bethge’s mutual influence. There is much more that could be done on this account, however, especially regarding Bethge’s independent theological voice. Once Bethge’s personal correspondence is made more readily available for research, a deeper investigation into Bethge’s own theological development—both on his own and in relation to Bonhoeffer—would be more easily accomplished.

As for theology beyond Bonhoeffer studies, particularity and mutuality, as they inform the practice of *Stellvertretung*, also open up certain possibilities for the doctrine of redemption that could be explored further. God’s redemption of the world in Christ is accomplished, for Bonhoeffer, in a way that human persons cannot do so on their own. In the way redemption is something offered to all, it is necessarily for more than a particular other; and in the way it is something that persons cannot do on their own, it is necessarily non-reciprocal. God does not only save some particular others, nor is salvation something we can offer to God. But redemption also takes place, for Bonhoeffer, in ongoing form in the church and in the world, and this makes for additional creaturely possibilities. Creaturely limit means that this kind of *Stellvertretung* will be limited to some particular others. And though parental relationships may repeat the pattern of ‘above and below’, *Stellvertretung*, as it takes place in a friendship, can become mutual and reciprocal without making the error of thinking of Christ’s originary *Stellvertretung* as something to which human persons contribute. In *Stellvertretung*—as it takes place in a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity and for particular others—one can

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659 See DBW/E 7, throughout.
receive the gift of redemption in another acting for you, according to your own particularity, and you can, in turn, do the same for another.

While the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship is not transgressive of the boundary between the church and the world—at least in that both of them were ecclesially situated as Christians—Bonhoeffer’s thought, as I have presented it, also offers resources for a more complex and transgressive understanding of friendship. Bonhoeffer wrote of intercession and self-giving in terms of a possible transgression of that boundary; Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on Gandhi, as one for whom friendship would have been a speculative possibility, make possible a similar transgression. Further, in the Spielraum, the church already has forms of coextension with the political and social world as a whole. So there are theological resources present in Bonhoeffer’s thought that open the possibility of friendship that is ecclesially grounded, and yet open to others who are not ecclesially situated. With Bonhoeffer, we can imagine a political friendship in which a friend prays for another—that is, to think of it as theological Stellvertretung—without the necessity of mutuality in the case of prayer. Further, in the way that Bonhoeffer makes certain kinds of self-offering, in the Ethics, both extra-ecclesial and theological, we can imagine a mutuality in self-offering that is for the sake of the friend, and for the sake of others, but a friendship that crosses the boundary between the church and the world outside it. This kind of transgressive friendship would not be the same as the Bonhoeffer-Bethge friendship, in that it would not have access to the same kind of ecclesial practices that meant intercession and forgiveness could be mutual. But it would be a friendship nonetheless—and a theological one at that—and would fulfill the promise of a Spielraum in which friendship brings a level of social coherence and reparation to the political and social world as a whole.

The question of human and divine agency, in Bonhoeffer, is both compelling and problematic. Bonhoeffer is silent about human agency as a problem with regard to divine agency in Sanctorum Communio and Discipleship, when he discusses ecclesial Stellvertretung in which human persons are actors; elsewhere, Bonhoeffer shows a very real concern about how one goes about doing God’s will. Speaking of Stellvertretung as a way of a human person acting as Christ for others could be explored through the ‘capacious as’ of John’s Gospel, a phrase David Ford develops in his Bampton lectures and relates to questions of agency; looking at agency through John’s Gospel would also be a way to turn the question of divine and human agency in a Trinitarian direction through John’s references to the Spirit’s

place in this concept of shared agency. Tanner’s ‘double-rule’ in *God and Creation in Christian Theology* could be another avenue of investigation, specifically around her comments on Luther and soteriological agency, which allows for creaturely capacity to exist alongside divine sovereignty and unconditioned primacy in a way that would be compatible with the duality of theological *Stellvertretung* as both God acting for others in Christ, and human persons acting as Christ for others.

In addition to Bonhoeffer’s ‘as’, the larger question of Bonhoeffer’s Johannine sensibility would be another good avenue of investigation. John 15:13—where Jesus speaks of the great love of laying down one’s life for one’s friends—has resonance in the way that for Bonhoeffer, to be a friend and *Stellvertreter* is to be Christ for another, and to offer oneself as Christ, but in an appropriately limited and creaturely way; following verses speak to freedom and servitude, explored in Chapter 4 in terms of freedom, commitment, and obedience; and knowledge, explored in Chapters 3 and 5. John 15’s words on friendship, in this way, may act as the kind of evangelical prototype that Ziegler sees operational elsewhere in Bonhoeffer’s eschatological understanding of the mandates.

These comments on Bonhoeffer studies, soteriology, political theology, agency, and the Johannine contours to Bonhoeffer’s thought, speak to the way my work offers some future avenues of investigation. But as a final word, in a thesis that argues for *Stellvertretung* in friendship, and for friendship as a relation for others, I would return to these two core concerns. If we were to say that it is extraordinary to imagine that Moses spoke to God as one speaks to a friend, as God does in Exodus, what I am saying here is even more extraordinary. If the friend can be *Stellvertreter* for a friend, we do more than speak to God as a friend: as we speak to a friend, we speak to God. But this is also about much more than speech. The friend acts as God for us, fashioning our own particular redemption as we do the same in return. And as the friend acts for us, and us for the friend, God may be fashioning a redemption not only for us or the friend, but for others as well.

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APPENDIX: Why Rößler?

Among Bonhoeffer’s correspondents, there are a number of possible candidates for an investigation into Bonhoeffer’s practice of friendship. I chose Rößler for three reasons: 1. The letters are substantive, having clear points of connection with Bonhoeffer’s theology (in this case his political eschatology), allowing for some analysis of Bonhoeffer’s theological development in relation to a friendship; 2. In these letters, we see evidence of the fact that they thought of one another as friends; and 3. They engaged in reflection on the meaning of friendship and/or its limits. There are no other candidates that fulfill all three of these criteria.

In his article of Bonhoeffer’s theology of friendship, Bethge lists Bonhoeffer’s ‘friends in the singular’: Hans Christoph von Hase, Walter Dreß, Franz Hildebrandt, and himself;663 in his biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge also calls Barth a friend of Bonhoeffer’s.664 But among these candidates, aside from Bethge himself (as seen in Chapter 5), references to friendship were rare.

In the letters shared between Bonhoeffer and von Hase, there is one to von Hase from Bonhoeffer (DBW/E 9:1/4, 13-14/23), and two to Bonhoeffer from von Hase (DBW/E 10:1/139, 205/250; DBW/E 10:1/143, 208-11/253-56). Bonhoeffer and von Hase neither refer to one another as friends nor do they have a conversation about friendship.

In the letters shared between Bonhoeffer and Dreß, there are two letters to Dreß from Bonhoeffer, both addressed to him and Susanne Dreß (DBW/E 14:1/15, 62-63/81; DBW/E 15:1/32a, 123/76-77), and 25 to Bonhoeffer from von Hase (DBW/E 9:1/89a, 144-45 and DBW 17, 20; DBW/E 9:1/89b, 145-46 and DBW 17, 21; DBW/E 9:1/93a, 150 and DBW 17, 21-22; DBW/E 9:1/93b, 150 and DBW 17, 22; DBW/E 9:1/94a, 152 and DBW 17, 22-23; DBW/E 9:1/96b, 157-58 and DBW 17, 24; DBW/E 9:1/97a, 161 and DBW 17, 24-25; DBW/E 9:1/97b, 161 and DBW 17, 25; DBW/E 9:1/97c, 163 and DBW 17, 27; DBW/E 9:1/97d, 164 and DBW 17, 28; DBW/E 9:1/99a, 166 and DBW 17, 28-29; DBW/E 9:1/99b, 167 and DBW 17, 49-50; DBW/E 9:1/99c, 168-69 and DBW 17, 50-51; DBW/E 9:1/102a, 173 and DBW 17, 51; DBW/E 9:1/102b, 173-74 and DBW 17, 51-52; DBW/E 9:1/105a, 177 and DBW 17, 52; DBW/E 10:1/14a, 76-77 and DBW 17, 70-72; DBW/E 10:1/19b, 86-88 and DBW 17, 74-76; DBW/E 10:1/27a, 101-03 and DBW 17, 76-79; DBW/E 10:1/44a, 136-38 and DBW 17, 81-84; DBW/E 10:1/45a, 139-40 and DBW 17, 84-85; DBW/E 10:1/45b, 141 and DBW 17, 86; DBW/E 10:1/49a, 146 and DBW 17, 86-87; DBW/E 10:1/60a, 157 and DBW 17, 87-88; DBW/E

664 Bethge, Bonhoeffer: A Biography, pp. 178-86.
13:1/47a, 76-77 and DBW 17, 121). None of the letters shared between Dreß and Bonhoeffer speak of friendship, nor do they address one another as friends.

In a letter to Erwin Sutz, Bonhoeffer calls Hildebrandt a ‘friend’ (DBW/E 11:1/38, 96/63); in a letter to Karl Barth, he calls Hildebrandt his ‘closest friend’ (DBW/E 13:1/2, 13/22); and in a letter to Heinrich Lebrecht, Bonhoeffer calls Hildebrandt ‘a close friend’ (DBWE 13:1/85a, 125). Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt were certainly friends. But in the four letters from Hildebrandt to Bonhoeffer (DBW/E 10:1/138, 202-04/246-49; DBW/E 10:1/149, 217-19/262-64; DBW/E 10:1/156, 229-31/273-75; DBW/E 13:1/66, 86-88/92-95) and the two letters from Bonhoeffer to Hildebrandt (DBW/E 14:1/151, 300/318 to both Hildebrandt and Julius Rieger; DBW/E 15:1/6, 22-23/28), they do not refer to one another as ‘friend’ or write about the friendship.

In the correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Barth, neither calls the other ‘friend’ nor do they clearly think of their relationship as a friendship; though Bonhoeffer did share with Barth what he calls ‘personal matters’ (DBW/E 13:1/2, 15/24), it is a relationship between senior and junior colleagues, though one that was valued by both. Their shared value in the relationship is seen in the exchange concerning Bonhoeffer’s reasons for being in Basel in September 1941 which had caused some suspicion in Barth’s circle; on this, see the letter from Bonhoeffer to Barth (DBW/E 16:1/161, 267-69/277-79), the response from Charlotte von Kirschbaum (16:1/162, 269-72/279-81), and Bonhoeffer’s response to von Kirschbaum (16:1/163, 272/282); Barth had also sent greetings, and a cigar, to Bonhoeffer in prison (DBW/E 8:1/79, 299/199). In the nine letters from Bonhoeffer to Barth, Bonhoeffer addresses Barth respectfully as ‘Professor’ (DBW/E 12:1/21, 37-38/81-2; DBW/E 12:1/37, 56-57/99-100; DBW/E 12:1/41, 62/105; DBW/E 12:1/96, 124-25/164-66; DBW/E 13:1/2, 11-15/21-24; DBW/E 14:1/119, 234-40/252-55; DBW/E 16:1/110, 182-83/190-91; DBW/E 16:1/160, 266-67/276-77; DBW/E 16:1/161, 267-69/277-79); in all five letters from Barth to Bonhoeffer, Barth addresses Bonhoeffer as ‘Colleague’ (DBW/E 12:1/30, 48-49/92-93; DBW/E 12:1/39, 60-61/103; DBW/E 12:1/97, 125-28/166-69; DBW/E 13:1/16, 31-34/39-41; DBW/E 14:1/124, 249-53/265-69), with one in which Barth sends ‘cordial greetings to you and all our friends’ (DBW/E 12:1/39, 661/103) and one in which Barth sends ‘friendly sentiments’ (DBW/E 14:1/124, 253/269). It is a relationship of mutual respect, if not the closeness seen in the Bethge and Rößler correspondence.

There are, however, possibilities beyond what Bethge suggests. Gottfried Beckmann and Gerhard Vibrans (along with Bethge) are referred to as potential friends in the Vibrans family guestbook (DBW/E 14:1/21, 73/93). The only surviving correspondence concerning
Beckmann is a letter to Beckmann’s parents in response to Beckmann’s imprisonment in Magdeburg (DBW/E 14:1/152, 301/319).

Despite the promise of the Vibrans-Bonhoeffer friendship, there are only four letters from Bonhoeffer to Vibrans (DBW/E 14:1/82, 166/187; DBW/E 14:1/90, 180-82/200-02; DBW/E 14:1/96, 191-93/210-13; DBW/E 14:1/114, 227-29/244-46) and one letter from Vibrans to Bonhoeffer (DBW/E 14:1/87, 171-75/192/95). Again, aside from an apologetic letter from Bonhoeffer after the fateful trip to Switzerland with Bonhoeffer, Bethge, and Vibrans that I mention in Chapter 5, there are no references to their friendship or its practice to be found in this correspondence.


De Gruchy, Daring, Trusting Spirit, p. 18.
15:1/131, 212; DBWE16:1/116a, 196-201), and the 15 letters to Lehmann from Bonhoeffer (DBWE 11:1/2a, 32 and DBW 17, 90-91; DBWE 11:1/8a, 41-44 and DBW 17, 91-94; DBWE 11:1/37a and DBW 17, 105-06; DBWE 11:1/59a, DBW 17, 106-08; DBWE 11:1/68a, 131-33 and DBW 17, 109-11; DBWE 11:1/93a and DBW 17, 112-14; DBWE 12:1/10b, 70-71 and DBW 17:10a, 115; DBW/E 15:1/40, 90-91/91-92; DBW/E 15:1/114, 191-92/191-92; DBW 15:1/126, 206; DBW/E 15:1/128, 208-10/209-10; DBWE 15:1/133, 213-14; DBWE 16:1/16a, 61-63 and DBW 17, 94-96; DBWE 16:1/92a, 168 and DBW 17, 128; DBWE 16:1/126a, 219-20) have the same limitations as others. Bonhoeffer thanks Lehmann for a letter ‘so full of friendship’ (DBW/E 15:1/128, 208/209) and refers to their ‘friendship’ (DBWE 16:1/92a, 168 and DBW 17, 128) but neither are in a reflective mood about the nature of the friendship. As for Frank Fisher and Jean Lassere, there is not enough material to work with. There are no letters at all between Frank Fisher, though there is a reference, in Bonhoeffer’s awkward English, to being Fisher’s ‘boyfriend’ in a letter to Paul Lehmann (DBWE 11:1/37a, 95). There is one extant letter from Lassere (DBWE 15:1/149, 262) in which he calls Bonhoeffer ‘dear friend’; in a letter to Erwin Sutz Bonhoeffer also refers to Lassere as ‘our friend’ (DBW/E 15:1/29, 72/72). The single published Zinn letter (DBW/E 14:1/47, 112-14/134-35) makes no reference to their relationship as a friendship.


The letters shared with the Cromwell family make an interesting case. In Bonhoeffer’s letter to Philipp Cromwell, he addresses Philipp as ‘friend’ (DBWE 14:1/67a, 147); and then in his letter to Phillipp’s son, Ernst, Bonhoeffer writes of friendship and shared conviction
(and is quoted as an epigraph to this chapter; DBWE 14:1/69a, 163). The other ten letters to Ernst Cromwell (DBW/E 13:1/208a, printed in DBWE 17, 55–57, original German unavailable in print; DBWE 13:1/209a, printed in DBWE 17, 57–58, original German unavailable in print; DBW/E 13:1/209b, printed in DBWE 17, 58, original German unavailable in print; DBWE 14:1/4a, 58-60; DBWE 14:6a, 64-65; DBWE 14:15a, 82; DBWE 14:20a, 92; DBWE 14:32a, 108-09; DBWE 14:40a, 122-23), one to the Cromwell family (DBWE 14:4b, 60-61), and one from Philipp Cromwell to Bonhoeffer (DBW/E 13:1/210a, printed in DBWE 17, 59, original German unavailable in print) do not offer any additional reflections on friendship. What Bonhoeffer does say, however, about shared convictions and friendship, offers corroborating evidence for my argument that for Bonhoeffer, friendship has political dimensions.


Many of these relationships—such as the one Bonhoeffer shared with von Hase, Dreß, Hildebrandt, Vibrans, Sutz, Lehmann, Lassere, Fisher and Philipp Cromwell—were certainly friendships, and understood as such. And it is likely that many of these friendships included theological conversation and discussions about friendship. But among them, the Rößler friendship stands apart because of the way the friendship was largely epistolary, and therefore open to textual investigation. In the Rößler correspondence, we have evidence that Bonhoeffer and Rößler engaged in theological conversation, considered their relationship a friendship, and engaged in conversation about the nature of that friendship and its limits. The only parallel epistolary relationship was with Bethge.
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