

The gospel for a
secular humanity
theology religion



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The primary concern of this paper is with the Asecularization of western American society and the hunt for an equal reading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to run into its challenges. Finding a feasible divinity to talk to a new coevals has been the concern of Christian theologians, curates, and lay people for old ages. Therefore, it is of import to analyze the attacks of the yesteryear to larn what may be utile for the present and future. And the responses to Asecularization are multitude from the Enlightenment to today, from the plants of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, to that of Harnack, Barth, Tillich, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, and the Niebuhrs. The end of this present work is to analyse the theological attack Dietrich Bonhoeffer took during his clip and find its relevancy for today and beyond. Much of this survey will be concerned with the significance of Bonhoeffer= s impression of a Areligionless Christianity as his response to secularisation in his Letterss and Documents from Prison.

The premise that American western society has been Asecularized is based on the decisions of George G. Hunter, III in the book How to Reach Secular Peoples and David J. Gouwens in the category AModern Christian Thought I took at Brite Divinity School Fall of 1993. Hunter suggests that secularisation is partially the consequence of the six major cultural events known as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, Nationalism, the rise of scientific discipline, the Enlightenment, and Urbanization and has led to the diminution of Christendom in the West.[1]Harmonizing to Gouwens, secularisation is a displacement from a universe position that saw God behind every event, to one that explains events without mentioning to God, while besides oppugning the spiritual life.[2]He adds to Hunter= s list events or

landmarks that led to secularization the influence of Ahistorical consciousness that sees faith as a merchandise of history, and the motions in modern idea led by Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrick Nietzsche.

Before looking at Bonhoeffer= s response to secularisation, it is important to observe what Hunter says is non one of the consequences of secularisation. One of the myths about secularisation that Hunter price reductions is that it Ahas erased all spiritual consciousness from people= s heads, that there is no more spiritual a priori within human personality, and we are come ining an age of & gt ; no religion.= [3]As we shall see, this will look to travel against Bonhoeffer who appeared to foretell the diminution of faith. But pluralism in America tends to uncover a set toward the Areligious in human nature despite the diminution of Christianity= s monopoly in the West.

In Hunter= s assessment of secularisation, he cites R. H. Tawney who laments the loss of Christendom in Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, SAA¶ren Kierkegaard who celebrates its diminution in Attack Upon Christendom, Rudolf Bultmann who desires to demythologise and re-explain the New Testament for modern civilization, and eventually, Bonhoeffer who declares that Bultmann A & gt ; did non travel far enough= but agrees with Kierkegaard= s positive position of it.[4]I will return to Hunter= s sum-up of Bonhoeffer= s assessment subsequently after first doing my ain observations.

The first clip we hear about Bonhoeffer= s desire to do Christianity relevant to a secular age is in the missive he wrote from his Nazi prison cell on April

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30, 1944. He begins with the observation of what he saw as the motion toward an age of no faith and what that means for Christianity. Since much of what concerns this paper lies in this missive, I will cite the majority of it and mention to it throughout.

What is trouble oneself me endlessly is the inquiry what Christianity truly is, or so who Christ truly is, for us today. The clip when people could be told everything by agencies of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the clip of kernel and scruples — and that means the clip of faith in general. We are traveling towards a wholly religionless clip ; people as they are now merely can non be spiritual any more. Even those who candidly describe themselves as Areligious do non in the least act up to it, and so they presumably average something rather different by Areligious.

Our whole nineteen-hundred-year-old Christian sermon and divinity remainder on the Areligious a priori of world. AChristianity has ever been a signifier — possibly the true signifier — of Areligion. But if one twenty-four hours it becomes clear that this a priori does non be at all, but was a historically conditioned and transeunt signifier of human self-expression, and if hence adult male becomes radically religionless — and I think that that is already more or less the instance. . . what does that mean for AChristianity? [5]

It is of import here to first understand what Bonhoeffer meant by Areligion. Bonhoeffer is non mentioning to the Christian religion by the word Areligion here, but to the Aso called Areligious facet of human nature that has been the presupposed foundation for Christian religion. [6] Areligion is Alonging

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for the ageless, or another sophistication, when we really belong entirely to this universe.[7] Harmonizing to Eberhard Bethge, all that is religious for Bonhoeffer is characterized by a emotional withdrawal from the universe ; the individualistic orientation toward the existence of the universe, toward art and civilization, . . . a private matter of single kernel.[8] And when Christian religion takes on a religion for Bonhoeffer, it takes a the signifier of a particular being which [has] small to make with the existent flow of life in its actions and wickedness, its duties and weakness. . . It moves toward & gt ; pure inwardness= or a kingdom of & gt ; metaphysics.= [9] In Bonhoeffer, a religion can besides be seen as the a human activity to make the beyond, the posit of a divinity in order to acquire aid and protection when needed. . . [And] the & gt ; religious= adult male looks in his hurt to the power of God in the universe. He needs a deus ex machina to acquire him out of his troubles.[10] This is what Christian religion becomes as a a religion. Alternatively of being the centre of all human being, it is relegated to the sphere of the a last resort when all else fails. God is merely some being one calls on when in demand of aid. God is non concerned with mundane life, merely the after life. God is merely a manner of explicating the unaccountable, like natural catastrophes.

Religious people speak of God when human cognition (possibly merely because they are excessively lazy to believe) has come to an terminal, or when human resources fail — in fact it is ever the deus ex machina that they bring onto the scene, either for the evident solution of indissoluble jobs, or as strength in human failure — ever, that is to state, working human failing or human boundaries. Of necessity, that can travel on merely till people can by

their ain strength push these boundaries slightly further out, so that God becomes otiose as a deus ex machina. . . I should wish to talk of God non on the boundaries but at the Centre, non in failing but in strength. . . As to the boundaries, it seems to me better to be soundless and leave the indissoluble unresolved. . . God= s Abeyond is non the beyond of our cognitive modules. . . God is the beyond in the thick of our life. The church stands, non at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the center of the small town.[11]

One of the things Bonhoeffer appears to desire to make is acquire rid of the thought of a God who is the reply to all of life= s jobs as One who is turned to merely in times of failing and problem. He sees that secularisation is already making that to the point where worlds will larn how to be before God without God.

To endorse up some and see more clearly what is go oning in Bonhoeffer, we need to look at his first propensities toward what is known as Aworldliness. William Hamilton begins his survey of the major subjects in Bonhoeffer= s divinity of the Letters with Athe thought of sophistication that leads to Athe non-religious reading of Christianity, the thought of Athe world= s coming-of-age, and the apogee of all this with the construct of Aparticipation in the agony of God.[12]

We see foremost in Bonhoeffer a strong concern for Athis-world as opposed to an Aother-worldliness. This is illustrated by the letters written from prison on December 18, 1943, January 23, 1944, and May 20, 1944 severally.

I believe that we ought so to love and swear God in our lives, and in all the good things that he sends us, that when the clip comes (but non before!) we may travel to him with love, trust, and joy. . . We ought to happen and love God in what he really gives us. . .

I think we honor God more if we appreciatively accept the life that he gives us with all its approvals, loving it and imbibing it to the full, and besides sorrowing profoundly and unfeignedly when we have impaired or wasted any of the good things of life. . .

What I mean is that God wants us to love him everlastingly with our whole Black Marias — non in such a manner as to wound or weaken our earthly love, but to supply a sort of cantus firmus to which the other tunes of life provide the counterpoint. One of the contrapuntal subjects... is earthly fondness.[13]

At this point in Bonhoeffer= s idea, the concern for Athis universe really leads one into concern for the Aother universe. The Aother universe is really hidden in and discovered in the Athis universe. But all this becomes more complex as Bonhoeffer begins the move toward what he sees as the demand for a Anon-religious reading of Christianity. This all goes back to the April 30 missive from 1944 which I quoted from earlier and the beginning of his rejection of Areligion described as Ainward, Aother-worldly and Ametaphysical. Bonhoeffer seems to believe that a Areligious Christianity concerned more with the Ainner life and Aother universe makes God irrelevant in Athis universe that has appeared to lose its spiritual a priori. His concern for Athis universe is a Christological 1 that wants to do Christ

relevant to all of life today: Awhat is Christ for us today? It is with the relevancy of Christ to those who may non hold a spiritual a priori.

At this point it may be helpful look some at Bonhoeffer= s Christology and its topographic point in his apprehension of a Anon-religious reading of Christianity. The topographic point that Bonhoeffer presents his Christology consistently is his talks on the topic in 1933. Russell Palmer provides a helpful survey of Bonhoeffer= s Christology to which I will mention here. For Bonhoeffer, Christology is concerned with the inquiry AWho are you? or the individuality of Christ and non straight with how it is that Jesus can be both godly and human. The latter is non answerable since it is a scientific inquiry. The inquiry of AWho are you? is a inquiry of religion.[14]

In response to the inquiry of the individuality of Christ, it is suggested that Bonhoeffer

begins his Christology with a consideration of Christ as the 1 who is present... . only as the crucified and lift one [and as] the historic Christ, the historical Jesus of Nazareth... . [I] t is of import... to get down with the individual of Christ as a present world because his presence... makes Christology possible. The presence of Christ is his being Ahere and now in the community of religion via word and sacrament, and this presence in bend presupposes the Resurrection because merely the risen one can be present here and now.[15]

Here we see the societal dimension of Bonhoeffer= s divinity with Christ being present in the church or the Christian community. But we can besides see from the talks that Christ exists as the Centre of all creative activity.
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The nature of the individual of Christ is to be temporally and spatially in the Centre. The 1 who is present in Word, sacrament and community is in the Centre of human being, history and nature. It is portion of the construction of his individual that he stands in the Centre.[16]

The two facets of Bonhoeffer= s Christology that are of import for this present survey are his accent on Christ as the 1 who became a human being, and AChrist as the broken and exalted one.[17]The first is his strong avowal of the embodiment and Jesus as the AIncarnate One. The concern here is non with Ahow it is so, but in how we talk about its world:

If Jesus is to be described as God, so we may non talk of... his omnipotence and his omniscience, but... of his cradle and his cross... [and] of his failing. In Christology one looks at the whole historical adult male Jesus and says of him, AHe is God. One does non first expression at a human nature and so beyond it to a godly nature, one meets the one adult male Jesus Christ, who is to the full God.[18]

The 2nd accent on the paradox of Ahumiliation and ecstasy continues the first by maintaining the paradox in balance.

Therefore Ahumiliation does non intend a province where the Incarnate 1 is more adult male and less God... . In humiliation and ecstasy, Jesus remains to the full adult male and to the full God. The statement AThis is God must be made of the Humiliated One in merely the same manner as it is made of the Exalted One.[19]

With Bonhoeffer's Christology in head, I will now go on with the survey of his Anon-religious reading of Christianity which is really AChristocentric. We have already seen his rejection of the Areligious a priori which is the premise that worlds need the thought of God to do sense of the universe.

Harmonizing to Hamilton, his onslaught at first on Areligion and the accent of existential philosophy and psychotherapeutics on the Ainner and personal life is Biblical, demoing the Bible's concern for the Awhole individual in relation to God. But still he searches for a stronger, more Christological statement.[20]As seen earlier, one of his desires is for divinity to talk beyond the boundaries of human being to the Centre of human life. He wants humanity's first brush with God to be in the comprehensiveness of life, non at the point of failing, desperation, and decease. A Anon-religious Christianity is concerned with day-to-day life and non the unanswerable inquiries of ultimateness. Worlds have found replies to these inquiries on their ain. The intent of Christianity is non in run intoing demands, work outing jobs, and supplying replies to life's inquiries, but to be the Centre of all human being and take part in it to the full.[21]

We are to happen God in what we know, non in what we don't know ; God wants us to recognize his presence, non in unresolved jobs but in those that are solved. That is true of the relationship between God and scientific cognition, but it is besides true of the wider human jobs of decease, agony, and guilt. It is now possible to happen, even for these inquiries, human replies that take no history of God. In point of fact, people deal with these inquiries without God (it has ever been so) , and it is merely non true to state that merely Christians have the replies to them... . God is no stop-gap ;

He must be recognized at the centre of life, not when we are at the terminal of our resources ; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not merely when death comes ; in wellness and energy, and not merely in enduring ; in our activities, and not merely in wickedness. The ground for this lies in the disclosure of God in Jesus Christ. He is the Centre of life, and he surely did not come to reply our unresolved jobs.[22]

The last two sentences here show the Christological footing for his non-religious reading. The lone manner we can talk of God's involvement in the Centre of human being is in Christological footings. That is the lone manner to avoid the inwardness of a religious Christianity which Bonhoeffer so strongly opposes. We speak of the humiliation of Christ as One who took on flesh and truly bore our wickedness, but besides as One who lives in the centre of life. The non-religious reading speaks of Christ as one who embraced the whole of human being. Jesus' attack was not to do people evil-doers in order to do room for the demand of God, but to name people out of wickedness as he affirmed the good in them. Therefore, Bonhoeffer continues his pursuit for a Christological footing for his non-religious reading by conveying the life of Jesus to bear on the cross.

Jesus is the footing for the avowal of the secular universe. It is Christ's life, enduring, death, and Resurrection that demonstrate his credence of it. Therefore, secularisation is something good that enables us to meet Christ in strength and not failing. It allows us the freedom to walk with Christ as a individual and not as an objectified being that provides replies to life's inquiries.

The Christian is to encompass the universe as Jesus did. For Bonhoeffer,

Christ is one who speaks to a universe come-of-age.

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Our coming of age leads us to a true acknowledgment of our state of affairs before God. God would hold us cognize that we must populate as work forces who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15: 34) . The God who lets us populate in the universe without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the universe and on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the universe, and that is exactly the manner, the lone manner, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8: 17 makes it rather clear that Christ helps us, non by virtuousness of his omnipotence, but by virtuousness of his failing and agony.[23]

The universe come-of-age accepts its heritage of Renaissance and Enlightenment and means that the secularisation of the universe includes the death of the spiritual life, a non-religious reading of Christianity.[24]The world= s Acoming-of-age is Bonhoeffer= s manner of speaking about God= s relation to the universe. Recent history has led to an independent humanity that has learned to cover with life= s jobs without resort to God for aid. AGod as a on the job hypothesis is being edged out of the universe devising room for God= s Lordship through failing.[25]And this procedure of secularisation is to be accepted as the duty of the church to unclutter the deck for God in the universe as Jesus who exists for others.

This is where secularisation is greeted by Bonhoeffer= s Christology as Aparticipation in the agony of God at the custodies of a irreverent universe. AThe universe semen of age... is the universe in which God suffers.[26]

Man is summoned to portion in God= s agonies of God at the custodies of a irreverent universe.

He must therefore truly unrecorded in the godless universe, without trying to gloss over or explicate its godlessness in some spiritual manner or other. He must populate a Asecular life (as 1 who has been freed from false spiritual duties and suppressions) . To be a Christian does non intend to be spiritual in a peculiar manner, to do something of oneself (a evildoer, a penitent, or saint) on the footing of some method or other, but to be a adult male — non a type of adult male, but the adult male that Christ creates in us. It is non the spiritual act that makes the Christian, but engagement in the agonies of God in the secular life. That is [transition] : non in the first topographic point believing about one= s ain demands, jobs, wickednesss, and frights, but leting oneself to be caught up into the manner of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event... .

When we speak of God in a Anon-religious manner, we must talk of him in such a manner that the atheism of the universe is non in some manner concealed, but instead revealed, and therefore exposed to an unexpected visible radiation. The universe that has come of age is more irreverent, and possibly for that really ground nearer to God, than the universe before its approach of age.[27]

In this subdivision we see the rejection of the two kingdoms of secular and sacred. The separation is broken by Jesus whose Lordship draws the two kingdom together through his agony and humiliation. What we have in Jesus is the 1 who exists for others in resistance to individuality and kernel. The

loss of Areligion makes room for Jesus. And alternatively of meeting Jesus as a supreme and transcendent Being, the experience of transcendency occurs in the new life we have for others. Merely as we participate in the agonies of Christ in the universe, by bearing the loads of others, can we be called AChristian.

As we look once more to Bonhoeffer= s concern at the beginning of this paper with AWho Christ is for us today, we see Jesus as the broken One life for others through the power of failing. But what is the topographic point of the apparently Areligious facets of worship and supplication? It now appears that worship and supplication is for the universe and carried out in the universe. Prayer is non to be used to show our ain desires, but allows us to stand following to Christ who suffers in the universe. We take on Christ= s loads and therefore all others as we see them standing under the cross. Prayer and worship unfastened us to the universe and are carried out in our life for others.[28]

The concern we now have with Bonhoeffer for today is with his relevancy to a society and Christianity that seemingly remains Areligious. His diagnosing of the death of faith may non be accurate as a anticipation. But is his review still a valid one? My decision is that his divinity is still really valid along with his review of Areligion as Ainwardness. Although the kernel continues to prevail and the sacred is separated from the layman, the AChrist for others motif is still needed today.

In the book I quoted from earlier by George G. Hunter, III, suggestions are made for the divinity required to talk to today= s Asecular individual, many

of which conveying Bonhoeffer's attack to mind. One suggestion that has some ties is the thought of getting down with the humanity of Jesus and letting the Godhead facet to uncover itself. Bonhoeffer's concrete and personal Jesus who suffers in the universe speaks to that possibility. The other thought that relates to his Christology is that of Christ being present in the Christian community and people meeting Christ at that place. Another sequence would be to ask for people to perpetrate to Christ by appealing to them in strength, and not by seeking to do them recognize their demand for God due to their wickedness. We could redefine our demand for God so that it includes our strength, not merely our failing. Bonhoeffer's words against the separation of secular and sacred is still really applicable today.

Harmonizing to Hunter, a feasible Christian religion today has to be able to talk to and confirm all of life. We worship in the universe as we seek to be at that place for others.[29]

All in all, Bonhoeffer's strong accent on life for and in the universe is a great excusatory for prosecuting the secular head. A transcendent God of the Aboundaries is irrelevant to those who have learned to populate good in the universe without turning to God. Merely a agony God can stand beside them and talk to them in the bosom of life. Karl Barth had and still has a powerful influence in the church, but Bonhoeffer has allowed for that influence to permeate the universe.[30] A Christian religion that merely speaks to itself has become a Areligion, but Jesus calls the church and the universe to new life lived in the universe.

Bonhoeffer... believed battle with the universe to be imperative if the church is to cut any ice, but the church would hold to populate its message in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-gospel-for-a-secular-humanity-theology-religion/>

world= s thick and learn to talk a Anon-religious linguistic communication.

[31]