

QUESTIONING BONHOEFFER ON TEMPTATION

By

Stephen R. Munzer

University of California, Los Angeles, USA

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Questioning Bonhoeffer on Temptation

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This article engages critically and constructively with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's biblical study 'Temptation' (1938). His study does not always do justice to the text of the New Testament or the theodicean and hamartiological issues pertaining to temptation. And his position that biblically temptation is not the testing of strength, but rather the loss of all strength and defenseless deliverance into Satan's hands, is hard to defend. However, Bonhoeffer's idea of Christ-reality undergirds his suggestion that all persons can find in Christ participation, help, and grace in resisting temptation. Bonhoeffer's most important insight, which requires some unpacking, is that 'my temptation is nothing other than the temptation of Jesus Christ in me'.

Keywords

Bonhoeffer, Christ-reality, Satan, temptation, theodicy

Astonishingly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's short biblical study 'Temptation' has received almost no careful attention in the literature.¹ In this article I focus equally on Bonhoeffer's study and on [265] the analysis and consistency of New Testament passages on temptation. I make four main claims. First, Bonhoeffer's idea of Christ-reality (*Christuswirklichkeit*) helps to explain why all persons can find in Christ participation, help, and grace in resisting temptation. Second, his most profound insight, which requires some unpacking, is that 'I ought to understand my temptation as nothing other than the temptation of Jesus Christ in me'.² Third, though he implicitly assumes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Temptation', ed. Eberhard Bethge and trans. Kathleen Downham, in *Creation and Fall and Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 97-128 (hereinafter DB/KD). The German original *Versuchung* was the subject of a bible study at Zingst on June 20-25, 1938, and first published by Christian Kaiser Verlag, Munich, in 1953. This paper follows the English translation in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 15, *Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 386-415 (hereinafter DBWE 15). I give parallel citations to DBWE and DB/KD because, though DBWE is the more accurate albeit less graceful translation, readers lacking access to it will probably use DB/KD. Occasionally I cite the German text established in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, ed. Eberhard Bethge et al., vol. 15, *Illegale Theologenausbildung: Sammelvikariate 1937-1940*, ed. Dirk Schulz (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 371-406 (hereinafter DBW 15). DBWE in the margins gives the corresponding page numbers in DBW.

² DBWE 15:397; DB/KD 108. Cf. Gal. 2:20 ('Christ living in me'). Throughout all biblical quotations are from *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

that the New Testament is consistent, in fact four passages are in partial conflict with each other: James 1:13-15, 1 Cor. 10:13, Matt. 6:13, and Luke 11:4.

Fourth, Bonhoeffer's text reveals some puzzling foundational positions on temptation and God that are extremely difficult to solve. Leading examples are:

1. In temptation the Christian is simultaneously both abandoned by God and held in God's love, grace, and word.³

2. God both disallows temptations beyond each person's power to resist and simultaneously abandons that person defenselessly into Satan's hands.⁴

3. Job is pious and righteous and 'is right to murmur against suffering . . . [b]ut even for Job this right comes to an end when he faces God Before God even the pious and innocent Job must confess his guilt.'⁵

I begin by expounding, and questioning, Bonhoeffer's biblical exegesis and his theology of temptation.⁶ So the first half of this article is, like Bonhoeffer's paper, a theologically and philosophically inflected biblical study. The second half is a theological analysis of Satan and the role of Bonhoeffer's Christology in possibly solving some vexing issues concerning temptation. The analysis discusses some of his work antedating and postdating 'Temptation'. Unlike his study, this article draws on analytic philosophy and occasionally on contemporary psychology.⁷ In many ways I share Bonhoeffer's assumptions, and sometimes I omit comment on those I do not share. It will become clear where we disagree. Owing to this journal's limitations on space, this article does not discuss his study [266] 'Creation and Fall', his debts to Augustine, Luther and Karl Barth, his views on original sin, his efforts to harmonize the depictions of sin, Satan and God's wrath in the NT with the Hebrew Bible, the historical development of Bonhoeffer's Christology, the extensive biblical scholarship on temptation, or the voluminous secondary literature on Bonhoeffer.

I write as an admirer of Bonhoeffer's 'Temptation'. It stirs me deeply. Despite some differences in outlook, I hope to have written something of interest both to theologians and philosophers who think about temptation and to Bonhoeffer scholars. My overarching goal is to separate what is sound in Bonhoeffer's study from what is not.

³ DBWE 15:387-89, 403; DB/KD 97-99, 116.

⁴ DBWE 15:387-88, 403; DB/KD 97-98, 116.

⁵ DBWE 15:406-07; DB/KD 119.

⁶ Almost always Bonhoeffer follows Luther's Bible in using the word *Versuchung* and its cognates for *peirasmos*. He rarely uses the word *Anfechtung* (pl. *Anfechtungen*), which DBWE translates as 'trial(s)'. In a draft Bonhoeffer often struck out *Anfechtung* in favor of *Versuchung*. DBWE 15:396 n.49, 402 n.69, 405 n.79, 406 n.83.

⁷ Bonhoeffer's philosophical background lies mainly in the German philosophy of his day, especially Heidegger. Bonhoeffer rarely draws on the academic psychology current in the first four and one-half decades of the twentieth century. Academic psychology today usually conceives of temptation in morally neutral or nearly neutral terms, such as a conflict between short-term (or lower-order) 'desires' and long-term (or higher-order) 'goals'. It speaks of 'self-regulation' rather than 'continence'. E.g., Ayelet Fishbach and Benjamin A. Converse, "Identifying and Battling Temptation," in Kathleen D. Vohs and Roy F. Baumeister, eds., *Handbook of Self-Regulation: Research, Theory, and Applications*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Guilford Press, 2011), 244-60.

Biblical Tensions

New Testament passages do not provide a uniform view of temptation. James 1:13-15 suggests that temptations come from our own desires. 1 Cor. 10:13 indicates that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our power to resist. It also qualifies James because it suggests that God has some control over the nature and intensity of our temptations. A petition in the Lord's Prayer says, 'And lead us not into temptation', which qualifies James, for it is not clear how we can be 'led' into our own improper desires. Matt. 6:14; Luke 11:4. To some this petition might seem to have little point in light of 1 Cor. 10:13. It is unclear why we should pray not to be led into temptation given that it is always in our power to resist, unless we doubt our ability to exercise that power, or unless we shy away from the annoyance or even pain of resisting. Matt. 6:13 and Luke 11:4 are consistent with each other but not with James 1:13-15.

It is scarcely surprising that a uniform view of temptation, or of trials or tests, does not emerge from the NT, for the authors of Matthew, Luke, James, Hebrews and First Corinthians differ substantially in outlook and intended audience. Bonhoeffer implicitly assumes that the NT has a coherent view of temptation but his textual evidence and arguments are not always convincing. He also works with an additional premise in writing 'Temptation is a concrete event, a sudden deviation from the normal course of life'.⁸ In fact, only some temptations are 'sudden deviations'. Others are everyday occurrences, or an abiding force that corrodes a person's character only after years of succumbing. Sex, food, money, power, status, and material goods can all be objects of temptation. Temptation presupposes the possibility of successful resistance. In contrast, the person in the grip of a compulsion is not so much tempted by the object of her compulsion, but rather is already on the verge of losing the battle.⁹

Let us look at each of these biblical texts and Bonhoeffer's remarks on them. [267]

The Epistle of James

Bonhoeffer cites James 1:13-15, which says:

Never, when you are being put to the test say, 'God is tempting me' [lit. I am tempted by God]; God cannot be tempted by evil [lit. God is untempted by evil things], and he does not put anyone to the test. Everyone is put to the test by being attracted and seduced by that person's own wrong desire [lit. his own desires/lusts]. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin reaches full growth, it gives birth to death.

The author of James holds that temptations, tests, and trials originate from within us, not from God. This author does not address passages in the Hebrew Bible that suggest temptations come from the serpent, the devil, or Satan. Neither does he point out that even if temptation issues from within a person, it often targets things outside the person, such as money, food, or other people. Still less does he consider the idea that God created human beings as entities who have the capability of acquiring improper desires. However, the author of James does remark on

⁸ DBWE 15:388; DB/KW 98 ('juts out from the course of life').

⁹ In the NT, the Greek word *peirasmos* can, depending on the context, be translated as 'temptation', 'test', or 'trial'. Cf. Vulg. *tentatio*. The most common English translation is probably 'temptation', as in 'And lead us not into temptation'. Some, however, prefer 'And do not put us to the test [or trial]'. Which English word best translates *peirasmos* might matter less than some scholars believe, for an all-good and omnibenevolent God would not seem to be in the business of tempting, testing, or trying anyone.

a sequence that goes from temptation to sin to death. It is a matter of interpretation whether ‘death’ here means physical death or spiritual death.

No hope exists of considering the extensive biblical commentary on this passage from James, but one can appeal to Hellenistic-Judaic thought about ‘psychic processes that occur between stimulus and decision’ to understand this passage.¹⁰ This way of thinking sometimes concentrates on psychagogy, i.e. methods of influencing behavior by specifying desirable life goals. John S. Kloppenborg points out that James 1:2-15 incorporates Hellenistic Platonism and stoicism and has its own understanding of the Jesus tradition.¹¹ The author of James intimates, according to Kloppenborg, that temptations are not evils but ‘the occasions of moral progress’.¹² Temptations provide opportunities to rationally control one’s behavior and perhaps even the nature and intensity of one’s desires.¹³ Kloppenborg does not suggest that the author of James knew 4 Maccabees, or the works of Plato, Arius Didymus, Seneca, Philo, or Posidonius.¹⁴ He suggests only that this epistle’s author, like other educated or semi-educated Judeans, had absorbed enough popularized Hellenistic philosophy to believe that it jibed with the Torah. This way of [268] understanding the proposition that temptations come from our own desires is a plausible melding of one strand in the Jesus tradition with first-century Judaism and Hellenistic philosophy.

When Bonhoeffer discusses what the Bible says about human desires as the causes of temptation, he quotes James 1:13-15 and then steps quickly from ‘temptation’ to ‘*Temptation is guilt* [*Schuld*], inasmuch as the fall is inexcusable’ and thence to ‘*Temptation is punishment* [*Strafe*]’ and eventually to sin.¹⁵ The ambiguous phrase ‘inasmuch as’ can mean either ‘to the extent that’ or ‘for the reason that’. Bonhoeffer’s German is also ambiguous.¹⁶ Because he hardly wants to say that Adam and Eve’s behavior that constituted the Fall was excusable, it is better to read him as saying ‘for the reason that’. However, Bonhoeffer’s step from ‘temptation’ to ‘temptation is guilt’ conflicts with James, which says that a person must first have a desire before it becomes a temptation. To make the step convincing, Bonhoeffer would have to show that a particular desire is already bad in some way. In a moment, I will question whether this claim can be defended. ‘The origin of temptation,’ writes Bonhoeffer, ‘resides in myself’.¹⁷ Even if that turns out to be true, seemingly he would have to establish either that the desire is itself bad, or that the desire and the temptation are identical.

¹⁰ John S. Kloppenborg, ‘James 1:2-15 and Hellenistic Psychagogy’, *Novum Testamentum*, 52 (2010): 37-71, p. 70.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65-70.

¹² *Ibid.*, 68, citing James 1:2-4.

¹³ Some research in social psychology supports this view. E.g., Ayelet Fishbach, Ronald S. Friedman, and Arie W. Kruglanski., ‘Leading Us Not Unto Temptation: Momentary Allurements Elicit Overriding Goal Activation’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (2003): 296-309.

¹⁴ Kloppenborg, ‘James 1:2-15 and Hellenistic Psychagogy’, 70-71.

¹⁵ DBWE 15:399 (italics in original); DB/KD 110-11 (no italics).

¹⁶ “*Versuchung ist Schuld*, insofern als der Fall unentschuldig ist.” DBW 15:386. DB/KD 110 translates this sentence as ‘Temptation is guilt in so far as the fall is inexcusable’, which is a little closer to Bonhoeffer’s German.

¹⁷ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

Bonhoeffer explicitly says temptation is punishment. It seems unlikely that he means resisting temptation is painful enough to feel like punishment. Instead, he seems to think: the devil leads Adam and Eve to disobey, their disobedience corrupts human flesh, which leads to bad or wrong desires, which in turn lead to temptation. Temptation has objective and subjective dimensions that are equally necessary. Objectively, temptation has ‘its origin in the devil’.¹⁸ Subjectively, temptation arises when such things as the beauty of the world arouse and entice us ‘through our evil desires’.¹⁹ Here Bonhoeffer seems to say that at least some desires are evil.

Bonhoeffer’s final step is to insist that ‘desire as such does not make me sinful’.²⁰ Only when my ‘ego’ approves of and identifies with an (evil) desire do I find ‘the origin of sin in myself and in me alone’.²¹ Before that, my desire remains an ‘Id’.²² He hints at some psychological account of desire and temptation, but the account remains undeveloped.²³ [269]

Here we can distinguish, preliminarily, between two unrefined models of temptation. The ‘sin’ model says that some desires are wrong in themselves and it is sinful to have them. The ‘not-yet-sin’ model says no desires are wrong in themselves and it is not sinful to have them. There is support for both models in James and in Bonhoeffer.

In a friendly refinement of Bonhoeffer’s discussion, one can suggest that desires are bad only if they are for a bad thing, and are wrong or sinful only if a person is responsible for having desires for a bad thing. Consider a desire for sexual intercourse. A married person’s desire for sexual intercourse with his spouse is not bad but a desire for sexual intercourse with someone other than his spouse is bad.

Yet if a married person often takes pleasure in fantasizing about having sexual intercourse with persons other than his spouse, then he is to some extent responsible for having this desire. In that case his dwelling on this fantasy would be wrong or sinful. Contrariwise, if he has a mostly innocent fantasy history, tries to brush aside adulterous thoughts whenever they arise, and experiences a sudden desire to have intercourse with someone other than his spouse, then the desire is, though bad, not wrong or sinful. The desire depends partly on his biological makeup, and he does not dwell on it. In ordinary circumstances, a person is clearly responsible for a desire to rape in order to humiliate, and thus having such a bad desire would be wrong and sinful. Yet circumstances can be extraordinary. Suppose that terrorists in war-torn Sudan force eight-year-old John into service as a soldier and over time teach him to kill men and children and rape women. John’s desire at age 18 to rape women in order to humiliate them was formed in the crucible of war, unlawful violence, and rape as a weapon of terror. He is not responsible for having this desire. Under the circumstances his having this desire is not itself wrong or sinful, though his acting on it would be.

¹⁸ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

¹⁹ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

²⁰ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

²¹ DBWE 15:399-400; DB/KD 111.

²² DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

²³ Use of the terms ‘ego’ and ‘Id’ might suggest that Bonhoeffer was receptive to some version of psychoanalysis. In fact, perhaps under his father’s influence, he was unsympathetic to psychoanalysis. See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 21-22.

Recall that Bonhoeffer discusses desire as a form of temptation along with the idea, derived from James, that temptations come from our own desires. When Bonhoeffer writes of ‘the guilt of temptation’, he can correctly mean guilt only for having bad desires for which one is responsible. Other desires do not in themselves involve guilt. Consider again the married man with the mostly innocent fantasy history who has a sudden adulterous desire. But this time he acts on his desire instead of brushing it aside. In this hypothetical case, guilt derives from the act rather than from having the desire. Bonhoeffer is generally right when he says that ‘desire as such does not make me sinful’.²⁴ Still, if the man desires a bad thing, and if he is responsible for having the desire, then his having the desire is wrong or sinful.

Bonhoeffer’s assertion ‘Temptation is punishment’²⁵ is questionable. By way of explanation, he writes: ‘The inherited, corrupted nature of the flesh is the origin of evil inclinations in body and soul’.²⁶ Evidently he has in mind the doctrine of original sin. Space does not permit treatment of this large issue here. Of course, if there have been any sins at all, there must have been one sin which was first, unless there was a tie. It is, however, possible to question the idea, associated with Paul’s epistle to the Romans, Augustine, Luther and many other theologians in the Latin West, that this first [270] (‘original’) sin changed human nature.²⁷ If one were to pursue this possibility, it could appear that Julian of Eclanum and the Orthodox theologians of the East may be correct to maintain that the first sin neither created hereditary guilt nor stained, degraded, or corrupted human nature. Ordinarily temptation is not punishment for anything.²⁸

The foregoing discussion of James 1:13-15, the two unrefined models of temptation, and the refined model does not get to the root of the differences between a plausible interpretation of James and a plausible interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s hamartiology. For Bonhoeffer, the main idea is not about desires which are or are not sinful but rather that what the sinner desires is itself sinful. The sinful ‘I’ is an individual curved in upon itself: *homo incurvatus in se*. Incurvature is not an obviously helpful exegesis of James 1:13-15, which focuses on desire as the initial

²⁴ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

²⁵ DBWE 15:399 (italics omitted); DB/KD 111.

²⁶ DBWE 15:399; DB/KD 111.

²⁷ On Bonhoeffer’s closeness to Luther regarding scripture, sin, temptation, and Christology, see Wolf Krötke, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther,’ in Peter Frick, ed., *Bonhoeffer’s Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 53-82.

²⁸ Relatedly, it is debatable whether ‘our own sin is punished by God’s wrath’. DBWE 15:412; DB/KD 125. Divine wrath is prominent in the Hebrew Bible, but much less so in the NT except for Paul’s epistles and Revelation. Bonhoeffer supports God’s wrath only with passages from the Hebrew Bible. DBWE 15:402; DB/KD 114; citing 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1. (Both DB/KD 114 and DBWE 15:402 n.68 correct Bonhoeffer’s erroneous citation to 1 Sam. 24.) He concludes: ‘Behind the wrathful God who tempts, the Christian now finds the gracious God who tempts no one’. DBWE 15:402; DB/KD 114. Here Bonhoeffer might be suggesting that the God of the Hebrew Bible is not really wrathful. Anyway, if God *reacts* emotionally to our sins, perhaps the pertinent emotion could be disappointment or sorrow rather than wrath. If an omnibenevolent God *acts* in response to our sins, the action could be correction, persuasion, or teaching rather than punishment in the form of subjecting us to further temptation.

concept. But incurvature is a way of thinking about sin that exists in Augustine, Luther, Barth, and other theologians.²⁹ In Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology, incurvature together with the idea of *simul iustus et peccator* (both justified and a sinner) is dialectical. Of course, not every desire of a sinner is sinful; desires for food and companionship, for example, are not sinful in themselves. Incurvature might not be a characteristic of every sin. And to start with the assumption that every person is a sinner no matter how young and innocent does not explain how any given individual becomes a sinner, unless one appeals to original sin or some related idea.³⁰ Sin is usually understood as a religious concept, though different religions have different theories of sin, and a few religions have no concept of sin. My point here is that while Bonhoeffer has an interesting understanding of sin, it contributes little to the exegesis of James 1:13-15 on temptation.

Paul to the Corinthians

Bonhoeffer quotes 1 Cor. 10:13, which reads: [271]

None of the trials [*peirasmos*] which have come upon you is more than a human being can stand [lit. No temptation has seized you, if not [one that is] human].

You can trust that God will not let you be put to the test, or will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with any trial will also provide a way out by enabling you to put up with it [lit. to endure].

This passage says that God will not allow you to be tempted, tested, or tried beyond your power to resist. Translations of this passage often read *peirasmos* and its cognates as 'temptation', 'trial', or 'test'. Paul suggests that God has some control over the nature and intensity of individuals' temptations, even though God does not tempt them. The fact that individuals can always resist temptation does not entail that they will always in fact resist. If that is correct, and if temptations are desires for bad things, then God seems to have some control over the nature and intensity of these desires.

Bonhoeffer writes: 'Every temptation must be seen in light of 1 Cor. 10:12-13'.³¹ He then says one thing that lacks care and elsewhere says a different thing that provokes thought. Care is wanting in his remark that 'God deals out according to the measure of how much each person can endure. This is certain.'³² It is not certain. 1 Cor. 10:12-13 does not say anything about God's allowing a person to be tempted at all, or allowing that person to be tempted to the maximum of his or her strength.

The provocative remark is that temptation is not really about testing a person's strength at all. This idea grows out of Bonhoeffer's different portrayals of temptation as experienced by the natural human being, the moral human being, and the Christian.³³ Against Bonhoeffer, natural and moral human beings need not respond to the prospect of temptation by saying 'Test me!' Human responses vary widely. Different individuals might react with modesty, humility, or timidity. The prospect of testing their strength need not excite them. But it is what Bonhoeffer says of the Christian that is provocative and seemingly runs counter to 1 Cor. 10:13:

²⁹ Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

³⁰ Stephen R. Munzer, 'Innocence', *Faith and Philosophy*, 29 (2012): 125-43.

³¹ DBWE 15:403; DB/KD 115.

³² DBWE 15:403; DB/KD 116.

³³ DBWE 15:386-88; DB/KD 97-98.

The temptation of which the entire Holy Scripture speaks does not at all concern the probation [testing] of my own strength. For the nature of biblical temptation is such that here – to my own alarm and without being able to do anything about it – all my strengths are turned against me. . . . This is the decisive fact in the temptation of a Christian, namely, that one is being *forsaken*, forsaken by all his strengths, indeed attacked by them, forsaken by all human beings, forsaken by God himself. . . .

. . . In a biblical sense, then, *temptation* does *not* mean: testing of strength, but the loss of all strength, *the defenseless deliverance into Satan's hands*.³⁴

The idea that God forsakes Christians, or any human beings, in their temptation merits scrutiny. Bonhoeffer's biblical support for this idea is modest. '[M]y strength fails me' in Ps. 38:11 is a report of the speaker and a prayer of distress, not a statement of divine forsakenness. Ps. 30:6 and Eccles. 3:1-4, 11 concern vulnerability and the [272] oscillation of good and bad times rather than instances of divine forsakenness in the face of temptation.³⁵ Bonhoeffer does better with Isa. 54:7: 'I did forsake you for a brief moment, but in great compassion I shall take you back'. However, this sentence occurs in a chapter that contrasts the upward changes of fortune of Jerusalem and a repudiated wife. On the surface, it says nothing about temptation.

Nevertheless, some might suggest that Isa. 54:7 is about Jerusalem (Zion), portrayed as a woman forsaken by her husband (the Lord). So suppose that Isa. 54:7 is about divine forsakenness after all. Given this supposition, a skeptic might say that God comes off looking unpleasant: Yes, I forsook you when you were greatly tempted, but now I am going to take you back. This supposition finds no support in 1 Cor. 10:12-13. Moreover, the corresponding picture of the divine being contrasts so sharply with the image of an omnibenevolent God that the supposition should be withdrawn. To forestall misunderstanding, Christians and other people sometimes *feel* forsaken or abandoned by God. This state of abandonment can arise from sin, individual insecurities, and an intense desire to be close to God and to obey God's will.³⁶ However, this state is arguably not something that God causes by withholding support when a person faces temptations, tests, or trials.

One can read Bonhoeffer's passages on forsakenness and abandonment in at least two ways, which strike different balances between textual support and theology. One reading, which is ill-supported by Bonhoeffer's text but jibes with the idea of an omnibenevolent God, is that people sometimes only *feel* forsaken or abandoned. A different reading, which tallies with Bonhoeffer's text but sits poorly with the idea of an omnibenevolent God, is that some, maybe all, persons are at one time or another *really* forsaken or abandoned by God, even if God does not forsake or abandon them for their entire lives.

Temptation in the Lord's Prayer

³⁴ DBWE 15:387-88 (italics in original); DB/KD 97-98 (no italics except for '*abandoned*').

³⁵ See DBWE 15:387-89; DB/KD 98-99. He does not cite Ps. 22:1, perhaps because of the rescue in vv. 22-31.

³⁶ E.g. K. Kavanaugh, 'Abandonment, Spiritual', in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), vol.1, 4; Stephen R. Munzer, 'Self-Abandonment and Self-Denial: Quietism, Calvinism, and the Prospect of Hell', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 33 (2005): 747-81, p. 750.

Bonhoeffer bestows great attention on ‘And lead us not into temptation’ from the Lord’s Prayer, which has seven petitions in Matt. 6:9-13 and five petitions in Luke 11:2-4. This prayer is addressed to ‘Our Father’ in Matt. and simply ‘Father’ in Luke. Petition 6, part 1, in Matt. v. 13 and petition 5 in Luke v. 4 both say ‘And do not put us to the test’. Some translations have ‘And do not lead us into temptation’, which corresponds neatly to the Vulgate (Nestle-Aland) in Matt. ‘et ne inducas nos in tentationem’ and in Luke ‘et ne nos inducas in tentationem’.

‘And lead us not into temptation’ or ‘And do not put us to the test’ seems simple enough. Although these phrases speak of a ‘temptation’ or ‘test’ in the singular, human beings sometimes encounter different or multiple temptations, trials, or tests even in a single day. If that is true, then this petition targets many temptations, trials, or tests [273] encountered in everyday life. But if, as James says, temptations come from our own desires, it is unclear how we might be ‘led’ into our own improper desires, or why God might have any role in doing so. One could translate the Greek verb here as ‘bring into’ or ‘carry into’ rather than ‘lead into’.³⁷ Yet it is unclear why an omnibenevolent God would want to bring or carry us into our own bad desires. Granted, most of us do not want such desires to spring upon us. However, springing upon is not leading, bringing, or carrying into. If one takes Paul at face value in 1 Cor. 10:13, it could seem strange that we should be especially concerned about any temptations, because God would never permit us to be tempted beyond our power to resist. In fact, if we lacked the power to resist, it would not be a temptation, because temptation presupposes the possibility of successful resistance. Perhaps, upon scrutiny, the strangeness disappears, for we might not always successfully resist temptation, and it can be annoying or even tormenting to resist. These tentative remarks suggest a possible dilemma. If the petition discusses everyday temptations, the significance of ‘And lead us not into temptation’ is hardly obvious. But if we read this petition as involving a ‘test’ or a ‘trial’, it is not evident why an omnibenevolent God would expose human beings to either given that life is already difficult enough.

Bonhoeffer struggles mightily with the idea that God, along with the devil and our evil desires, is ever the author of temptation.³⁸ He cites passages in the Hebrew Bible in which God tempts Abraham, Israel, and Hezekiah.³⁹ The NT support he has for this idea is limited to 1 Pet. 4:11-12, 17. These verses discuss God’s judgment and Christians’ sharing the sufferings of Christ, but say almost nothing about temptation. Bonhoeffer invokes God’s permitting Satan to tempt human beings. Still, God’s permitting someone else to tempt is not the same as God’s tempting anyone.

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer’s treatment of ‘And lead us not into temptation’ is perplexing. If Satan were God’s independent adversary, it would be odd to pray to God not to do something that is peculiarly within Satan’s sphere of activity.⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer might, instead, think of Satan as

³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, ‘And Lead Us Not into Temptation’, *Biblia*, 84 (2003): 259-73, p. 259. Spanish and Portuguese translations often use *caer* and *cair*, respectively, which mean ‘carry’ and ‘bring’ as much as ‘lead’. French translations generally say *soumets*, which means ‘submit’ or ‘subject’.

³⁸ DBWE 15:397, 400-02; DB/KD 109, 111-14. Perhaps Bonhoeffer is distancing himself from the view of James that God tests no one.

³⁹ DBWE 15:400; DB/KD 112; citing Gen. 22:1; Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; Judges 2:22; Ps. 66:10; 2 Chron. 32:31. Some Christians, including Bonhoeffer, appear to take these passages at face value. Other Christians might see them as a less than accurate portrait of God.

⁴⁰ J. P. Day, ‘Temptation’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 30 (1993): 175-81, p. 175.

under God's control but nevertheless an adversary of humans. But this thought raises the theodicean issue of why God would permit Satan to act as he does or indeed to exist at all.

Bonhoeffer contrasts Adam's temptation with that of Jesus in the wilderness.⁴¹ In the latter case, 'Jesus is tempted in *flesh*, in faith, and in his *divine sonship*'.⁴² Perplexity [274] arises when Bonhoeffer tries to explain the relation between the temptation of Jesus and the temptations experienced by Christians and other human beings:

Because Christ has been tempted and has overcome, therefore, we pray: do not lead us into temptation! For the temptation has already come and been overcome; he has done it in our stead. 'Look at the temptation of your son Jesus Christ and do not lead *us* into temptation'. We may and ought to be certain that this prayer is heard. . . . From now on *we* shall no longer be led into temptation, but all temptation that now still happens is the temptation of Jesus Christ in his members, in his church community. It is not we who are tempted, *but Jesus Christ who is tempted in us*.⁴³

Either we are tempted or we are not. On the one hand, if we are tempted, then after-the-fact prayer to not be tempted seems unhelpful. True, we might anticipate future temptation. Yet Bonhoeffer would assure us that we are mistaken, because he believes that we are not tempted: it is Christ who is tempted in us. Further, if we are tempted at all in this context, we are tempted as members of the body of Christ and armed against temptation as members of that body.

On the other hand, if we are not tempted, then there seems to be little point to praying "And lead us not into temptation" – unless, once again, we anticipate future temptation. Any anticipation appears misplaced, for Bonhoeffer tells us that we ourselves are not tempted but rather Christ is tempted in us. To free Bonhoeffer from this difficulty, one might point out that Jesus found the temptations in the wilderness to be tormenting; we should not want him to go through such torment again. Still, if that is correct, it would seem that a more appropriate prayer might be 'And lead not Jesus to be tempted in us'. Some Christians might consider it brazenfaced to utter such a prayer. Other Christians might consider this prayer to reflect a concern that Christ should not have to bear any more torment because of us. The second half of this article considers what the content of this prayer might mean.

There remains a major question about temptation that Bonhoeffer does not confront: How should one express God's mode of activity in tempting, testing, or trying human beings? An untutored answer is that God leads or brings people into situations in which they are tempted, tested, or tried, even if God is not the author of the temptation, test, or trial itself. For instance, God could bring a woman into a situation in which she is tempted to defraud a business partner, even though the temptation itself comes from the woman's own bad desires. Because God plays a causal role in bringing her into this situation, it is unclear why an omnibenevolent God would play such a role. In the Hebrew Bible, God plays a causal role in testing the Israelites, but the NT offers less support or justification for this role. Bonhoeffer appears concerned, in one passage, with extending 'And lead us not into temptation' to an eschatological temptation as well as everyday temptations.⁴⁴ Eschatological temptation finds its home chiefly in the book of Revelation, and otherwise is mainly a post-biblical phenomenon.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, 'Temptation', DBWE 15:390-95; DB/KD 101-06.

⁴² DBWE 15:394 (italics in original); DB/KD 105 (no italics).

⁴³ DBWE 15:396; DB/KD 107 (both italics in original).

⁴⁴ DBWE 15:402-13; DB/KD 115-26.

Let us focus on ordinary temptations and the Lord's Prayer. A sophisticated position is that it took a while for Christians to refine their understanding of God's activity and [275] learn how to express that activity in language interpreting the Hebrew Bible and the NT.⁴⁵ Perhaps people once attributed to God many things that happened to human beings. Only later did Patristic thinkers distinguish 'between God's permissive will and God's absolute will'.⁴⁶ The distinction, as it applies in this context, is that God *permits* people to fall into temptation, tests, or trials. God does not *will* that they do so. Joseph A. Fitzmyer compactly traces this development from some of the early Patristics to Augustine.⁴⁷

Does the distinction between God's permissive will and God's absolute will supply a satisfactory theological and philosophical analysis of 'And lead us not into temptation'? Standard translations of the Greek NT text into English suggest that the plain meaning of the English is a petition that God not tempt, test, or try us – rather than 'And do not permit us to encounter any non-divine temptation, test, or trial'. Fitzmyer seems to think that the permissive-will reading solves a problem. But some may question whether God (apart from the Son while incarnate before the resurrection) has two wills – one absolute will and one permissive will. Rather, it seems God has one will, which can either cause temptation to occur or allow it to occur. Allowing temptation to occur within the meaning of the Lord's prayer seems to *lead* someone into temptation, which raises a theodicean issue.

Temptation and Christology

Satan, Christ, and God

Bonhoeffer paints a mostly conventional portrait of Satan. Satan is an adversary of human beings but not an independent adversary of God. Always under divine control, Satan is an agent of God who tempts people, as in the book of Job. Bonhoeffer's Satan appears in both the Hebrew Bible and the NT as a deceitful, cunning, and powerful figure who brings woe to humans. Satan has the power to tempt Christ in the desert, but only because the Holy Spirit allows him to do so. Satan is neither human nor angelic; though created by God, his exact origin is unknown. Bonhoeffer associates Satan with the serpent in Eden, where strictly speaking it is the serpent who tempts.⁴⁸ He rarely flirts with identifying Satan with Lucifer or a fallen angel, and thus does not partake of post-biblical accounts of Satan.⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer's account does, however, stress that human beings are defenselessly delivered and abandoned, with God's apparent permission, into Satan's wiles and assaults.⁵⁰

Granted, many passages in the Hebrew Bible and the NT support something like this account. But Bonhoeffer fails to defend a theodicy according to which God allows Satan [276] to tempt. In one passage he asks, 'Does God have to grant such power to Satan?'⁵¹ The next lines only exhort the reader to flee temptation and pray not to be led into temptation. Bonhoeffer does

⁴⁵ Fitzmyer, note 37 above, 263-67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 265-67.

⁴⁸ DBWE 15:391; DB/KD 101-02

⁴⁹ Many complications exist within the biblical and post-biblical dimensions of Satan. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ E.g., DBWE 15:387-88, 389-90, 392, 395, 400-01; DB/KD 98, 100, 103, 106, 112.

⁵¹ DBWE 15:389-390; DB/KD 100.

not justify what the Bible says God did. To say that one cannot ask, though in a way pious, is a questionable answer.

Bonhoeffer poses another question: ‘Why does God not simply kill Satan?’⁵² He replies that ‘God gives Satan room *for the sake of* human sins. . . . Thus against his will Satan must serve God’s plan of redemption.’⁵³ This answer might seem to be an odd divine choice in redeeming sinners, though for many theologians it is the standard account of redemption. There would seem to be manifold ways for an omniscient and omnibenevolent God to redeem humans from their sins. That God would create an entity, Satan, who as a brutal henchman tempts humans and eventually Jesus himself, might appear to be a strange redemptive plan. It is also a plan in which Satan, according to Bonhoeffer, has ‘rights’ and thus is unavailable for divine annihilation but instead ‘must annihilate himself’ so that he is once for all overcome by God.⁵⁴ To non-Christians the plan could seem to have some bizarre plot twists, even though many theological models of atonement, redemption, and salvation accept something like this plan.⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer’s theology says comparatively little about theodicy and almost nothing that would justify Satan’s role with respect to human beings.⁵⁶ Problematically, Bonhoeffer never asks why God created Satan in the first place. If God did so, Bonhoeffer does not get to the bottom of justifying God’s creating him.⁵⁷

Christ Is Tempted in Us

Earlier I drew attention to the seeming strangeness of Bonhoeffer’s view that after Jesus’s victory, it is not we who are tempted but Jesus Christ who is tempted in us. What could he mean in taking this view? He means, I think, participation, help, and grace. He writes repeatedly of ‘participation [*Teilnahme*] and communion in the temptation of *Jesus*’.⁵⁸ The temporal aspect of this phrase is unclear, for it is not evident how someone who is tempted today participates in the temptation of Christ in the first century C.E. Suppose two drinking buddies yield one evening to the temptation to get drunk in a bar. Each might participate in the temptation of the other by, say, encouraging the other to have [277] another drink. Their presence in the same bar at the same time seems crucial to participation. Yet Bonhoeffer’s idea is at least that those of us alive today can, by an act of imaginative identification, think of ourselves in temptation as being alongside Christ in his temptations.

Bonhoeffer offers a further idea: help. Jesus’s temptation, which was overcome, helps any Christian who experiences temptation. Despite the secular timbre of many contemporary psychological articles on temptation and related phenomena, in the psychology of religion and

⁵² DBWE 15:400; DB/KD 112.

⁵³ DBWE 15:400-01 (italics in original); DB/KD 112 (no italics).

⁵⁴ DBWE 15:401-02; DB/KD 113.

⁵⁵ E.g., Joshua Farris and S. Mark Hamilton, ‘The Logic of Reparative Substitution: Contemporary Restitution Models of Atonement, Divine Justice, and Somatic Death’, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 83 (2018): 62-77.

⁵⁶ Annette G. Aubert, “Theodicy and the Cross in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Trinity Journal*, 32 (n.s., 2011): 47-67.

⁵⁷ One recent attempt to argue for the dogmatic indispensability of Satan sounds in soteriology and hamartiology but lacks a theodicy. See Philip G. Ziegler, “‘Bound Over to Satan’s Tyranny’: Sin and Satan in Contemporary Reformed Hamartiology,” *Theology Today*, 75 (2018): 89-100.

⁵⁸ E.g., DBWE 15:396 (italics in original); DB/KD 108 (‘sharing’, no italics); DBW 15:383.

spirituality one hears other timbres. In particular, some authors stress the idea of spiritual struggle: suffering caused by, among other things, difficulty in overcoming temptations.⁵⁹ ‘Thus I ought to understand my temptation as nothing other than the temptation of Jesus Christ in me. In his temptation is my help [*Hilfe*], for only here is victory and overcoming.’⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer’s intuition appears to be that Jesus, as the savior of human beings and a fundamental and good aspect of my self, assists Christians in any era to resist temptation. In a temptation to lie, for example, a four-stage sequence seems to go from superficial to subtle: (1) I am tempted to lie; (2) when I am tempted to lie, Christ is tempted in me; (3) when Christ is tempted in me, he is tempted to lie; (4) when he overcomes the temptation to lie, his overcoming helps me to overcome my temptation to lie. Bonhoeffer’s claim that Jesus’s resisting temptation can aid Christians in fighting off temptation is a plausible extension of the NT message. Still, there is little support for his view that, with participation and help understood thus far, ‘only’ here is victory and overcoming.

Bonhoeffer would agree to include grace in the nature of help. By grace I understand not the sporadic bestowal of divine gifts but God’s continuing and universal self-communication that flows to all people, not just Christians. Bonhoeffer’s theology attaches great importance to the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ; through these events Christ’s self-communication enters human history. In temptation, the grace of God and Christ is available to the Christian and the non-Christian alike. Even if one were to say that, all else being equal, the Christian can resist temptation more easily than the non-Christian, it scarcely follows that *only* the Christian can achieve ‘victory and overcoming’.

Christ-reality

One can try to strengthen the foregoing understanding of participation, help, and grace by appealing to Bonhoeffer’s idea of Christ-reality. Christ-reality is the transformation of the world wrought by the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Under an appealing interpretation, Bonhoeffer believes that Christ-reality solves a two-realms problem by uniting them. One realm (*Raum*) is the reality of God. The other realm is the [278] reality of the existing world. Bonhoeffer explains each realm not as an abstract, atemporal concept but as a concrete, historical development. The first realm is basically the realm of grace represented by Aquinas’s theology ‘in the High Middle Ages’. It is ‘divine, holy, supernatural, and Christian’. The second realm is basically ‘post-Reformation’ Protestant thinking, which he calls ‘pseudo-Lutheranism’ and ‘cultural Protestantism’. It is ‘worldly, profane, natural, and unchristian’.⁶¹ Some readers might regard the historicized explanation, with its references to the High Middle Ages and the Reformation, as a stretch, believe the two-realms ‘problem’, as just expounded, not to be a problem at all, might see the realm of realm of grace as hugely better than what preceded it, and might consider a further-reformed Protestantism to be an option.⁶²

⁵⁹ Julie J. Exline and Eric D. Rose, ‘Religious and Spiritual Struggles’, in Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, eds., *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Guilford Press, 2013), pp. 380-99; Jon R. Webb, ‘Incorporating Spirituality into the Psychology of Temptation: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Clinical Implications’, *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 1 (2014): 231-41.

⁶⁰ DBWE 15:397; DB/KD 108 (‘succour’); DBW 15:384.

⁶¹ These quotations and exposition come from Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*. See DBWE 6:54-60.

⁶² The two realms (*Räume*) are not the same as the two kingdoms (*Reiche*) in Luther, Bonhoeffer,

Ulrik Becker Nissen's more appealing interpretation of Christ-reality holds that there are neither two realms nor two realities that need uniting.⁶³ Instead only Christ-reality exists, though it holds the reality of God and the reality of the world together in a 'polemical' or 'forced unity'.⁶⁴ Occasionally Bonhoeffer backs off 'unity' (*Einheit*) and uses 'reconciliation' (*Versöhnung*) instead.⁶⁵ Christ-reality, be it characterized as a unity or a reconciliation, involves Christ's continuing presence in the world. Imaginative identification with Christ, discussed earlier, suggests inadequately that there is some help for the living to resist temptation. Christ-reality suggests, richly, that all things are held together in Christ (Col. 1:17). As Bonhoeffer puts it, 'In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world'.⁶⁶ The contribution of Christ-reality is not a mere psychological process but a substantive contribution of Christ's participation, help, and grace that strengthens our resistance to temptation.

Bonhoeffer's concept of vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*) throws further light on how Christ aids in our resisting temptation.⁶⁷ Christ was an innocent victim – the sinless person treated as guilty – who bore the sins of humanity. He was tempted for us in the desert and Gethsemane. He resisted Satan's temptations and the temptation [279] to turn away from the cross. '[H]e lives only as the one who in himself has taken on and bears the selves of all human beings. His entire life, action, and suffering is vicarious representative action.'⁶⁸ Christ is, then, the very embodiment of acting responsibly on behalf of others. '[H]e is the responsible human being par excellence'.⁶⁹ In imitation of that embodiment the Christian should act responsibly by resisting temptation and accepting a 'bond' to all other human beings without 'absolutizing either my own self or the other person'.⁷⁰ Further, the Christian, especially the Christian who has to act on the behalf of those subordinate to him or her, should not tempt others.

Difficulties remain. The link between Christ-reality and a person beset by temptation is unclear. Christ-reality might seem incompatible with persistence of sin in the world, and with Bonhoeffer's frequent assertions that Christians are left defenseless in Satan's hands. Moreover,

and other Lutheran thinkers. See Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 77-141. DBWE 6:56 n.33, 62 n.54 consistently translates *Raum* as 'realm' (except where 'it refers to the church-community existing in the world', in which case the term 'space' is used) and translates *Reich* as 'kingdom'.

⁶³ Ulrik Becker Nissen, 'Letting Reality Become Real: On Mystery and Reality in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 39 (2011): 321-43, pp. 325-31.

⁶⁴ This citation to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, DBWE 6:59-60, and later to other parts of his corpus are to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, general ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) (17 vols.) and sometimes to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, ed. Eberhard Bethge et al. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1986-1999) (17 vols.), by volume, colon, and page(s). Bonhoeffer adds: 'Hence there are not two realms, but only *the one realm of the Christ-reality*, in which the reality God and the reality of the world are united'. DBWE 6:58 (italics in original).

⁶⁵ DBWE 6:59 n.46, 265; DBW 6:44 n.44, 265.

⁶⁶ DBWE 6:54 (italics omitted).

⁶⁷ The principal discussion of this concept is in the *Ethics*. DBWE 6:231-32, 234, 238, 257-59, 275, 288, 389.

⁶⁸ DBWE 6:231 (footnote omitted).

⁶⁹ DBWE 6:258-59.

⁷⁰ DBWE 6: 257, 259.

before the incarnation there was no Christ-reality. Hence, unless backward causation or normative retroactive change is possible, Christ-reality appears to operate only prospectively (from the moment of either the incarnation or the resurrection), and the soteriological status of those who died before the incarnation appears uncertain.⁷¹

Christ-reality requires Christ's continuing presence in the world if it is to be of great aid in resisting temptation – but what does 'continuing presence' entail? Save for the descent into hell, Christ was bodily present from the incarnation until the ascension. After the ascension Christ's presence, like all presence between persons, would seem to require bodily contiguity in space and time. This requirement for presence jibes with Bonhoeffer's views on Christ as mediator, and with his view that if Christ is in us then his presence is mediated in us. Bonhoeffer hardly means that Christ's continuing presence entails that one could, for example, play tennis with him today at some location on earth. It might, however, mean that if Christ is no longer embodied on earth after the ascension, he can be spatiotemporally located by his effects on one in one's efforts to resist temptation today. Yet if action at a distance is possible, Christ might not be present with one in a spatiotemporally contiguous way. If so, Christ-reality might deliver less than one would think.

Some might suggest that Christ is still bodily present in our world in the Eucharist. Liturgically, this suggestion might work for Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics under the doctrine of transubstantiation in which Christ's body and blood are with us now under the elements of bread and wine. Perhaps under the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation one can get a similar Eucharistic result. But serious problems about Christ and time stand in the way.⁷²

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Whether Bonhoeffer can overcome or at least mitigate these difficulties surrounding the present presence of Christ depends partly on what help is available from his lectures on Christology in 1933. He writes that 'Christ is the Christ who is present in history'.⁷³ Michael DeJonge expounds: "'Christ is'" means "'Christ is present'" which in turn means "'Christ is present as Word, sacrament, and church-community'".⁷⁴ It is hard to make sense of DeJonge's exposition. The statements 'Christ is' and 'Christ is present', it would seem, are both true only if the statements are made at the same time and implicitly presuppose the same geographical location. The statement 'Christ is present' does not mean the same thing as 'Christ is present as Word, sacrament, and church-community' unless one already subscribes to Bonhoeffer's theories about Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology – which would beg the question. In short, even if DeJonge accurately describes Bonhoeffer beliefs about the interrelations between these three statements, he does not show that these beliefs are true.

⁷¹ There is also a dating problem. Bonhoeffer's mature exposition of Christ-reality and *Stellvertretung* is in *Ethics*, which he started in 1940. Scholars may debate how much of that exposition can be read back into 'Temptation' (1938).

⁷² For perceptive objections that are sometimes insensitive to the details of Eucharistic theology, see Pavel Butakov, 'The Eucharistic Conquest of Time', *Faith and Philosophy*, 34 (2017): 247-71.

⁷³ DBWE 12:310.

⁷⁴ DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, note 62 above, 75. He cites scattered passages in the *Lectures on Christology*: DBWE 12:310, 314, 315, 317, 322, 323.

A few theologians maintain that Christ not only was human but also is human and will remain human, and now occupies a particular location. The Calvinist scholastic theologian Francis Turretin writes:

[W]e maintain that Christ went up locally, visibly and bodily from the earth into the third heaven or seat of the blessed above the visible heavens; not by a mere withdrawal of his visible or familiar intercourse, but by a true and local translation of his human nature. There he will remain until the day of judgment, so that although he is always present with us by his grace and Spirit and divinity, yet he is no longer with us by the bodily presence of his flesh.⁷⁵

Turretin's position, though it gives Christ a spatial location in some sense, may seem speculative, but he does deploy scriptural arguments in support of it.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether and, if so, how this location belongs to the same spatiotemporal universe that we inhabit. There is no evidence Bonhoeffer would have endorsed Turretin's position, and Turretin directly opposed Lutheran theologians.⁷⁷

Bonhoeffer's Christology and Some Puzzles of Temptation

Bonhoeffer's Christology developed over the period 1930-1945 and has significant continuity. The development goes from Christ as center (*Mitte*) and boundary (*Grenze*), next to Christ as center and mediator (*Mittler*), and eventually to Christ as both the eternal Son [281] and the crucified reconciler.⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer's broader Christology and his idea of Christ-reality might help with some puzzles.⁷⁹

I now discuss three puzzling positions from his paper on 'Temptation' which were specified in the Introduction. Each perplexes because of a habit of mind and expression that Bonhoeffer shares partly with Luther and especially with Barth among others. He writes in a way that puts somewhat opposed phrases into contact with each other and exhibits a style often called 'dialectical theology'. This theology was a reaction to the rationally-oriented liberal theology of such nineteenth-century figures as Friedrich Schleiermacher. John Baillie, one of Bonhoeffer's professors at Union Theological Seminary in 1930-31, noted his 'German predilection for impossible associations of ideas such as "revelation in hiddenness." Is this not a perverse expression?'⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer's prose sometimes contains ill-assorted or seemingly incompatible

⁷⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* [1679-1685], ed. James T. Dennison Jr. and trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 1992-1997), vol. 2, 367.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 367-68.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 366-67.

⁷⁸ His Christology unfolds in, for example, *Sanctorum Communio* (1930), *Creation and Fall* (1933), *Lectures on Christology* (1933), *Discipleship* (1937), and *Ethics* (1940-1945). See, respectively, DBWE 1:141-61, 182-92, 202; DBWE 3:92-93; DBWE 12:299-360; DBWE 4:213-52, 281-88; DBWE 6:47-75.

⁷⁹ Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), and Florian Schmitz, *'Nachfolge': Zur Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), discuss Bonhoeffer's Christology, but neither gets outside Bonhoeffer's own vocabulary or unpacks carefully Christ's presence and action in the world after the ascension.

⁸⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, note 23 above, 160.

phrases.⁸¹ It would have benefited his many readers, I suggest, if this penchant had been kept to a minimum. My point is not that this way of writing is inherently confused, but that it drives out clarity and misleads more than it helps.

An anonymous reviewer suggested a different approach to Bonhoeffer's dialectical theology: to see it not merely as stylistic or phraseological, but as a manner of thinking that engages with the reality of things disclosed in and by the gospel. It would be foolish indeed to make it seem that all biblical passages and all Christian doctrines lend themselves to being stated with analytical precision. There is room for mystery in the Bible, theology, and liturgy. Consider the Catholic liturgical *mysterium fidei* in one of its forms: 'Let us proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.' To think dialectically can be an effort to grasp semi-paradoxical truths. Some things are mysterious, and not only in theology. Consider quantum entanglement in physics.

Nevertheless, in some measure I am reluctant to quickly give in to this manner of thinking. Anselm's motto *fides quaerens intellectum* aims not to substitute understanding or knowledge for faith but to use trust in and love of God to seek a deeper understanding of God. If one follows this motto, one should not embrace mystery prematurely. Some recent scholarship on Bonhoeffer bestows attention on all manner of mysteries in his works.⁸² It [282] is unclear to me how much general profit comes from these efforts. In any case, let us descend to particulars and take up Bonhoeffer's examples in 'Temptation'.

It would be hazardous to assume that one can wrestle with all three examples in the same way. A *way*, as understood here, is a procedure that lessens or eliminates a clash of ideas. In Example 1, the way is that something is true or correct in some respects but not others, aided by Christ's role as mediator. In Example 2, the way is that Christ as mediator of all things takes precedence over, and indeed overcomes, any unclear association of ideas. Only in Example 3 does there seem to be no way that lessens the collision of ideas, which would be the closest to, but not the same as, a paradox or a *reductio* argument.

One attempt to solve the first puzzle might be to specify respects in which the Christian is abandoned but also in different respects held in God's love, grace, and word. A related attempt might say that, in Jesus Christ, the Christian is both abandoned (in the crucifixion) and held in God's love (in the resurrection). But the crucifixion and the resurrection are not simultaneous events. The ideas of Christ-reality and Christ as the mediator of all things might offer a more promising solution. Christ, through his incarnation, life, crucifixion, and resurrection, reconciles to himself all human sins, trespasses, and yielding to temptation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection were not simultaneous events, but ever since the resurrection all of these events are in the past. Still, it is not clear how the reality of Christ – both past and continuing – resolves, reconciles, or bridges the chasm between divine abandonment and divine love, grace, and word. This example would be unproblematic if the Christian is not really abandoned after all, but Bonhoeffer does not take this easy exit.

⁸¹ A well-known extended passage from *Letters and Papers from Prison* includes 'The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34)' and 'Before God, and with God, we live without God'. DBWE 8:478-79.

⁸² E.g., Kirsten Busch Nielsen, Ulrik Nissen, and Christiane Tietz, eds., *Mysteries in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Copenhagen Bonhoeffer Symposium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

Example 2 is also puzzling. Perhaps Bonhoeffer thinks that the Christian has some power to resist despite divine abandonment, even though Christ as the mediator of all things does most of the work. Bonhoeffer seems to depend on the idea that God uses Satan to bring death from sin so that God can, by grace, bring life out of death. In Bonhoeffer's view, the reality of the world and the reality of God are brought together in the members of the body of Christ and in his church-community through his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.⁸³ It is nevertheless unclear how temptations that lie within a person's power to resist go together simultaneously with divine abandonment of that defenseless person into Satan's hands. One can avoid this unclarity by saying that the person only seems to be abandoned, but Bonhoeffer shows no interest in such a way out.

Example 3 puzzles most of all. If Job was both pious and righteous, then he seems to be innocent. And if he was guilty, then he must have sinned and he would not be righteous. It bewilders that 'the pious and innocent Job must confess his guilt'. The bewilderment only rises when Bonhoeffer says, 'Job is tempted for the sake of his piety'.⁸⁴ Job, if we think of him as a historical person, lived and died long before Christ became incarnate. Hence, Bonhoeffer's views on Christology and his notion of Christ-reality do not clearly solve Job's predicament without a *nunc pro tunc* effect that rests on backward causation or normative retroactivity. Bonhoeffer's Christ-reality and his Christology generally seem to target quite different concerns from the puzzles thrown up by these three examples. [283]

Conclusion

Bonhoeffer's study of temptation has some weaknesses that one cannot ignore. (1) The discussion of the natural man, the ethical man, and the Christian which introduces his study does not withstand scrutiny, for only sometimes do any of them say 'Test me!' (2) His treatment of 'And lead us not into temptation' is beset by difficulties. (3) His insistence on God's abandonment of the Christian in temptation, in which the Christian is utterly forsaken and delivered defenseless to Satan, seemingly conflicts with the idea of an omnibenevolent God and 1 Cor. 10:13. (4) Bonhoeffer's uncritical understanding of Satan never satisfactorily explains how God could have justifiably created an agent who brings woe to human beings.

Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's forceful study has merits that outstrip its shortcomings. He has a gift for paying close attention to the Bible without getting bogged down in scholarly wrangles. In addition, he emphasizes concrete, everyday temptations. If at times he pays insufficient attention to temptation as an abiding feature of human life, and to temptation as a means of developing the character to resist it, this much is certain: Bonhoeffer, like most other people, faced concrete struggles in his own life.

Further, Bonhoeffer masterfully brings Christ into the story of temptation and its overcoming. The reality of Christ in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension helps to explain why all persons can find in Christ participation, help, and grace in resisting temptation.

In 'Temptation', Bonhoeffer's most profound insight is his account of how Christ aids the Christian in temptation. The non-Christian could receive equivalent help and grace from God through a mechanism of aid that perhaps differs from that which assists the Christian. It is characteristic of temptation, as understood in morality, that resisting temptation cleaves to an

⁸³ DBWE 15:396; DB/KD 107-08.

⁸⁴ DBWE 15:406; DB/KD 119.

aspect of one's self that is genuine and morally good. To succumb is to give in to some aspect of one's self that is false and morally bad. In going beyond the moral man, Bonhoeffer insists that 'I ought to understand my temptation as nothing other than the temptation of Jesus Christ in me'.⁸⁵ Because Christ is somehow in one's self,⁸⁶ he provides an aspect of one's self that is genuine and good. This, I think, is the best way to grasp Bonhoeffer's initially perplexing and obscure remark, 'It is not we who are tempted, but Jesus Christ who is tempted in us'.⁸⁷

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Author Biography

Stephen R. Munzer is Distinguished Research Professor of Law at the University of California, Los Angeles. In addition to his writings on law, he has published articles on innocence, self-abandonment and Quietism, Catholic ideals of mendicancy and voluntary poverty, and Kierkegaard on purity of heart. [285]

⁸⁵ DBWE 15:397; DB/KD 108.

⁸⁶ John 14:20 ('On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you'). Cf. 1 John 4:15-16; Gal. 2:20.

⁸⁷ DBWE 15:396; DB/KD 107 (both italics omitted).