

Christ Alive Here: Immanence, Transcendence, Christology, Historical Jesus, Bonhoeffer

According to Bonhoeffer, Christology (the theology of Christ) is utterly concrete in its orientation. In Christ the Centre Bonhoeffer asserts that God in timeless eternity is not God, Jesus limited by time is not Jesus. Rather, God is God in the man Jesus. In this Jesus Christ God is present. This one God-man is the starting point of Christology.

For Bonhoeffer, Christology is a doctrine of God as well as of the humanity of Jesus, for Jesus Christ is God present in the humanity of Jesus. He expresses the difference between transcendence and immanence in terms of the two questions he introduces in his Christology lectures:

Here we have the essence of Bonhoeffer's Christology that the very being of Christ is his being-for-man, in the community. The very being of Christ is his "being there for other".

"A Christology which does not put at the beginning the statement, 'God is only pro me, Christ is only Christ pro me', condemns itself." Here Bonhoeffer refers to the essential unity of the act and being in God and in Christ. If God were not pro me He would not have acted in terms of revelation and made Himself known to us in Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ were not pro me He would not be God incarnate. This means that Christ cannot be thought in isolation, as a Christ in Himself, but only in his relation to us, because the purpose of God's humbling Himself in Christ was to have this relation to us, to be pro me. This does not, however, mean that God and Christ depend for their existence on me or any other human being. Bonhoeffer makes it clear when he says that Christ is both "the one who has really bound himself to me in free existence", and "the one who has freely preserved his contingency in his 'being-there for you'." [5]

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Christ is Christ not as Christ in and by himself, but in his relation to this human who is me. His being is being *pro me*. This being *pro me* that is, *pro human* is meant to be understood as the essence, as the very beingness of the person Jesus Christ himself. Here we have the essence of Bonhoeffer's Christology that the very being of Christ is his being-for-man, or in the community. In this statement we find a Christological idea that the very being of Christ is his "being there for other". The concepts of person, community and God have an essential and indissoluble relation to one another. Bonhoeffer speaks of God's personal revelation in the world. In other words he says that person and transcendence are fused together as God. It requires us to accept a different concept of personality in which it is absolutely free and absolutely transcendent. While our personalities are limited by our knowledge, individual and social experience in this world, such is not the case with God. To the question "Is God alive here now?" the answer is yes and he is so in his own Word spoken in the being of Jesus Christ.

My Personal Savior - From the editor: As an aside, when I say that Jesus Christ is my **personal** Savior, of course I do not mean that he is my Savior and mine alone. I mean

that Jesus Christ is a person, and I have a relationship with him. Not an impersonal abstract (or what sociologists call a secondary relationship) I know him personally and our relationship is a close personal one. GCC

Put another way, Bonhoeffer is saying that whatever is to be said of God's transcendence (the beyond of God) is what we can say of the Jesus Christ. This man Jesus provides us with a norm, a standard, which is concrete and ethical and not something that is solely ethereal or heavenly. In terms of human understanding we humans can approach a grasp of who God is in so far as we can truly see and take hold of the person who is Jesus the Christ. In Christ we not only see God in the center of life; we also see God as the reconciler of life. Stated in other words, God makes the decision that in spite of human beings' sinful lives, blunders, evil deeds, and rebellion against all that is holy, in spite of the way humans distance themselves and run away from God, he pursues them and forgives them and their rejection of him, and takes them into his arms as a Father who welcomes back his prodigal, spendthrift son. In this way, God remains in the center of our lives even if we reject and leave him.. That is the meaning of Jesus Christ's life and his identity. He is with us even though we might not want him to be. Does this not demonstrate God's transcendence, his commitment to go beyond what is humanly possible? That is, God's Divine transcendence is revealed in Christ, and it is revealed as reconciliation. Yes, God transcends us but he is immanent in us, in the world, in the Grand Canyon, the living tropics, and in Antarctica. He emanates and exposes his beauty to us from inside and outside all of these.

Finally, Bonhoeffer says: "I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the center, not in weaknesses but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness." [7] The God of the Bible encounters human beings in the midst of worldly activities, at the strongest point. Bonhoeffer, thus, brought a resolutely non-metaphysical notion of divine transcendence. [6]

"By introducing the concept of this-worldly transcendence, by no means is Bonhoeffer writing off the transcendence of God in favor of His immanence. Rather, he believes that the idea of incarnation is conceivable only where there is both transcendence and immanence." [6]

The Historical Jesus?

In the past there arose movements to find the historical Jesus. One such movement purported to use historical methods to determine what words and actions, if any, may be attributed to Jesus, and to use the findings to provide portraits of the historical Jesus.

Bonhoeffer stated that any quest for the "historical Jesus" fails. Christ is the risen Word of God who reveals God to us today. In fact, the word: Word can refer to Jesus Christ and/or the Bible. It is a good thing that "the Word" is ambiguous because it requires us to think about it, to reflect on it. The Latin word, Logos, is often used synonymously with Word. Bonhoeffer taught that we can approach the divine Logos only through faithful attentiveness. In his writing he challenges the reader by emphasizing the transcendence of God and AND

the fact that God reveals himself with an authority that actually defies human efforts to classify, to question and fully grasp the meaning of the divine Logos, that is, Jesus Christ.

[From the editor of ChristAliveHere.com, much of what I have said and paraphrased above is taken from a wonderful article: <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-10-transcendence-according-to-bonhoeffer> There is so much more in this article than I was able to present above, and if you want to know more I highly recommend that you read it. I have often taken the liberty to "translate" some of the article's more academic language into wording perhaps more understandable by laymen like me. That exercise has caused me to understand parts of the article that I would have missed if I had not done so. I thank [Paulose Mar Paulose](#) and Religiononline.org for this article] - Glenn Currier, Editor