The Bonhoeffer twins, Dietrich and Sabine, were born on February 4th, 1906, the sixth and seventh children of a family of eight. By present day standards the Bonhoeffer household was rather lavish. The household over which Dietrich’s mother, Paula, presided had a staff of at least five, including a governess, a nurse or nanny, a housemaid, a parlor maid, and a cook. Dietrich’s father, Karl, was a university teacher and physician. The Bonhoeffers were not a church-going family. Although Dietrich’s parents knew the Bible well, the children were not sent to church. Paula catechized her soon-to-be famous son at home thus fulfilling her responsibility as a good Lutheran parent. No parish pastor appears to have played any significant part in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s social upbringing or in his choice of vocation. Against overwhelming odds, then, Dietrich firmly decided to be a minister and a theologian as a young boy. His brothers and sisters challenged his choice. When he was about fourteen they tried to persuade him that the church to which he proposed to devote himself was a poor, feeble, boring, petty and bourgeois institution. He confidently replied: “In that case I shall reform it!”

What is it then about Bonhoeffer’s life and writings that draws interest from so many different people? Larry Rasmussen cautions us not to equate Bonhoeffer’s “full measure” too quickly with his martyrdom. He writes:

Is martyrdom why PBS airs a documentary about him and USA Today gives a full-page article? Is his death sufficient cause for an opera in his name or a statue in Westminster Abbey? Does the drama of prison and execution truly explain the Bonhoeffer phenomenon? Let’s step back a moment and consider: Which Bonhoeffer do we actually meet across his 39 years. Is it the pastor, the patriot, the poet, the professor, the pursuer of peace or some other? Several Bonhoeffer’s [sic] seem to surface.
As interest in Bonhoeffer has exploded so too have the plurality of projections about “his meaning for today.” Harvey Cox once likened the diverse interpretations of Bonhoeffer to a Rorschach test. People usually reveal more about themselves in the process than about Bonhoeffer. Stephen Haynes maps out the complex world of Bonhoeffer scholarship with a recent survey entitled, The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint. The results of his work are both enlightening and sobering. Haynes structures his portraits of the “Protestant saint” under the following headings: Seer: the Radical Bonhoeffer; Prophet: The Liberal Bonhoeffer; Apostle: The Conservative Bonhoeffer; Bridge: The Universal Bonhoeffer; Saint: The function and form of Christian Hagiography; Cult: Expressions of the Bonhoeffer Phenomenon; and Domestication: The Perils of Protestant Sainthood.

Given the preponderance of this “Rorschach effect,” it is with some trepidation that yet another name will be given to the configuration of all those theological blots (i.e. fragments) inherited from Bonhoeffer’s writings and Bethge’s indispensable biography. The “new angle” is Bonhoeffer’s identity as a Lutheran confessor. Does the lens of the Lutheran confessional tradition open up new avenues for grasping how Bonhoeffer understood himself as a theologian and a disciple of Christ? The contention of this article is that for Bonhoeffer, the life of a disciple of Christ was the life of a confessor.

Bonhoeffer’s eclectic engagement with theologians like Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Althaus, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Holl is well documented. It is also clear that Bonhoeffer’s theological framework relied heavily on Martin Luther. But whereas studies are quick to point to Luther’s influence on Bonhoeffer’s thought, few go the next step and inquire about the influence of the Lutheran confessional tradition on him. In other words, Bonhoeffer is often approached through the hermeneutical lens of Luther, not confessional Lutheranism.

Ironically, it was Bonhoeffer’s own fascination with “arcane” theological and spiritual issues which led his contemporaries to label
his initiatives as "routing out ancient halberds from dusty ecclesial armories." Today, it would be truly ironic if these same "ancient halberds" led contemporary theologians, especially Lutheran ones, to dismiss their own confessional material in Bonhoeffer as arcane, out-dated, and thus extrinsic to the central picture of one of the church's guiding lights.

This article cannot explore in great detail all the fascinating dimensions of confessional thought in either the first (early scholarly period from 1923 to 1932) or final (period of resistance and prison after 1939 to his death in 1945) periods of his life. Leave it to say, however, that the scholarly consensus is that Bonhoeffer's life and writings form a fundamental continuity over his entire life. Therefore, if it can be shown that confessing and confession are central themes for him from 1933 to 1939, then it can be confidently assumed that this same evangelical dynamic played itself out at other times in his life as well, even in prison.

This article argues that Bonhoeffer's identity should include "confessor" as a fundamental dynamic that drove him spiritually, theologically and politically. It is his role as a confessor that best explains his participation in both the Confessing Church and the conspiracy to kill Hitler. Moreover re-discovering this dimension of Bonhoeffer will assist us in discovering the relationship between discipleship and grace as we struggle to live out our own callings as public evangelical leaders today.

Confessional complexities have characterized German church history since the Reformation. Bonhoeffer was well steeped in this history. In 1830, Frederick William III of Prussia sent out a directive commissioning the arrangement of a tercentennial celebration of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V. This celebration was to be conducted by a Protestant church divided over the authoritative status of confessions in general and the Augsburg Confession in particular. The disagreement over confessions was to supply the proposed festival with a seriousness which it otherwise would not have enjoyed.

One prominent preacher and theologian found himself caught in the middle of this confessional feud, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher went on that year to preach an entire series of ser-
Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) as Confessor

mons on the Augsburg Confession. In defense of his participation in the festival, he explained his position regarding the confessional documents as follows:

I believe it was possible for a minister to say confidently on this festive occasion, even in the pulpit, that the document presented on that day should not be measured by the standard of our times, and that one must in many points judge it with caution . . . And yet if . . . we acknowledge that our church has not stood still for three hundred years in the purification of Christian doctrine by means of biblical scholarship, that could not retract one bit from our celebration . . . For the celebration does not hold for the document anyway . . . but for its presentation [Übergabe]: it is not the work that is being celebrated but the deed.8

By underlining “deed” instead of “content,” Schleiermacher was siding with the act of confessing over the authoritative content of the confession, the fides qua at the expense of the fides quae creditur. Such a decision didn’t please everyone. B. A. Gerrish comments about the situation in 1830: “The confessional questions, raised earlier by the formation of the union [Prussian Union of 1817], had been raised again; and the tercentennial was to be celebrated by a church officially united in confession but actually divided over the status of confessions . . . 9

What was true at the tercentennial celebration of the Augsburg Confession remained true up to the quadricentennial in 1930. The same unresolved dilemmas surrounding a common approach to “confession” and “confessing” played themselves out in 1930 in the same way as they had in 1830—and as they would four years later in Barmen. The tension remained between the authority of the new versus the old confession, Reformed versus Lutheran models, and the fides qua (the faith by which one confesses) versus the fides quae creditur (content of faith which is confessed).

Bonhoeffer not only understood these confessional complexities, he embodied their legacy already at the time of Barmen’s convocation in 1934. In contrast to Schleiermacher, he desired to resolve the confessional stalemate without losing the content of the historic confessions as still existentially valid. The fides quae creditur should not be sacrificed in the act of confessing. On the other
hand, Bonhoeffer was ready to forge ahead “with God’s guidance” toward the formation and declaration of a new living confession together with other non-Lutherans, accepting the “dangerous” ecclesiastical consequences for German Protestantism, and especially German Lutheranism, which this confessional “union” might bring. These views on confession were not traditional, but rooted in tradition. They were theological in nature, but also theologically “questionable.”

Bonhoeffer’s participation with Herman Sasse in formulating the Bethel confession is illustrative of the growing role that confession played throughout the whole middle period of Bonhoeffer’s life and writings. Three insights from this period of time are important to retain:

1. Bonhoeffer’s writings and theological interests from 1933 to 1939 unveil the prominent role confession played in this thinking;
2. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutical understanding of confession was not generically “Lutheran” but a particular school of Lutheran confessionalism; and
3. Bonhoeffer’s use of “confession” in the middle period appears explicitly in his many articles and activities but only implicitly in his major books.

Confession during the Church Crisis (the Middle Period)

What made Bonhoeffer’s confessorhood unique was not that he was a confessor over against other pastors or theologians in Germany. Evangelical confessors abounded in Germany from 1933, to 1939. What made Bonhoeffer unique was that he intentionally practiced three different modes of confession. These modes of confession will be characterized here as:

Evangelical Confessor: Bonhoeffer found common cause with other Lutheran and Reformed confessors who grasped the theological, ecclesiological, and legal dynamics of being Protestant, i.e., Evangelical.
Lutheran Confessor: Bonhoeffer interpreted the confessional nature of the church from a particular “evangelical” stance; that is, as a Lutheran.

Formula of Concord Confessor: Bonhoeffer understood the internal functioning of confessing as a particular class of Lutheran in that he both accepted and engaged the rules of the Formula of Concord.

The following is a short account of the major historical and theological events in Bonhoeffer's life during the middle period. The role of confession, understood in its three different modes, was of central concern in each of these events.

The Jewish Question Ignites the Confessional Fires

Bonhoeffer was one of the first evangelical theologians to attack the Aryan legislation in writing based on the confessional nature of the church. In his essay on “The Church and the Jewish Question,” he stated clearly what options were open to church in relating to the state. Bonhoeffer mapped out three ways in which the church could react. First, it should call upon the state to look again at its responsibilities (this is the church's prophetic call). Second, it must aid the victims who suffer under state action (in this case, the Jews). Third, there was the possibility “not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.” The last option, as described by Bonhoeffer, was to be strictly a confessional-theological act, as opposed to a purely political act. The “spoke in the wheel” option was to be inaugurated only after a breach of the gospel could be established by an evangelical council. By the decree of an evangelical council, a status confessionis could be declared in which the whole church recognized that the integrity of its identity and gospel-message were at risk of the state’s actions.

Amidst the confusion and intrigue surrounding the July 23rd election of church officers and the law of April 7, 1933, on the “Reconstruction of the Civil Service,” it was clear to Bonhoeffer that a status confessionis as defined by the Formula of Concord had arrived.
On the Sunday of the election, Bonhoeffer preached in Berlin and called the church to confession.

Church stay a church! But church confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord, from his grace alone can you live as you are . . . The Confessing Church is the eternal church because Christ protects her.\textsuperscript{14}

The broad range of confessional terms used by Bonhoeffer is particularly evident in the draft of a protest, signed by Bonhoeffer and Niemoller on September 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1933, which would later serve as a foundation for the League's celebrated points [phrases in italics mine]:

1. According to the Confession of our Church, the teaching office of the Church is bound only to the authorized calling [Evangelical Confessor]. The Aryan clause of the Church Civil Service Law has given rise to a legal situation which is in direct opposition to the fundamental principle of the Confession [Lutheran Confessor]. In this way, a situation which must be regarded as unlawful from the point of view of the Confession has been proclaimed as the law of the church and has violated the Confession.

2. There can be no doubt that the ordained ministers affected by the Civil Service law, in so far as they have not been deprived by formal procedure of the rights of the clerical profession, should continue to exercise in full the right freely to proclaim the Word and freely to administer the sacraments in the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union, which is based upon the Confession of the Reformation [Evangelical and Lutheran Confessor].

3. Anyone who assents to such a breach of the Confession excludes himself from the communion of the Church [Formula of Concord Confessor]. We therefore demand the repeal of the law which separates the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union from the Christian Church.

Niemöller called upon the German clergy to protest on September 12\textsuperscript{th} and to pledge themselves "to a new allegiance
to the Scriptures and Confessions . . . and to reject the Aryan clause.” A “time of confessing” in terms of the Formula of Concord’s Article 10 had arisen—for Bonhoeffer at least. This situation necessitated a return by the churches to the basics of gospel and confession [Evangelical Confession]; it demanded that ecclesiastical-legal rights be recognized by the state and other churches [Evangelical and Lutheran Confession]; and for Bonhoeffer, it raised the warming flag that the central teaching of the church, and thus the theological foundation for church and state, were being compromised [Formula of Concord Confession].

*London; the Confessing Church Gains Strength—1933–1935*

When Bonhoeffer became overwhelmed with church matters he always moved abroad—once to London in 1933 and twice to New York (1930, 1939). On October 17th, 1933 Bonhoeffer moved into the German vicarage in South London. For the first time Bonhoeffer had a regular pastorate. Two events received wide publicity during the first few months of Bonhoeffer’s stay in England. First, the English press debated in detail the Wittenberg manifesto, “To the National Church” of September 1933, which had been sent to the synod by two thousand pastors of the newly formed Pastor’s Emergency League. By virtue of its initial letter, Bonhoeffer’s name was prominent at the head of the list of twenty-two signatories. Second, everyone in London was eager to learn about the details of the Sports Place “scandal.” As an insider to these events, Bonhoeffer was in a good position to defend the cause of the church opposition. He used this position in London to create growing pressure on the newly formed German Church. Telegrams, not theological books, were the weapons of choice sent from the German churches in London to the central offices of the German Evangelical Church.

Bonhoeffer had long since decided that the church was heading for schism; that is, a division caused by confessional disagreements. In London, Bonhoeffer worked tirelessly with the German community and with Anglican church leaders in order to prepare for the split. With the Aryan clause, Bonhoeffer believed that schism had been brought to the church. But it was for this same reason that
Bonhoeffer was shocked by Barth’s response to his own conclusions. “If there is to be schism, it must come from the other side,” writes Barth.\(^{15}\)

This initial disagreement between Barth and Bonhoeffer points in actuality toward two different approaches to the hermeneutics of confession. Barth’s and Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutics for defining a confessional situation generally ran along traditional Reformed-Lutheran confessional lines of interpretation. In Bonhoeffer’s case, the additional Lutheran hermeneutical category of status confessionis, drawn from the *Formula of Concord*, was a key category distinguishing him from Barth.

Preparing his parishes for a church schism became Bonhoeffer’s driving project within his time in London. Not everyone in his parishes understood all the confessional hermeneutics behind such a drastic move, but the parishes followed his analysis and called for concrete action. They were some of the only German congregations outside of Germany to do so.

*The Confessions—Bethel, Barmen, Dahlem*\(^{16}\)

Confessional action increasingly became viewed as the appropriate genre for responding to the church crisis in Germany. Groups sprang up everywhere in Germany calling for confessional action. A notice by one of these groups, the Young Reformers read:

> Within this context, not only are the Reformation confessions being referred to, but also the new contemporary confessions, for example, the “Confession of the Altoner Pastors,” or the “Attempt at a Lutheran catechism” from Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt. In a not so long time, even from within our circles a confession will emerge which will provide the most appropriate foundation for the training of the congregation.\(^{17}\)

Bonhoeffer believed that both the historical confessions were authoritative and that the Holy Spirit could speak through a “new” confession, thus binding the confessors to the Word of God and to each other through their confessing. Confessions, both old and new, became Bonhoeffer’s tools for spiritual battle.
I come in certainty and thankfulness that God has let me know the way for his church through his word and the church's confession. I do not go to such meetings as to a Quaker meeting, in which each time I should first have to wait for new directions from the Holy Spirit; I go to them rather as to a battlefield, in which the Word of God is in conflict with all human views and would be used as a sharp sword. What takes place here is not representation of a piece of realized Christian life, but a struggle for truth. I do not wait here somehow for an "intervention of the Spirit of God" as you write. God's Spirit battles only through the Word of Scripture and of Confession, and only where my insights are overwhelmed by Scripture and confession can I know myself to be overwhelmed with the Spirit of God.\textsuperscript{18}

Bonhoeffer was a recognized leader in the formation of the Pastors' Emergency League. As a leader in a movement which affirmed a return to "Bible and Confession," he was asked by Friedrich von Bodelschwing to help draft a new confession, the Bethel Confession, as an attempt to counter Nazi ideology creeping into the Evangelical Church. Furthermore, although he was not invited to Barmen in 1934, Bonhoeffer affirmed strongly the Barmen Declaration and its later interpretation at Dahlem as more than a mere declaration to be studied and interpreted by each confessional community. He acknowledged their theological status as "confessions."\textsuperscript{19}

Although people often spoke about the "Altoner Bekenntnis" and the "Confessions of 1933," the actual synod at Barmen was extremely cautious in regard to terminology and avoided using the word "Bekenntnis" (i.e., Confession) so as not to offend the confessional sensitivities of the Lutherans, the Reformed and the Union church delegates or create a new "union" church through the development of a common confession. Bonheoffer seems to throw the caution of the Barmen Synod to the wind. He interpreted Barmen and Dahlem outright as "confessions" not mere declarations. In fact, "Word of God" status or "a common word" is at times used to affirm their authority.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{The Ecumenical Movement}

The use of confession within Bonhoeffer's writings is never as forceful or all-encompassing as in the document, "The Confessing
Bonhoeffer had been active in the ecumenical movement. A conference had been arranged in May 1935 to prepare for the 1937 Oxford Conference. Bonhoeffer was invited to participate as a representative of the Confessing Church. The problem facing Geneva was which church would be invited to represent the German church at this ecumenical gathering, the newly formed Confessing Church or the German Reich Church. Geneva wanted to act in a conciliatory manner and invite representatives from all the warring sides of the German church dispute. Bonhoeffer argued against this weak posture. Geneva, he thought, needed to stop evading the decision as to which was the "real" church in Germany. Bonhoeffer wrote:

A church without a confession or free from one is not a church, but a sect, and makes itself master of the Bible and the Word of God. A confession is the church's formulated answer to the Word of God in Holy Scripture, expressed in its own words. Now unity of confession is a part of the true unity of the church.  

Bonhoeffer claimed the Confessing Church was fighting vicariously for all Christendom. It was the participation in the Ecumenical Movement which called the Confessing Church to articulate precisely its confessional nature in relationship to the whole church. It was, on the other hand, the Confessing Church which challenged the Ecumenical Movement to deal with its very existence in relation to confession. Thus Bonhoeffer was trying to challenge the ecumenical church to recognize the confessional nature of church. Such recognition would fundamentally change the way the Ecumenical movement went about its business.

The Confessing Church is the church which would be exclusively governed in all its totality by the confession. It is fundamentally impossible to enter into conversation with this church at any point without immediately raising the question of the confession. Because the Confessing Church has learnt in the church struggle that from the preaching of the gospel to the taxing of the churches, the church must be governed by the confession and the confession alone, because there is no neutral ground, divorced from the confession, within her, she immediately confronts any partner in conversation with the question of confession.
Confession and Church Boundaries

Given the “modern” church’s penchant for religious tolerance, no topic is potentially as embarrassing as Bonhoeffer’s strict pronouncements against the German Christians in the July 1936 issue of *Evangelische Theologie*. The infamous sentence from the article spread like wildfire: “Whoever knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation.” The phrase was later reduced by opponents to read, “Those without a Red Card won’t go to heaven!” Explanation was immediately demanded from Bonhoeffer by all sides for theological reasons as well as for financial ones.

The reactions to Bonhoeffer’s modern application of the ancient doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, came swiftly. Objections arose throughout Germany, on all sides of the Church Struggle, because Bonhoeffer pronounced an anathema, in the fullest confessional sense of the word, against those confessing Christians who associated “knowingly” with the German Christian church. Martin Niemöller called this “spiritual adultery.” The vitriol of the attacks seems to have taken Bonhoeffer by surprise. Bonhoeffer wrote to Barth, “People are getting terribly excited about it. And really I thought that what I was writing was axiomatic.” A statement by the Rhineland Council to queries about Bonhoeffer’s infamous phrase explains his intent:

Bonhoeffer’s statements are ‘based on the thesis that the call “Here is the church” is synonymous with the call “Here is the gospel.’ The Rhineland Council sees in this thesis a legitimate interpretation of the reformatory concept of the Church . . . Anyone who persistently repudiates the call “Here is the Church, here is the Gospel” raised by the Confessing Church, has broken with the gospel as it is preached . . .

How did Bonhoeffer support such a radical, uncompromising condemnation against a whole church? Was he acting theologically or church politically? Bonhoeffer writes in response:

So while conversation with other erring churches would be possible, such a possibility no longer exists for conversation between the National Church
and the Confessing Church. Doubtless it would be easy to point out the false doctrines of the German Christians in many other churches. Nevertheless the Confessing Church recognizes a qualitative difference.\(^\text{30}\)

How does Bonhoeffer justify this “qualitative difference?” He uses the notion of confession.

The Confession Church takes its confident way between the Scylla of orthodoxy and the Charybdis of confessionlessness . . . the church will recognize friend and enemy by the Confession . . . The church must decide where the enemy is standing. Because he can stand now on Eucharistic doctrine, another time on the doctrine of justification, a third time on the doctrine of the church, the church has to decide. And in deciding it makes its confession.\(^\text{31}\)

In decisions like these one recognizes elements in Bonhoeffer’s thought and actions can be explained only if Bonhoeffer’s confessional thought is fully grasped as an expression of his ecclesiology and Christology.

Finkenwalde: A Teacher of the Lutheran Confessions

In 1935 the Confessing Church had reached the peak of its development as an organization. This was a time when there still seemed to be a reasonable prospect of success for the church opposition. The seminary at Finkenwalde was one of five seminaries set up by the Confessing Church as an alternative to the state institutions. It wouldn’t be long until they were banned by the government as illegal.

Concerning the curriculum at Finkenwalde, the Lutheran confessional writings played a prominent role in Bonhoeffer’s classes:

From July 1933 onwards, study was centered almost wholly on the confessional writings which at that time aroused the same passionate interest as does the hermeneutical question today. With each term more and more time was allocated to these classes than to any other subject. The authenticity of the binding declarations made by the Protestant church was examined in the light of the concepts of ministry, Church, \textit{adiaphora} and scriptural doctrine.\(^\text{32}\)
Bonhoeffer’s interest in the confessional writings wasn’t merely “pedagogical.” It would appear from the copious notes in his own copy of the *Bekenntnisschriften* that these writings were a major resource for his thought.

During later courses at Finkenwalde it [*Formula of Concord*] was to become the predominant theme in this series of lectures, and his notes, which cover his whole time at the seminary, contain no fewer than eighty-one themes and questions on this subject which he gave as tasks to the ordinands. He loved the *Formula of Concordia* and liked nothing better than to discuss its tendency to express, in the guide of traditional philosophical formulae, the saving truth, and in the doctrines of confessional differentiation, the invitation to salvation.

Lutheran seminarians at Finkenwalde had to take an oath that they would accept the confessional documents as “true interpretations of the Word of God” for their ordination to become pastors. Among Bonhoeffer’s duties as a Lutheran theologian at Finkenwalde, therefore, was the responsibility to teach the Lutheran confessional literature so as to prepare seminarians for their pastoral oath. In addition, as a seminary of the Confessing Church, these same seminarians were to be taught the nature of modern confessions and the role they played with the German church situation. In other words, Barmen and Dahlem were as much a topic for discussion as the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Formula of Concord*.

**The Confessing Church and the Confessional Churches**

How Lutherans were to use the confessions in response to the new crisis remained a problem throughout the Church Struggle. As Bonhoeffer drove to Wittenberg in 1933 to express protest at the Aryan policies of the church on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions, the Erlangen theologians Elert and Althaus undercut his efforts on the basis of the same documents. Althaus’ statement announced; “the church must therefore demand that Jewish Christians hold back from the ministry.” Bonhoeffer’s argument was completely the
opposite, calling the exclusion of Jews from the ministry as grounds for church schism. Both positions referred to the same confessional documents as witnesses. And while the Pastors’ Emergency League was calling on the church to confess in resistance to the take-over of the church by German Christians, Ludwig Müller, the first Bishop of the united German Protestant Church, called German Christians to renewal based upon the confessional documents of the church. The result was constant confessional confusion.

Early in the crisis, Niemöller did not disguise the fact that he would greatly have preferred to consider the Aryan clause as peripheral; that is, as *adiaphorón*. This would have relegated the Aryan clause to a neutral position vis-à-vis the confessions. Sasse, in sharp contrast, understood the Aryan clause from beginning as a major heresy and a break with the confessions. Yet, at Barmen, instead of joining rank with other Protestant churches in Germany to protest the injustices created by the German Christian movement, Sasse’s biggest protest was made in response to a remote but fundamental confessional rule which had been broken or overlooked by the delegates at Barmen. The Barmen document, cautiously labeled by the whole synod merely as a “declaration,” would be later included by Bonhoeffer within his catechism as a confession.

German Christians, the Confessing Church, the “Third Front” Lutherans and the silent majority of Protestants were all confronted with the weighty decisions on how they stood over against the state and each other. Confession quickly became the wedge, the plumb line, the acid test which divided the camps, if not always cleanly. Confessional terminology proliferated as the church grappled with their identities, with their futures, and with the future of Germany.

Bonhoeffer was clear that the old confessions were now insufficient in defining the boundaries of the church. To confess in 1936, one needed more than the Reformation confessions. Bonhoeffer was also conscious of the problems this interest in “new confessions” might create. New confessions made by old confessional opponents meant breaking Lutheran confessional “rules.” One of Bonhoeffer’s greatest concerns, consequently, was how to theologically reconcile his participation in the Lutheran Church and in the Confessing Church at the same time.
Since Barmen, Lutherans and Reformed have been speaking with one voice in synodical declarations. Schismatic differences of confession no longer make it impossible to form a Confessing Synod, though of course the synods are without intercommunion. This is to be taken into consideration as an actual fact. Of course, disputes arise on the confessing side. But the fact is there, and it is up to God to make what he will of it.38

In summary, a rich grasp of confessional thought and action penetrated all the major events of Bonhoeffer's middle period. His articles reflect this tradition; his books mirror this tradition too, but only implicitly. To support this argument, we need to address how Bonhoeffer's identity as confessor related to his call to discipleship.

**Confession and Conversion**

Bonhoeffer began teaching at the seminary in Finkenwalde in 1935. On the surface there appeared nothing special about how Bonhoeffer organized the seminary or the syllabus, that is, except for his series of lectures on discipleship. Bethge reports that after only a few hours in class, newcomers would realize that this was the nerve-center of the whole.39 In essence, Discipleship was an interpretation of justification by grace through faith. Bonhoeffer wanted to unite the confessional articles of "faith," "justification," and "sanctification," under the one concept of "discipleship."40 Faith and obedience, according to Bonhoeffer, shouldn't be so sharply distinguished. Faith and obedience are two sides of one coin. For support, Bonhoeffer went to Scripture and wrestled with the text from Matthew on the Sermon on the Mount. Bonhoeffer's conception of faith as discipleship, however, found little support in the confessional writings. This is fascinating, naturally, because Bonhoeffer was responsible for teaching the confessional writings and the catechism as part of the Finkenwalde curriculum. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer continued to assert that his book built on the validity of Luther's sola fide and sola gratia. His aim, he insisted, was to avoid both extremes and rediscover and restore Luther's language of faith to its full value. His use of "cheap grace," "costly grace" and "discipleship as participation in Christ's sufferings for others," was
Bonhoeffer's way of keeping Matthew and Paul, the gospels and the Pauline epistles, pointing in the same direction.

Bonhoeffer identified himself within the confessional tradition of a church at the brink of a special *kairos* in Germany history, Germany's "hour of destiny." Thus anyone in conversation with Bonhoeffer will necessarily be confronted with the questions of confession and discipleship. But what led to Bonhoeffer's insights about the life of discipleship? Bonhoeffer experienced a conversion in the early 1930s. As a result of this conversion, a new confessional identity emerged that reshaped his ecclesiology, led to his concern for discipleship, and gave him new eyes to see the reality of the church as Christ existing as community. What was then the nature of his conversion experience?

I plunged into work [on *Act and Being*] in a very unchristian way . . . Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian . . . Since then everything has changed . . . It was a great liberation.  

Bonhoeffer disliked conversion stories. Showing emotions in public had been frowned upon at home by his father. Bonhoeffer's frank uneasiness with publicly airing internal struggles may explain why we know so little about the biographical background of his own conversion; his turn from "phraseology to reality." The exercise of analyzing the root causes for his conversion may have been judged too spiritually dangerous. For whatever reason, a significant change took place in Bonhoeffer which was observable to friends, family, and students. Bethge writes, "What Bonhoeffer so serenely describes as a 'turning away from phraseology' and as 'longing for a break' turns out on closer examination to refer to a change in him that took place at a definite time and can be attributed to the period when he was beginning work at the university, in the church, and in the ecumenical movement."  

The date of the conversion corresponded to a general period of time not a specific day, that is, to the whole year of 1932. It was during the course of this year that Bonhoeffer became con-
cretely involved with responsibilities for the church, the ecumenical movement, and the university. Between the winter semesters of 1931/1932 and 1932/1933 the outward signs of Bonhoeffer's turn toward reality consisted of at least six elements. All six outgrowths of Bonhoeffer's turn had a major impact on his ecclesiology as it developed within the new emerging confessional paradigm.

First, there was the "discovery of the Bible as the Word of God," particularly the Sermon on the Mount had great impact as God's Word. Bonhoeffer's new attitude toward the Scripture lay at the heart of all subsequent changes. Second, God's Word was understood as a Word of Christus praesens, a word which united gospel and command. Third, international peace was accepted as a command of God for discipleship "in our time." Fourth, Bonhoeffer began to exercise various disciplina pietatis (e.g. daily devotions and regular church attendance.). Fifth, there was a renewed commitment to the German church and the ecumenical movement. Sixth, there was a new discovery of confession as the basis for church identity, ministry and "knowing the truth" not found within the early dissertations.44

The groundwork for Bonhoeffer's renewed interest in confession was already in place as early as the summer of 1932, as witnessed in Hanns Ruppell's and Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann's class notes on Bonhoeffer's lecture "On the Being of the Church."45 This lecture represents the first systematic handling of confession within the Bonhoeffer corpus and begins to show a transformation of the ecclesiological categories of the dissertations.46 Several intriguing "rules" concerning confession are noted in this 1932 lecture which reappear consistently in later writings. These rules defined the use of confession both inside and outside the church community.

1. Bonhoeffer characterized "word-confession" as an arcane discipline which rightly finds its place within the fellowship of believers. In contrast, the only churchly confession the world can comprehend is a self-interpreting "deed-confession." A "word-confession" is inappropriately used by the church when it functions as propaganda against unbelievers (e.g. The German Christians' "confession" against Marxists). He pejoratively labeled this use of confession as Bekennertum.
2. An evangelical confession involves the question of how one stands before God: it is an existential confession; it is comparable in truth value to a sermon; and it is recognition of truth, not general truths or principles.

3. Based upon the recognition of truth, Bonhoeffer goes on to distinguish an evangelical confession from both the Catholic church and the early church in terms of “the spoken world,” using Luther’s conception of the *viva vox evangelii*. This distinction was even used to call into question the adequacy of the Apostle’s Creed in the service of ordination.47

4. The relationship between Confession and the office of preaching has a vertical and horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension reflects the church’s relationship with God expressed through its verbal confession of faith. The “I” inherent in this confession does not represent the individual but “the collective I” of the congregation, that is Christ confessing in and with the believers as community. The horizontal dimension reflects the power and authority of the office of preaching.

5. The question about the correct preaching of the gospel is decisive for confession, that is, for an existential understanding of divine truth.

6. The Word of God has established three fundamental aspects of the church which must be understood as creations of the Word: the gathering of believers, the office of preaching and confession. Three additional domains of the church are meant to protect these aspects of the Word: theology, the authority of councils over theology and establishment of dogma by the councils.48

By outlining the nature of confession in such detail in 1932, one recognizes that both the epistemological and act-being categories from his Berlin dissertations are now assumed as functions of the church’s confession. This transformation is significant and striking. Bonhoeffer’s unique treatment of his past epistemological and ecclesiological categories marks the beginnings of a significant theological shift toward understanding discipleship and theology.
within a confessional framework. By 1935 Bonhoeffer can formulate the structure of confession more profoundly as a "way of knowing" which "governs her whole sphere ... from taxing the churches to the preaching of the gospel." It took the election of January 20, 1933, and the subsequent events including the Altoner Confession on January 11th, to bring Bonhoeffer to the point on July 23, 1933, where ecclesiology and confession were more systematically linked and developed.

The truly unique feature of Bonhoeffer's "confessional shift" was not that confessional rules were being formed by a community in order to govern its theology and life within a crisis situation. This kind of theologizing would not have represented anything new in Germany. The fascinating feature of Bonhoeffer's confessionalism was his unique correlation of "living confessions," the concrete command and the traditional confessional theology on the one hand, and the relation of ecclesiastical "knowing" with confession on the other.

Bonhoeffer's confessionalism becomes clearer when its Christological foundation in Luther's Eucharistic thought is fully comprehended. Bonhoeffer followed the character of Luther's sacramental argument step for step in his 1932 Christological lectures, making exact distinctions between how Christ is and is not present bodily in word, sacrament and churchly fellowship. Here Christology has become Eucharistic Christology and as Eucharistic theology, the ontological nature of "who" Christ is and "where" he is to be found determines the direction of the soteriological question, not vice versa.

Bonhoeffer's 1933 lectures contain most of the crucial elements of Luther's Christology. This was no accident. Bonhoeffer had immersed himself in Luther's Christology since his student days. He learned many aspects of his own Christology within the context of Luther's notion of Christ's real presence in the Lord's Supper. Bonhoeffer was certainly aware of the fact that Christology and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper had in Luther mutually conditioned each other. Luther's Eucharistic thought thus provides a rich contextual framework for analyzing Bonhoeffer's Christology. Of
particular interest is the fact that just as the Eucharistic debates led Luther to make his "Great Confession" concerning Christ's presence in the bread and wine, so too did the Church Struggle lead Bonhoeffer to make his (in)famous confessional pronouncement concerning Christ's presence in the Confessing Church.\textsuperscript{50} There appears to be, therefore, a direct link between the Eucharistic christologies of Luther and Bonhoeffer and their practice of uncompromising confession.

Gottfried Krodel has observed that the character of Luther's theology can best be described as affirmation; that is, \textit{assertion}.\textsuperscript{51} Krodel suggests that it was the confessional nature of Luther's theology which distinguished him most fundamentally from Erasmus. In his assertions, Luther expressed "my faith" on a wide range of teaching that had been in dispute. On account of Luther's understanding of what the Word was and how it functioned, he treated his confession as a kerygmatic assertion. Any compromise in reference to these assertions would have likewise compromised for him the gospel message. Luther felt compelled to confess Christ's bodily presence in bread and wine because that was his understanding of the gospel's essence. Luther neatly interwove his understanding of assertion (e.g. the words of institution) with confession as faith's response to that address (the response to the words of institution is, "Amen."). Luther's assertion as kerygmatic confession thus embraced both Word-address and the existential Word-response.

The central point here is that Lutheran and Reformed Christians since the 16\textsuperscript{th} century have held a number of theological approaches to their confessions in common: doxological, hermeneutical, catechetical, legal and ecclesiastical. The one major difference is the kerygmatic function of confession. This approach to confession links gospel proclamation and confession and is unique to Lutheran dogmatic history.\textsuperscript{52}

There should be no surprise that Bonhoeffer's kerygmatic assertions became especially pronounced after his Christological lectures in the summer of 1933 were completed. Bonhoeffer's growing dependence on Luther's Christology drew him deeper into the "living word." The stress on \textit{concrete} proclamation and \textit{concrete} response
led Bonhoeffer into making very *concrete* assertions. These assertions would define for Bonhoeffer areas of truth. At two critical times in particular, one can clearly see this kerygmatic approach to assertion. First, the call for a *status confessionis* was raised in response to the Jewish question. Second, Bonhoeffer wrote: "The Confessing Church is the true church of Jesus Christ." Just as Luther declared the Gospel with his confession, "This is my body," Bonhoeffer declared the gospel with his confession, "Here is the Church!"

Many aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology in the middle period are incomprehensible without reviewing the underlying tenets of his Christology which were in place before his confessionalism during the church crisis became apparent. Like Luther before him, Bonhoeffer's Christology led to a life of confessorhood, employed here as both a schematic theological paradigm and a praxis for Christian discipleship.

*The Confessor as Prisoner, Poet, Martyr*

The role of confessional thought and praxis played a prominent role in Bonhoeffer's life and theology during the church crisis. Did this focus, however, remain the same from his return from New York in 1939 until his death at Flossenburg on April 9th, 1945? At first glance, the answer seems to be "no." In sharp contrast to his articles and writings in the middle period, Bonhoeffer's two fragmentary books, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rarely mention confession or confessing directly. Nevertheless, the question about confession is the driving issue for anyone who tries to interpret the final actions of Bonhoeffer's life in prison. Bonhoeffer's label as either "martyr" or unfortunate "collateral damage" of the war depends on the answer to this question.

In order to clarify the role of confession in the last period of his life, three categories of confession in Bonhoeffer need to be identified and distinguished. These categories, which will be labeled as first, second and third order confession, emerged first in Bonhoeffer's dissertations. They function in one form or another throughout Bonhoeffer's life.
First Order Confession (*actus directus*): confessing is a direct response of the church to Christ's address to the world by grace through faith [e.g. repentance, prayer, worship, good works, acts of charity and witness, silence, etc.].

Second Order Confession (*actus reflectus*): Confession is a communal interpretive scheme which establishes authoritatively the nature and existence of the community and governs and guards that community's life of discipleship in the world through *regulae fidei*. It is the "remembering of the church."

Third Order Confession (*the act of preaching—kerygmatic act*): Confessing is the church's living proclamation of and response to both truth and heresy within any particular context.

The role of confession as a communal praxis played itself out systematically in a rather surprising fashion during the third period. Confessional decisions had been made authoritatively at Barmen and Dahlem. They were final; considered by Bonhoeffer as God's Word to the church. But now, beginning already in *Ethics*, this same negative confessional process was forcing Bonhoeffer to step back and look critically at his own Confessing Church. A confessional church was defined by its speech, its confession. Confession was its response to its Christological and ecclesiological "reality." For a church to break a second order confessional rule was merely bad theology, but it was apostasy for a confessing church to compromise a third order confession. Once a church has declared, "Here is the church. Here is the gospel. Come here!”, it denies both itself and the gospel proclamation if it willingly moves from that position. That is how Bonhoeffer interpreted the posture of the Confessing Church by 1939. It willingly removed itself from its living confession, and thus from the reality of Christ's presence in the world itself.

The key to understanding the role of confession in the third period is to see that Bonhoeffer acknowledges the ongoing role of first and second order confessions. The problem with the church is that it has compromised its ability to practice third order confession, that is, to preach Christ contextually in its time. When a church abandons its confession, its only recourse is silence. Silence
transforms the nature of the church within a status confessionis from a speaking church centered on proclamation (third order Confession) to a silent church centered on the confession of sin (first order Confession). By withdrawing itself from speaking "the truth," the Confessing Church was no longer by definition a confessing church. It had lost its right, according to Bonhoeffer, to speak.

One may conclude therefore that Bonhoeffer was not primarily concerned in prison with the church's speaking. He was much more concerned with the form of Christianity in a world come of age. "What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over . . ." He suggests that all that remains for a world-come-of-age confessor was to pray and act responsibly.

In the baptismal sermon from prison, Bonhoeffer summarized these new positive and critical thoughts to his nephew as a baptismal gift. These thoughts mark the end of a process which had begun in 1933. This confessional process which began with ecclesiological words spoken publicly as an authoritative confession of Christ's presence in the church was now ending in a very different fashion.

Today you will be baptized a Christian. All those great ancient words of the Christian proclamation will be spoken over you, and the command of Jesus Christ to baptize will be carried out on you, without your knowing anything about it. But we are once again being driven right back to the beginnings of our understanding. Reconciliation and redemption, regeneration and the Holy Spirit, love of our enemies, cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship—all these things are so difficult and so remote that we hardly venture any more to speak of them. In traditional words and acts we suspect that there may be something quite new and revolutionary, though we cannot as yet grasp and express it. That's our own fault. Our church (i.e., the Confessing Church) which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, incapable of taking the word of reconciliation to the world. Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and action. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action. By the time you have grown up, the church's form will have
changed greatly . . . Till then the Christian cause will be a silent and hidden affair, but there will be those who prayer and do right and wait for God's own time.  

The Confessing Church’s disregard for its living confession led to the call for the church’s silence for the gospel’s sake. This third period marks a period “between the times” when Bonhoeffer searched to re-capture a true worldly confession of Christ in a world come of age. The movement is from an orthodox confession-alism in the middle period to a search for a new worldly confession. In his “Outline for a Book,” Bonhoeffer gathered notes about the future role for a worldly confession of Christ in a church—without religion.

What do we really believe? I mean, believe in such a way that we stake our lives on it? The problem of the Apostle’s Creed? “What must I believe? is the wrong question; antiquated controversies, especially those between the different sects; the Lutheran versus the Reformed, and to some extent Roman Catholic versus Protestant, are now unreal. They may at any time be revived with passion, but they no longer carry conviction.

This text serves as a springboard for highlighting six aspects of confession which are both explicitly and implicitly supported by Bonhoeffer’s letters from prison in the year 1944.

1. Confession as a response to concrete faith-knowledge of God in the world remains a driving concern for Bonhoeffer throughout the letters from prison. “What do we really believe?” and “who is Jesus Christ for us today?” are questions which serve in these letters as leitmotifs.
2. The state of status confessionis had not been rescinded by 1944. This theologically defined crisis was still in force while Bonhoeffer was in prison.
3. Since the Confessing Church had abandoned its living confession during a status confessionis, its entire confession had lost its moorings in Christ’s reality in the world and had become, in Bonhoeffer’s words, “unreal . . . they no longer carry conviction.” The traditional confessional “rules” of the
church, even the Apostles’ Creed, had now become a problem within the German context; that is, “religion” (a phrase borrowed from Barth). A concrete worldly confession was needed, i.e., “religionless Christianity.”

4. Life in the world without God, *etsi deus non daretur*, did not mean life in the world without the church. Bonhoeffer declared in his letter of June 8, 1944, that “God is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground.” Furthermore, “the time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over—and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving towards a completely religionless time.” Nevertheless, “in the place of religion there now stands the church—that is in itself biblical.” “The church stands not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.”

5. Bonhoeffer claimed in his letter of April 30, 1944, that religion had become a garment to be discarded. Without its connection to reality (third order confessing), confession as paradigm and praxis in the church was judged by Bonhoeffer to be dangerous for faith and for the world. Confession without its connection to reality becomes a “historically conditioned and transient form of human self-expression.” He continued by questioning the status of the church, congregation, sermon, liturgy, and Christian life in a religionless Christianity: “How do we speak of God—without religion?” The real intent of this letter is to imagine the form of Christianity in the future. What form will Christianity, the church and the church’s confession take when disrobed of religion?

6. The overarching goal of Bonhoeffer’s letter was to underline the need and the guidelines concerning how the church might search for a new worldly confession of Christ in a world come of age. Unlike Barth, Bonhoeffer didn’t want to be accused of not giving the church concrete guidance as it searched for this goal. The renewal process was envisioned at first in terms of two negative pictures: the picture of circumcision and of the disciples praying with their Lord in Gethsemane. Religion had to be cut away so that the new religionless Christianity might
emerge. Death before resurrection. And while Jesus was being pushed out of the world on the cross, Christians were called to watch with Jesus in the garden and pray. Bonhoeffer risks only a few projections about Christianity in the future. He is much clearer about how to clear away any obstacles from prohibiting this renewal process to occur: ultimate honesty before God, prayer, repentance, silence, and responsible action for others.

In his poetry from prison,\(^{57}\) he writes: "We come before thee as men. As confessors of our sins . . . Until thou wipe out our guilt, keep us in quiet patience."

Bonhoeffer was anxious to use new phrases to express how the church should overcome the division of faith and world. In his letter of July 21, 1944, he wrote about a worldly confession emerging from a church called unreservedly into life's duties:

During the last year of so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*, but simply a man, as Jesus was a man—in contrast, shall we say, to John the Baptist. I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightenment, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this worldly life in this sense . . .

By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failure, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*: and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.\(^{58}\)

The third period was marked theologically by the provocative and now famous notions of "religionless Christianity," "arcane disciplines," "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," "living in the world without God," and the "World come of Age." This new vocabulary was Bonhoeffer's attempt at reestablishing "true" churchly confessions on a new, earthier understanding of Christ's presence in the world. In short, the basis for any true and living confession for Bonhoeffer was the answer to the question, "Who is
Jesus Christ for us today?" This question, developed thematically in the 1933 Christological lectures at the university in Berlin followed him all the way in prison—and to the gallows. The pursuit of this question is one of Bonhoeffer's greatest contributions to the contemporary church today.

Conclusion

The pacifist and the conspirator lands in prison. Fragments of his thought from Tegel prison have tantalized and troubled readers ever since. And there, for the first time, Bonhoeffer pens poetry, like his lament/poem/confession entitled Who am I.59 “Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.”

“O God, I am thine.” Bonhoeffer's confession in prison is profound; and it is simple. It still rings out and draws new readers to his life, and to the life in Christ. Nevertheless, his approach to confessing at the end of his life also had its shortcomings. He raised more questions than answers with his new insights from prison. Bonhoeffer envisioned for the future a new path for theology and discipleship in the new world brought on by both the German kairos and the church's inability to respond. Within the rapidly changing world that Bonhoeffer could already see from his tiny single cell No. 92 in Tegel prison, he knew a new vocabulary was required. The concrete reality of Christ's cruciform presence in the world needed new articulation. But in order to learn this new vocabulary the church needed to follow a certain path; that is, it was bound in the interim to “silently prepare [itself] till though doest call us to new times.”60

Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among men. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew our of this prayer and action ... It is not for us to prophesy the day (though the day will come) when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming—as was Jesus' language.61
Identifying with Moses’ story in the wilderness, Bonhoeffer sensed that he might die before seeing the Promised Land. Despite this prophetic insight, he began writing a book in prison with the title “The Essence of Christianity” where, in fact, he returned to the same nagging questions he had posed twelve years earlier in his lectures. What is the truth of Christian propositions? What relevance do these propositions have to real life? Although Bonhoeffer was still wrestling with the same questions he had posed earlier at Berlin University, he had in fact made progress in regard to his Christological and ecclesiological understanding of truth, doctrinal propositions, community, reality, moral action, communal decisions, and responsibility. The church struggle had been for him a baptism in fire. It had also been a good teacher. In *Discipleship* the key lesson was single-minded obedience. Obedience meant simply doing and believing what God had promised and commanded. It was this kind of obedience that could lead to martyrdom just as it had led Jesus to the cross. But in *Ethics* God also commands freedom, permission, responsibility and liberty. Responsible action became obedience to the command of God and action which arises out of the freedom to interpret that command. Determining one’s responsible action in freedom, however, was not to be conducted in a vacuum. In was an interpretation which took place within a communal process and one which incorporated very precise structures, rules and disciplines. This was the life of a confessor.

*Confessio*, understood as a systematic theological concept (confession) and as a mode of life (confessing), was at the heart of Bonhoeffer’s life and writings; that is, both in the “who” of his identity and the “what” of his theology. The role of Bonhoeffer as a confessor was so foundational to his life, in fact, without grasping this root of the tree, the beauty and power of the fruit of Bonhoeffer’s legacy to the church today is missed. Bonhoeffer was a confessor. And we have received his life and writings as powerful pictures of costly discipleship. Is this the secret of his popularity? For Lutherans, he points the way to a practice of confession that is faithful, challenging and generous. This may prove to be his greatest legacy for Christians today struggling to give witness to Jesus Christ within our own “special times.”
NOTES


13. GS II, 49; *No Rusty Swords*, 226.

14. GS IV, 135; *No Rusty Swords*, 217.


16. For an excellent study of how Bonhoeffer’s confessional theology was expressed in this period, see Robert Bertram, *A Time for Confessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 65–95.

17. GS II, 81 [translation mine].

18. GS II, 214. *No Rusty Swords*, 305. In this quotation, Bonhoeffer is particularly referring to the two confessions made at Barmen and Dahlem.

19. The most obvious sign of this theological judgment was the inclusion of the Barmen Declaration into his catechism (GS III, 335) where he directly refers to this document as a confession (338). See also the *Geltung von Barmen und Dahlem* (GS II, 205).

20. "We can no longer go back behind Barmen and Dahlem not because they are historical facts of our church to which we show due reverence, but because we can no longer go back behind the Word of God." ["The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and

21. GS I, 240f; No Rusty Swords, 326.
22. GS I, 250–251; No Rusty Swords, 335.

23. At the conference of the Central Church Office at Dassel on March 6–9, 1933, Bonhoeffer gave two speeches concerning the confessional problem and ecumenism: Bethge writes: “[Bonhoeffer in the speeches] shows himself already to have been the conscious Lutheran that he had always wanted to be in the ecumenical movement and that he later showed himself to be in the 1935 statement of principles. He insists on two things, the necessity of avoiding the danger of confessional relativism on the one hand, and on the other the necessity of loosening up the rigidity of confessional absolutism. One of the subjects of the Dassel conference was ‘Confession and Truth,’ and he tries to show that the truth of the word is double-sided, in that it represents both the word of God and the confessional word of the Christian congregation.” (Bethge, 180).

24. GS I, 243, No Rusty Swords, 328.
25. GS, II, 238f.

26. Due to Bonhoeffer’s pronouncement, certain supporters of the Confessing Church stopped contributing to the general fund.


29. Ibid.
31. Ibid.

33. The Erlangen school remained a permanent stimulus to Bonhoeffer. He acquired the complete works of F. H. R. Frank and Hofmann, and he gladly made use of Frank’s four-volume Theology of the Formula of Concord when he discovered the “confessions” during the church struggle. Then Hofmann’s hermeneutics also began to attract him (Bethge, 62). It was Frank’s theology which influenced Bonhoeffer concerning the question of adiaphora and the nature of “times of confession.” Martin Schoemann writes: “With the growth of confessional consciousness, historical studies were increasingly directed to the development of Reformation confessions, including new approaches to the controversy over adiaphora. Striking examples are to be found in Frank’s theology of FC IV (1865) and the earlier work of Preger whose reformulation of the Flacius’ “thesis” is cited increasingly (Schoemann, 59). It is to be noted in Schoemann’s article that the issue adiaphora, associated with the term “status confessionis,” had been newly re-discovered in the 19th century by Frank (Theologie der Concordienformel IV, 1865) and in the 20th century by R. Seeberg (Lehrbuch der Dogmensgeschichte IV, 2, 1920) under the influence of his Doktervater, F. H. R. Frank. Seeberg was Bonhoeffer’s Doktervater. It is thus very likely that, concerning the issue of confession and adiaphora, there is a strong link running from Frank through Seeberg to Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was on of the few theologians during the Church Struggle to use the phrase “status confessionis” within its confessional context (FC X).

34. Bethge, 368.
35. Bethge, 236.
36. Ibid.
37. "Intact" Lutherans in the south of Germany formed a "Third Front." The desired result of this act was, among others, to weaken the "United" churches in the north.

38. GS II, 233.


40. Bethge, 372.

41. Bethge, 155.

42. Bethge, 157.

43. Bethge, 155.

44. Bethge, 154.

45. GS (first edition) V: 227f.

46. It is likewise the first time Bonhoeffer specifically links together the notions of truth and confession. On July 1932, Bonhoeffer writes that "The churches included in the World Alliance have no common recognition of the truth." (No Rusty Swords, 172). On April 1932, he writes: "The ecumenical movement had lost the concept of heresy" (No Rusty Swords, 177–178).

47. Bonhoeffer's and Hildebrandt's 1931 catechism does not include the Apostle's Creed but instead Luther's statement of faith which Hildebrandt had discovered while working on his thesis. Bonhoeffer like this so much that for the rest of his life he kept it in his daily prayer and service book and occasionally used it instead of the Apostle's Creed in even the most orthodox confessional services. Compare Bethge, 143f.

48. No Rusty Swords, 258–259.

49. GS I, 244.

50. GS I, 253–254.


53. See Bonhoeffer's "Outline for a Book" for one of the most direct references to the role of confession in the world come of age in Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 382. Hereafter, LPP.

54. LPP, 279.

55. LPP 300.

56. LPP, 382

57. LPP, 349. "Night Voices in Tegel."

58. LPP, 369–370.

59. LPP, 347.

60. LPP, 355.

61. LPP, 300.