

WAYNE WHITSON FLOYD, JR.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer's name was introduced to the English-speaking world through the appreciative reception that was given to certain of his writings in the generation following the second world war. Titles such as *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison* summoned an image of a courageous pastor and thoughtful theologian who rose above the confusion and inaction of his age not only to speak prophetic words of clarity but also to take costly actions of resistance against the horrors of National Socialism. His provocative words became a staple among those themselves searching for an adequate response to a 'world come of age' in the 1950s and 1960s. He evoked a fearless openness to the challenges of modernity, a way to be Christian without succumbing to mere religiosity, a spiritual path that led into the midst of this world, evoking a compassionate and redemptive embrace of both life's gifts and its deep wounds and needs.

Far less well known and read, however, were the works that come from the first half of Bonhoeffer's adult life – the writings from the time of his academic preparation for an anticipated professional life as a university professor, as well as those that were the first fruits of his academic vocation. To be ignorant, however, of his first dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*,<sup>[1]</sup> or the university lectures later published as *Creation and*

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[1.] *Sanctorum Communio* was Bonhoeffer's doctoral dissertation, the first of two theses that were required of a candidate wishing to receive a doctorate and to teach in a German university.

*Fall* and *Christ the Center*,<sup>[2]</sup> not to mention *Act and Being*,<sup>[3]</sup> is both to disregard the very foundations of the better-known works that followed and, almost invariably, to misunderstand them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's academic theological career was distinguished, despite its brevity. It began with the year he spent (1923–24) studying theology at the University of Tübingen. This was followed, beginning in June 1924, with a three-year program at the University of Berlin, culminating in the acceptance of his doctoral dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* in 1927. In February 1928, Bonhoeffer left Berlin to become curate of a German-speaking congregation in Barcelona.

In 1929–30 Bonhoeffer was back in Berlin working as an assistant to Wilhelm Lütgert, a specialist in German idealism. His qualifying thesis or *Habilitationsschrift*, *Act and Being*, was accepted in 1930, and in July of that year Bonhoeffer presented his inaugural lecture, "The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology" (now published in *DBWE* 10, 2/7), at the University of Berlin. Bonhoeffer then spent the academic year 1930–31 as a postgraduate student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. On his return to Germany, Bonhoeffer taught at Berlin from mid-1931 to 1933.

In the summer of that year Bonhoeffer's formal academic career came to an end with his final lectures at Berlin on "Christology" and his seminar on "Hegel."<sup>[4]</sup> That autumn he accepted a call to serve two German congregations in London, where he entered a self-imposed quasi-exile, increasingly convinced that Christianity in Germany faced in its new leader, Adolf Hitler, a crisis — a *status confessionis* — such as it had not known since the Protestant Reformation.

### The Writing of *Act and Being*

On a summer day exactly sixteen years before the fateful day of July 20, 1944 — when the failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler finally

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[2.] The lectures subsequently published as *Creation and Fall* were delivered at the University of Berlin during the winter semester, 1932–33. Those subsequently published as *Christ the Center* were delivered at Berlin during the summer semester, 1933.

[3.] *Act and Being* was Bonhoeffer's postdoctoral dissertation, the *Habilitationsschrift* that qualified him to teach at the University of Berlin.

[4.] The former lectures, reconstructed from student notes, formed the basis for the publication of *Christ the Center*. The text of the latter has been lost; a reconstruction of the student notes of Ferenc Lehel from that seminar has been edited by Ilse Tödt and published as *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hegel-Seminar*.

sealed Bonhoeffer's fate as a conspirator in that plot – Dietrich had written to his doctoral adviser, the Berlin systematic theologian and church historian Reinhold Seeberg, saying that he had chosen as the topic of his postdoctoral dissertation “not a historical one, but rather a systematic one. It connects to the question of consciousness and conscience in theology and to several Luther citations from the major Galatians commentary.” The exploration of this question of consciousness, Bonhoeffer wrote, ought to “be not a psychological but rather a theological investigation.”<sup>[5]</sup>

In deference to Seeberg, who was facing retirement in the near future, Bonhoeffer previously had agreed to write his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, on a topic “that is half-historical and half systematic.”<sup>[6]</sup> But now he wanted to turn to theology per se, and to do so with a writing project that would be the entree to a serious academic career, not just a stepping stone to ecclesiastical life. To his friend Helmut Rößler, Bonhoeffer later wrote that he was planning “in connection with the problem of consciousness” to write a thesis with a somewhat surprising goal, the treatment of the “problem of the child in theology.”<sup>[7]</sup> Neither friend nor teacher could have imagined how the ambitious student of theology could deliver on both promises – a theology of consciousness and a theology of the child – in a single philosophical-theological volume such as *Act and Being*.<sup>[8]</sup>

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[5.] Bonhoeffer's letter to Reinhold Seeberg (July 20, 1928), *GS* 6:142f. Also see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 87–89. Although the present work consistently endeavors to use gender-inclusive language, quotations from others remain as published.

[6.] Bonhoeffer's letter to his parents (September 21, 1925), *DBW* 9:156.

[7.] Bonhoeffer's letter to Helmut Rößler (August 7, 1928), *NRS* 38–39 (*GS* 1:53).

[8.] Cf. Reinhold Seeberg's letter to Bonhoeffer, in which his mentor wrote of his quite different expectations for his student: “I am in suspense about the topic you yourself will choose. Perhaps it would be advisable now to seek out something historically or biblically oriented, in order independently to get used to the line of questioning and methods of these fields as well. How would it be, for example, with the consideration of the question of why in the Scholasticism of the twelfth century the ethical problems recede so strongly, and of how to judge the presentation in John of Salisbury's *Metalogicus*. But this is only an example and if you have something of greater personal interest to you, then it is naturally better. But the history of ethics, and still more of morality, is an area on which a young man today could focus himself, with the goal of something like an ethical history of dogma from the Sermon on the Mount to our own days” (October 19, 1928), *NRS* 36, trans. altered (*GS* 3:17).

Bonhoeffer wrote *Act and Being* during the summer semester of 1929 and the winter semester of 1929–30 at Berlin, facing a February 1930 deadline. While writing this second thesis, he held the position of *Voluntärassistent* or training assistant with Wilhelm Lütgert, who had just been called to the Berlin theological faculty as Reinhold Seeberg’s successor.<sup>[9]</sup> Lütgert considered his inherited postdoctoral student to be a Heideggerian, on whose philosophy Lütgert – had he not just “taken over” Bonhoeffer – “would have surely exercised some more pressure.”<sup>[10]</sup> Bonhoeffer himself described the period of the writing of *Act and Being* in words that bring to mind the labors of many a thesis writer facing a deadline: “I plunged myself into my work in a very unchristian and arrogant manner. A crazy ambition, which many observed in me, made life difficult for me. . . . Back then I was frightfully alone and abandoned to myself. It was very bad.”<sup>[11]</sup>

The following summer semester Bonhoeffer underwent both the oral *Habilitation* examinations in the theological faculty and a required examination with the Berlin church. He completed the latter from July 5th to July 8th, 1930,<sup>[12]</sup> having been granted permission by the Protestant superior church council not to attend the normally mandatory preaching seminar, since he “has shown now once again through his *Habilitationsschrift*, which has been recognized by the theological faculty as a good achievement, that his scholarly preparation is a good one.”<sup>[13]</sup> Approximately one week later the postdoctoral student presented his examination lecture.<sup>[14]</sup> At the beginning of August 1930, the dean, Erich Seeberg, communicated to the Prussian minister for Science, Art and National Education, under the diary number 730, “that on the 12th of July 1930 Mr. Lic. *Bonhoeffer* has qualified for the postdoctoral degree

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[9.] Bonhoeffer’s fear that his new mentor, identified as a specialist in idealism, “[will] have even less understanding than Seeberg . . . for my work,” did not appear to interfere with his research. See Bonhoeffer’s letter to his parents (February 6, 1929), *GS* 6:163.

[10.] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 94.

[11.] Letter of January 1936, *GS* 6:367.

[12.] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, page 178 of the German edition.

[13.] Writing of the Protestant Consistory from May 22, 1930, as well as the written response of the Protestant superior church council from May 31, 1930 (*GS* 6:173f.).

[14.] Cf. letter to Helmut Rößler (June 24, 1930), *NL* A 20, 4.5. The topic of the examination lecture is not known.

in systematic theology in the theological faculty," adding that "the *Habilitationschrift*, which is not yet printed, shall be handed in later."<sup>[15]</sup>

### Publication and Reception

Bonhoeffer's first attempt to publish *Act and Being* was with Christian Kaiser Verlag, the publisher of Karl Barth and of 'dialectical theology'. Paul Althaus offered to try to find a place for Bonhoeffer's *Habilitationschrift* in the series he edited at Christian Kaiser along with Karl Barth and Karl Heim, *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus* (Studies in the history and teachings of Protestantism), but this could not be arranged without a significant delay. Bonhoeffer's next option, to have *Act and Being* appear as a supplementary issue to *Zwischen den Zeiten*, also published by Kaiser Verlag, also was unsuccessful, due to Bonhoeffer's desire for a timely publication. Finally, through the mediation of Lütgert<sup>[16]</sup> and Althaus,<sup>[17]</sup> the work was accepted by C. Bertelsmann publishers for their series *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* (Contributions to the advancement of Christian theology).

Althaus wrote to Bonhoeffer's new publisher that "I consider the work to be an exceedingly significant achievement which must be printed as soon as possible."<sup>[18]</sup> The book appeared in September 1931 as the second issue in the thirty-fourth volume of the Gütersloh series, copies of which were sent by the author to Althaus,<sup>[19]</sup> Erwin Sutz,<sup>[20]</sup> and Rößler.<sup>[21]</sup> To his sponsor Paul Althaus he sent the printed version of his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, too, writing that "There remain for me, however, essential material connections as well between both works, connections that pertain in principle precisely to the church."<sup>[22]</sup>

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[15.] *NL D 4*. Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* incorrectly dates the *Habilitation* as July 18, 1930.

[16.] Cf. Lütgert's letter to Bonhoeffer (January 18, 1931), *GS* 3:20.

[17.] Cf. letter to Althaus (January 28, 1931), *NL* Appendix A 10.

[18.] Letter from Althaus to Karl Bonhoeffer (March 4, 1931), cited from Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 100, trans. altered [MR]. After the death of Lütgert and Schlatter, Althaus became the sole editor of the *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*.

[19.] Letter to Althaus (September 16, 1931), *NL* Appendix A 10.

[20.] Letter to Erwin Sutz (October 8, 1931), *NRS* 123 (*GS* 1:22).

[21.] Letter to Rößler (October 8, 1931), *GS* 1:62.

[22.] See above, editorial note 19.

In the two years after its initial publication, reviews and discussions of *Act and Being* appeared by Heinz Eisenhuth in the *Theologischen Literaturzeitung* and by Hinrich Knittermeyer in *Zwischen den Zeiten*.<sup>[23]</sup> Earlier Emil Brunner, made cognizant of the newcomer no doubt through Sutz, referred in a note on his *Ethics* to this “instructional writing.”<sup>[24]</sup>

A quarter-century later in 1956, through the efforts of Ernst Wolf, a new edition allowed *Act and Being* to appear at last under the imprint of Christian Kaiser, volume five of the *Theologische Bücherei* (Theological Library). Translations of this appeared in 1961 and 1962 in English, in 1968 in Japanese, in 1970 in selections in French, and in 1985 in Italian.

Beyond his own lifetime Bonhoeffer’s notoriety clearly originated with the publication and clamorous reception of his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, followed by the growing awareness of other examples of his writings, particularly those from during the church struggle. And the fragmentary character of many of these works seemed to eclipse Bonhoeffer’s own attempts in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* to articulate the conditions of the possibility of a coherent theological methodology. Moreover, the level of difficulty of the work itself made *Act and Being* seem at odds with the portrait drawn by Bonhoeffer’s early interpreters of a rhetorically inspiring, yet antispeculative, nonmetaphysical – that is to say, not academic – writer.

The perception of *Act and Being* as an uncharacteristically dense and opaque tome has been, however, a two-edged sword. It has contributed, to be sure, to the regrettable neglect of this work, especially among Bonhoeffer’s English readership who were at times hampered merely by the limits of the available translation. Yet, for those who have attempted to undertake a close study of Bernard Noble’s earlier English version, these very characteristics of *Act and Being* often have had the beneficial effect of helping to turn the “eminently quotable” Bonhoeffer of the *Ethics*, *The Cost of Discipleship*, and the *Letters and Papers from Prison* back into a genuinely scholarly explorer of theology’s deepest methodological needs. Bonhoeffer’s writing here is an example of what Theodor Adorno once called a “substantive thought – a thought of whose movement the thinker becomes aware only as [one] performs it.”<sup>[25]</sup> *Act and*

[23.] See below, Bibliography to *Act and Being*, 204, 205.

[24.] Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 606.

[25.] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xix.

*Being* undertakes such a form of thought whose movement the reader can comprehend only when one thinks along with Bonhoeffer. It resists facile summation, demanding disciplined theological engagement.

### Cultural, Theological, and Philosophical Context

*Act and Being* evidences Bonhoeffer's emerging practical concern to find for theology a methodology adequate and proper to its unique subject matter – and to the challenging terrain of its cultural and historical location. Despite its seemingly abstract philosophical cast, this work begs to be interpreted within the concrete, historical context of the cultural crisis in Germany between the world wars, which eventuated in the National Socialist rise to power in 1933. For, as Robin Lovin has insightfully noted, “unlike Barth and Brunner, Bonhoeffer experienced the dislocations in European society after 1914 as the background of his life, and not as a strange intrusion that called his theology into question.”<sup>[26]</sup>

Bonhoeffer stringently refused to join in the growing antimodernist, neo-Romantic, *völkisch* worldview that was then threatening theology's best attempts at rational thinking.<sup>[27]</sup> But neither was his theology merely a ‘modern theology’, drawing all of its inspiration from – and speaking all of its conclusions to – the theological and philosophical traditions from the nineteenth century that tried to sustain a naive confidence in human rationality and moral perfectibility even in the face of the recent horrors of World War I.<sup>[28]</sup> Bonhoeffer wished theology to speak with all the resources of modern thought, yet with its own distinctive voice, including the prophetic tone of the critique of idolatry.

Bonhoeffer therefore approached his chosen topic for *Act and Being*, a theology of consciousness, from within the perspective of the Reformation tradition's insights about the origin of human sinfulness in the *cor curvum in se* – the heart turned in upon itself and thus open neither to the revelation of God, nor to the encounter with the neighbor.<sup>[29]</sup> Bon-

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[26.] Robin Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices*, 126.

[27.] See Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., “The Search for an Ethical Sacrament: From Bonhoeffer to Critical Social Theory.”

[28.] See Wolfgang Huber, “Bonhoeffer and Modernity,” N.B. 10ff.

[29.] One of the surprising discoveries of a careful reading of *Act and Being* may be the discovery of the extent to which the central philosophical sections of the book are deeply indebted to theological insights from Martin Luther, especially his *Lectures on Galatians*.

hoeffer wished to analyze consciousness, that is to say, as itself inherently moral. Epistemology was to be understood in terms of the dynamics of power – humanity’s desire to have the power to make itself over in its own image, rather than God’s, and humanity’s concomitant resistance to any encounter with genuine Otherness that threatens the central, sovereign position of the human subject, the “I.”<sup>[30]</sup> What is needed, Bonhoeffer is proposing in *Act and Being*, is a theological epistemology, or philosophy of knowledge, capable of articulating an alternative vision of divine and human community that transcends the desire of the knower to grasp and control the object of knowledge, whether God or another human being. “The concept of revelation,” Bonhoeffer wrote in *Act and Being*, “must . . . yield an epistemology of its own.”<sup>[31]</sup>

It was this need for a conceptuality adequate to the theological category of revelation that initially attracted Bonhoeffer to the circle of the early dialectical theologies of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Friedrich Gogarten, and Eberhard Grisebach. In this task Bonhoeffer clearly took his cue from Karl Barth’s problematic relationship to Immanuel Kant: the inescapability of confronting the similarities and differences between transcendental philosophy’s and dialectical theology’s treatments of Otherness.<sup>[32]</sup>

When one tries to understand Bonhoeffer’s unique contributions to this crucial subject, it is not so much that the philosophical influences on Bonhoeffer’s early work have been misrepresented as that they have not yet been reconstructed in anything approaching a comprehensive manner.<sup>[33]</sup> Yet there are hints throughout the existing biographical material that philosophy, particularly the problematic relationship between the Kant of *The Critique of Pure Reason* and the ensuing Hegelian and post-Hegelian idealism, was an early and consistent influ-

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[30.] Cf. the lectures on Genesis (winter semester 1932–33), published as *CF*, N.B. 40, 69–76.

[31.] See page 31 below.

[32.] For a full treatment of the theological voices in chorus with whom Bonhoeffer is writing here, see below the Afterword by Hans-Richard Reuter, pages 162–83. On the Bonhoeffer-Barth question in particular, see Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers: Eine notwendige Klarstellung*, and Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology*.

[33.] Sections of what follows have appeared previously in my book *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness: On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno*, chaps. 1 and 2.



ence on Bonhoeffer's academic theology. Eberhard Bethge notes that even in secondary school, "his brother Karl-Friedrich's skepticism, against which he had to defend himself, spurred him into grappling with epistemology at an early age, and he worked hard at philosophy during his last years at [secondary] school."<sup>[34]</sup> When he went to Tübingen to study theology, in addition to hearing Karl Heim's lectures in dogmatic theology on Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl,<sup>[35]</sup> Bonhoeffer made numerous "excursions into epistemology."<sup>[36]</sup> He attended Karl Groos's lectures at Tübingen on logic and on the history of modern philosophy and joined Groos's seminar on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which Bonhoeffer wrote a paper.<sup>[37]</sup> At Berlin he attended lectures by Heinrich Maier in the summer of 1924 on epistemology;<sup>[38]</sup> lectures by Privatdozent Rieffert in the winter of 1925 on the history of logic; lectures again by Maier in 1925 on freedom and necessity; and in 1927 those on the philosophy of culture by Eduard Spranger, who was "a leading figure of the German Neo-Hegelian revival of the 1920's."<sup>[39]</sup>

Bonhoeffer's philosophical training at Tübingen during 1923–24 and during his first year at Berlin was evidently sufficiently thorough so that, as Bethge recounts, "in 1925, when Reinhold Seeberg, after a first encounter with Dietrich, met his colleague Karl Bonhoeffer [Dietrich's father] at a meeting of the Senate of Berlin University, he expressed his surprise and admiration at the solidity of the young man's philosophical preparation and his wide knowledge of contemporary philosophy."<sup>[40]</sup> Thus we would not disagree when Bethge tells us that Bonhoeffer "familiarized himself with Seeberg's great models – Schleiermacher, Hegel and Albrecht Ritschl – and that he also acquired from Seeberg the difficult technical jargon of his student years, which is saturated with Seeberg's Hegelian concepts . . . [and] . . . Ritschl's aversion to metaphy-

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[34.] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 27.

[35.] *Ibid.*, 35.

[36.] *Ibid.*, 43.

[37.] *Ibid.*, 36.

[38.] *Ibid.*, 50. In the summer of 1924, when the only philosophy course that Bonhoeffer was taking was Maier's "*Erkenntnistheorie*" (Epistemology), he was reading Husserl and Hegel.

[39.] L. E. Loemker, "Spranger, (Franz Ernst) Eduard," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8:1.

[40.] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 36.

sics.”<sup>[41]</sup> But we should resist letting this suggest that Bonhoeffer’s knowledge of, and opinions about, philosophy had come only at second hand, always and only filtered through, and shaped by, the theological concerns of his mentors.<sup>[42]</sup>

While Hans-Richard Reuter, therefore, has with admirable thoroughness and clarity emphasized the theological roots of *Act and Being* in his “Editor’s Afterword to the German Edition” below,<sup>[43]</sup> it needs to be stressed here that Bonhoeffer’s distinctive contribution to his theological problematic was to think it through in dialogue with the basic trends of modern philosophy, particularly starting with Immanuel Kant. Bonhoeffer is attempting in *Act and Being* to state the shape of a “genuine transcendentalism” and its corollary “a genuine ontology”; and he does so with constant reference to Kant’s distinction between thought’s unifying function (the unity of transcendental apperception) and that which resists being brought completely under the sway of reason (the thing-in-itself). A genuinely dialectical form of thinking is possible only to the extent that it sustains the reality of authentic Otherness.

In Bonhoeffer’s typology in *Act and Being*, therefore, both a genuine transcendental philosophy and a genuine ontology are dependent on philosophy’s being able to maintain the relationship between *both* the activity of thinking *and* something transcendent, *ein Transzendentes*, to thought – ontologically distinct from the thinking subject – neither of which “swallows up” the other. Bonhoeffer’s dialectical claim that “‘being between’ that which is transcendent is ‘Dasein’”<sup>[44]</sup> brings to mind the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber, whose work Bonhoeffer seems not to have known, and the whole personalist school of thought, particularly the philosophy of Eberhard Grisebach, whose influence on *Act and Being* was profound.

His explorations of the Kantian definition of the limits of philosophy – and Hegelian and Fichtean idealism’s constant transgression of the limits of genuine Otherness through the pretensions of reason – led Bonhoeffer to inquire into the phenomenological and ontological tradi-

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[41.] *Ibid.*, 48.

[42.] Thus, the importance of part two of Reuter’s Afterword in this volume, concerning the conceptual roots of *Act and Being*, should not be read as superseded by part three, concerning the theological context of Bonhoeffer’s work.

[43.] See below, N. B. 168–72.

[44.] See below, page 35.

tions. He was especially concerned with the problem of intersubjectivity in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* was published in 1927, just after Bonhoeffer's work on *Sanctorum Communio* was complete.<sup>[45]</sup> Throughout *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer is arguing that what is needed is a form of theological thinking that takes seriously both philosophy's own repeated attempts to surmount its intrinsic tendency toward system, toward totality, and the reasons they must be judged a failure. He wished to clarify the extent to which theology can or cannot affirm transcendental epistemology's subject-object paradigm as appropriate for theological thinking that remembers the sociality of the Other, the ethics of difference – between humanity and God, as between one human being and another.

### Description and Organization of the Text

Couched in the jargon of a doctoral thesis, *Act and Being* is a vigorous transcendental argument. That is to say, its concern is with the conditions of the possibility of theology's responsible thinking about Otherness. Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being* engages in a protracted meditation on the consequences of theology's reluctance to state clearly its justifiable reasons for its long and deep involvement in continental philosophy's epistemological subject-object paradigm, which theology has employed precisely as a means by which to explicate its categories of *transcendence* and *revelation*.

Despite his clear sense of the inadequacies for theology of many of philosophy's ways of thinking, Bonhoeffer was aware – as were few of his contemporaries – “that the passage beyond philosophy,” as Jacques Derrida more recently has observed, “does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*.”<sup>[46]</sup> *Act and Being* is a theologian's proposal of that *certain way* in which to read theology's investments in the continental philosophical tradition, rather than merely turning its back when the relationship had become problematic, as seemed to Bonhoeffer to be the case with the rise of dialectical theol-

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[45.] These need to be compared with the personalist philosophies of Bonhoeffer's contemporaries Eberhard Grisebach, Franz Rosenzweig, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessey, and Martin Buber.

[46.] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 288.

ogy. *Act and Being* wished to discover how to honor both theology's category of revelation and the legacy of philosophy's struggle to articulate an authentically dialectical conceptuality — "the question that Kant and idealism have posed for theology."<sup>[47]</sup>

To be sure, Bonhoeffer's willingness to think along with philosophy, indeed to see a congruity between the philosophical and theological tasks, is striking. Yet so is his trenchant critique of philosophical idealism, the epitome of which for Bonhoeffer was not Fichte, but the attempt to "raise substance to the subject," which Hegel had worked out most completely in his logic — namely the understanding of the object as an a priori synthesis in transcendental apperception.<sup>[48]</sup>

Bonhoeffer is inquiring here about the totalizing urge of reason, *Vernunft*, to overcome 'the being between' that is human existence. Thinking, according to Bonhoeffer, either will be *genuinely* transcendental and ontological, or it will be *systematic* and totalizing. The latter option recognizes *neither* the true act of thinking-within-limits (the goal of genuine transcendental philosophy) *nor* the nature of the being of what-is-thought, yet remains beyond-thought — something transcendent (the goal of genuine ontology).

*Act and Being* is central to understanding the nature of Bonhoeffer's movement toward a new paradigm for theological method. It clarifies not only his thinking about the possibility of a genuinely transcendental reading of the Kantian tradition vis-à-vis the dominant idealist reading that he encountered in his teachers. It also more fully develops many of the social-ontological concerns that had occupied his attention only a short time earlier in *Sanctorum Communio*. And it points us toward the enduring ethical problematic of the Other, the stranger, the neighbor, to which he was to return, for example, in his fragmentary *Ethics*.<sup>[49]</sup>

Bonhoeffer, the English-speaking audience needs to be reminded anew, was from the beginning of his career a systematic — perhaps better stated, a philosophical — theologian. *Act and Being* beyond any doubt presents us with a scholar more philosophically sophisticated than many among his theological supporters heretofore have been willing to admit. Bonhoeffer drew deeply from conceptual wells that, at least in many of the earlier commentaries on him, were seen as merely the target of his

[47.] See below, page 27.

[48.] See Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, 611, trans. altered.

[49.] Cf. *E*, N.B. 224ff., 248ff.

criticisms, rather than a clue to the context within which his enduring significance must be gauged.

Bonhoeffer refused in *Act and Being* to move from the perceived potential inadequacies of theoretical epistemology directly toward an apparently “more concrete” social or ethical approach. Rather, he searched in *Act and Being* for an enriched conception of human rationality that yet takes significant clues from epistemology – a form of human reason that would be adequate to the emerging social and ethical demands on theology that confronted him.

Following an introductory sketch of the contemporary theological terrain, entitled “The Problem,” the argument of *Act and Being* is organized into three main sections. The first deals with the general methodological quest on which Bonhoeffer has embarked, guided by the epistemological paradigm of the subject-object relation and its ontological implications. The second places what Bonhoeffer calls “the act-being problem” in dialogue with the theological category of revelation, developing further his concern with a theology of the church, begun in his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*. The third attempts to state the framework of a theological anthropology – humanity “in Adam” or “in Christ” – using the act-being framework as his guide to addressing the need for a more temporally-oriented typology.

### ***Act and Being* and Bonhoeffer's Subsequent Theology**

A clearer understanding of *Act and Being* requires that we place it in the context of three other pieces in particular: (a) Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin on July 31, 1930, “Humanity in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology”; (b) a lecture prepared in English and delivered to his peers while studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1931, “The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude toward Philosophy and Science”; and (c) an article written in English in 1931 and published in *The Journal of Religion* in 1932, “Concerning the Christian Idea of God.” *Act and Being* also cannot be understood without reference to Bonhoeffer's Berlin lectures from the winter of 1932–33, published as *Creation and Fall* in 1933, and his lectures on Christology from the summer of 1933, posthumously published as *Christ the Center*.

An initial difficulty in understanding *Act and Being* arises from a disparity between the text of the *Habilitationsschrift* and the explication of

its themes by its author in his inaugural lecture at Berlin. For example, the subtitle to *Act and Being*<sup>[50]</sup> is “Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology.” The inaugural lecture’s synopsis of *Act and Being*, however, hardly mentions ontology, and certainly not as a major category in his typology. A recognition of this discrepancy should lead us to notice a further puzzling characteristic of Bonhoeffer’s argument.

His own introduction to *Act and Being*, “The Problem,” does indeed speak of “the decision one comes to between a transcendental-philosophical and an ontological interpretation of theological concepts,” as if this simply entailed deciding between alternatives.<sup>[51]</sup> Thus Ernst Wolf’s introduction to the text of *Act and Being*, which began the 1956 German edition as well as the 1961/1962 English translation, states the usual reading of this work, according to which the *Habilitationsschrift* is to be understood as a study of what Wolf calls the “confrontation between cardinal, mutually exclusive philosophical positions: Transcendentalism (Kant) and Ontology (Heidegger).”<sup>[52]</sup>

Yet already here we can see some equivocation about the study’s true purpose. For example, he does speak at one moment of “how faith as act, and revelation as being, are related to one another.”<sup>[53]</sup> This is as if, parallel to the concerns stated in the subtitle, the former were simply a ‘transcendental’ issue and the latter an ‘ontological’ issue. But at the next moment he speaks of revelation itself as needing to be interpreted alternatively “in terms of act [aktmäßig], and . . . in terms of being [seinsmäßig].”<sup>[54]</sup>

One begins to suspect that there is something else going on here, that the fundamental problem is more subtle than theology’s categorical choice between a transcendental emphasis on ‘act’ and an ontological-systematizing emphasis upon ‘being’ – or theology’s attempt somehow simply to put the two together again.<sup>[55]</sup> In addition one suspects that considerable care may need to be taken to distinguish what Bonhoeffer

[50.] The subtitle of *Act and Being* was omitted from the previous English translation.

[51.] See below, page 27.

[52.] “Introduction” by Ernst Wolf, *AB* 5.

[53.] See below, page 28.

[54.] *Ibid.*

[55.] The tendency to the latter sort of oversimplification of the task proposed in *Act and Being* seems to be one to which Ernst Feil’s *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* is prone (N.B. 10).

said he was going to do – perhaps even intended to do – in *Act and Being* itself, and what a careful reading of the text reveals.

Thus, the inaugural lecture leads one to interpret the two divisions of Section A of *Act and Being* not as the polar extremes of the argument: the transcendental endeavor versus the ontological endeavor. Rather, for Bonhoeffer “*der transzendente Versuch*,” whose inspiration was Immanuel Kant, refers to the general rubric within which Bonhoeffer’s own argument in *Act and Being* is to be understood. And “*der ontologische Versuch*,” as seen most clearly in post-Hegelian idealism, represents the dominant way in which philosophy and theology up until Bonhoeffer’s time had attempted to respond to the act-being problematic inherited from Kantian transcendentalism. Stated in the most direct terms, Bonhoeffer’s constructive argument is that the transcendental endeavor has been to set conditions under which both its own project and that of ontology are to be undertaken if both are not to share complicity in the system’s collapse of the dialectic of ‘act’ and ‘being’.

Bonhoeffer stated the sharpest possible formulation of the problem in his essays “Concerning the Christian Idea of God” and “The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude toward Philosophy and Science,”<sup>[56]</sup> both of which were written in 1931 when Bonhoeffer was a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. They both carry the tone of an apology for the position of Barth, at that time largely unknown in the United States, in a climate that Bonhoeffer found to be overwhelmingly and uncritically shaped by theological liberalism. Yet they also reflect the cardinal concerns of Bonhoeffer during the time of the writing of *Act and Being*. Thus they remain instructive for our reading of the present text.

First, Bonhoeffer charges in these essays, the legacy of the system-building of idealism to theological liberalism is a conception of thought as “in itself a closed circle,” which “does violence to reality, pulling it into the circle of the ego,” since “thinking always means system and system excludes reality.”<sup>[57]</sup> In idealism, Bonhoeffer argues,

there are no limits for the ego; its power and its claim are boundless; it is its own standard. Here all transcendence is pulled into the circle of the

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[56.] Bonhoeffer, “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” *GS* 3:100–109; “The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science,” *NRS* 361–72 (*GS* 3:110–26).

[57.] “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” 101.

creative ego. . . . One knows oneself immediately by the act of the coming of the ego to itself.<sup>[58]</sup>

Second, according to Bonhoeffer, idealism's premises exhibit the sinfulness of the human being after the fall, as understood by Protestant theology. Fallen humanity "refers everything to itself, puts itself in the center of the world, does violence to reality, makes itself God, and God and the other person its creatures."<sup>[59]</sup> In the "essential boundlessness of thinking, in its claim to be a closed system, in its egocentricity," Bonhoeffer sees "a philosophical affirmation of the theological insight of the Reformers, which they expressed in terms of the *cor curvum in se, corruptio mentis*. Human beings *in statu corruptionis* are indeed alone, they are their own creator and lord, they are indeed the center of their world of sin."<sup>[60]</sup>

Third, such thinking is therefore incapable of conceiving that "the Christian messages comes . . . entirely from outside of the world of sin. It was precisely God who came in Jesus Christ."<sup>[61]</sup> The idealist tradition, Bonhoeffer argues in Kierkegaardian fashion, cannot conceive of "God as the absolutely free personality [who] is therefore absolutely transcendent,"<sup>[62]</sup> and yet who "revealed God's self in 'onceness' . . . in a historical fact, in a historical personality"<sup>[63]</sup> — in "God's real acting for human beings in history" in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>[64]</sup> Since humanity cannot "get outside of the circle of sin" on its own, "revelation in Christ, justification, means breaking . . . the circle of sin. . . . Since only the revelation in Christ claims to constitute the real outside of human beings, it implies that it is the only criterion of any revelation."<sup>[65]</sup>

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[58.] "The Theology of Crisis," 120, trans. altered. There he also writes: "At the basis of all thinking lies the necessity of a system. Thinking is essentially systematic thinking, because it rests upon itself, it is the last ground and criterion of itself. System means the interpretation of the whole through the one which is its ground and its center, the thinking ego. Idealism saw and affirmed this as the proof of the autonomy and the freedom of human beings."

[59.] "Concerning the Christian Idea of God," 101, trans. altered.

[60.] "The Theology of Crisis," 122, trans. altered.

[61.] *Ibid.*, 123, trans. altered.

[62.] "Concerning the Christian Idea of God," 103.

[63.] *Ibid.*, 105, trans. altered.

[64.] "The Theology of Crisis," 112, trans. altered.

[65.] *Ibid.*, 115–16.



Fourth what is needed is “a genuine theological epistemology” that, “as thinking per se, . . . is not excepted from the pretension and boundlessness of all thinking,” but which “knows its own insufficiency and its limitations” and thereby can “leave room for the reality of God,” even in theological thought.<sup>[66]</sup> What is needed is a form of theological thinking that can affirm the finitude of God’s “revelation in history,”<sup>[67]</sup> – “the foolishness of the Christian idea of God, which has been witnessed to by all genuine Christian thinking from Paul, Augustine, Luther, to Kierkegaard and Barth” that “God himself dies and reveals [the divine self] in the death of a man, who is condemned as a sinner.”<sup>[68]</sup> And yet such thinking must be able to distinguish between God’s finite, historical “revelation in hiddenness,” and humanity’s sinful desire for “revelation in openness”<sup>[69]</sup> – the ironic ‘openness’ of “the captivity of human thinking within itself”<sup>[70]</sup> that is the truest sign of human brokenness.<sup>[71]</sup>

Thus the point of *Act and Being* for Bonhoeffer is not merely negative. Rather, if the idealist resolution of genuine transcendentalism’s epistemological tension between subject and object does not know “its own insufficiency and limitations,”<sup>[72]</sup> then “the concept of revelation must . . . yield an epistemology of its own.”<sup>[73]</sup> Revelation needs a form of thinking that both attends to the ‘immediacy’ of that historical particularity of revelation – which can “take seriously the ontological category in history”<sup>[74]</sup> – and yet continues to distinguish itself, as thought, from the reality whose presence it mediates.

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[66.] “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” 102.

[67.] *Ibid.*, 105.

[68.] *Ibid.*, 108, trans. altered.

[69.] *Ibid.*, 105. For a thoughtful inquiry into the theme of ‘hiddenness,’ see Andreas Pangritz on arcane discipline in Bonhoeffer’s theology in his *Dietrich Bonhoeffers Forderung einer Arkandisziplin – eine unerledigte Anfrage an Kirche und Theologie*.

[70.] “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” 101.

[71.] See “The Theology of Crisis,” 113–14: “It is revelation because it is *not* compatible with our own deepest essence, but entirely beyond our whole existence, for would it otherwise have had to be revealed, if it had been potentially in us before? . . . All that means that God’s revelation in Christ is revelation in concealment, secrecy. All other so-called revelation is revelation in openness.”

[72.] “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” 102.

[73.] See below, page 31.

[74.] “Concerning the Christian Idea of God,” 106.

Bonhoeffer has inherited from Søren Kierkegaard the suspicion that all immediacy per se is paganism. And yet he suspects that in the theology of revelation of his mentor, Barth, mediation itself has been carried to such an extreme that God is only tangential to history, never ontologically *in* history, with graspable, “haveable particularity.” What sort of thinking, then, can theology be if it would (1) avoid the pitfalls of idealism, (2) take account of sin, (3) affirm the particularity of revelation in history, and (4) still be *thought*, affirming that “in every theological statement we cannot help but use certain general forms of thinking,” which “theology has . . . in common with philosophy”?[75]

Bonhoeffer takes one clue, clearly, from the ‘Kantianism’ of the early theology of Karl Barth. For

although Barth knows that even [Kant’s] philosophy remains in boundlessness, he sees here the attempt of philosophy to criticize itself basically and takes from here the terminology in order to express the eternal crisis of the human being, which is brought on by God in Christ and which is beyond all philosophical grasp.<sup>[76]</sup>

Bonhoeffer concludes, however, that the ‘beyond’ for Barth requires the theological judgment that “there is no Christian philosophy nor philosophical terminology at all.”<sup>[77]</sup> Then, “what according to Barth and his friends,” Bonhoeffer asks, “ought to be the task of philosophy?”<sup>[78]</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s response to his own rhetorical question, intentionally or not, is significant because, coming after his dissertation *Act and Being*, it provides a revealing clue to his divergence already from orthodox Barthianism. Bonhoeffer wrote:

Barth himself has not answered this question sufficiently, *but his friends have thought a great deal about the problem*. Philosophy remains profane science; there *is* no Christian philosophy. But philosophy has to be *critical* philosophy, not *systematic*. And yet since even critical philosophy is bound to be systematic (as we have seen before), philosophy must work in view of this fate. It must try to think truth with regard to the real existence of humanity, and must see that it is itself an expression of the real existence of human beings and that by its own power it not only cannot save human beings, but it can-

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[75.] “The Theology of Crisis,” 118.

[76.] *Ibid.*, 123–24, trans. altered.

[77.] *Ibid.*, 124.

[78.] *Ibid.*, 124.

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not even be the crisis of them. *By doing so it gives room, as far as it can, for God's revelation, which indeed makes room for itself by itself.*<sup>[79]</sup>

Any sympathetic reading of *Act and Being*, however critical it need be, must be willing to follow along with Bonhoeffer's brash attempt to push the transcendental tradition to give room, as far as it can, for God's revelation. He never wavered in his confidence that revelation indeed makes room for itself by itself. But neither did he waver in his sense of the urgency for theology to find for itself a form of conceptuality that is an adequate receptor for these twin demands. What was needed, Bonhoeffer argues, is a form of thinking that takes seriously philosophy's own attempt to surmount its intrinsic tendencies toward system, toward totality. Theology requires a form of thinking capable of realizing transcendental philosophy's own attempts to think critically rather than systematically, its attempts to articulate a genuine active-receptivity of revelation, a dialectics of Otherness.

The social and ethical implications of Bonhoeffer's methodological deliberations in *Act and Being* resonate throughout his other theological writings. Already in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer had drawn the ethical inference from idealist epistemology that "the limit set by the individual person is in principle overcome."<sup>[80]</sup> It would become the guiding metaphor in *Creation and Fall*, where Bonhoeffer speaks of humanity's being created free, but only within the limits of creatureliness.<sup>[81]</sup> Indeed 'the fall' is for Bonhoeffer the Promethean attempt to be God, humanity's attempt to exist *sicut deus*, in the place of God, to become limitless, all-powerful, one whose very existence comes to be defined by the violent transgression of the limit of the Other (thus the Cain and Abel story which concludes the creation-fall narrative in *Genesis*).<sup>[82]</sup> Indeed the lectures on Christology would propose that Jesus is the Other-par-excellence, the sought-for limit to human pretensions, the center of human existence, history, and nature precisely *because* the concreteness of revelation in Christ — the new Adam — provides the creative limit that allows humanity to be authentically human, rather than a demonic usurper of divine power. Bonhoeffer returned to this theme of the limits of creatureliness and their role in human responsible action in

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[79.] *Ibid.*, 124; trans. altered, emphases added [WF].

[80.] *SC* 27.

[81.] *CF/T* 52ff.

[82.] *CF/T* 72-76.

*The Cost of Discipleship* and his *Ethics*, calling the life of the Other “a boundary which [the disciple] dare not pass.”<sup>[83]</sup> This enduring theme of the transgression of the Other, the refusal to know any limits, is what *Act and Being* had warned theology against — “the I . . . [become] the *point of departure* instead of the limit-point,”<sup>[84]</sup> not just of philosophy but of reality itself. To be limitless is to be incapable of being encountered by the revelation of Christ and one’s responsibilities to one’s neighbor as well.

### ***Act and Being* in Bonhoeffer Scholarship in English**

Until recently, serious treatments of *Act and Being* in the English literature on Bonhoeffer have been few. Franklin Sherman wrote the first major explication of *Act and Being* in *The Place of Bonhoeffer* in 1962. Walter Lowe wrote an enduringly provocative essay, “The Critique of Philosophy in Bonhoeffer’s *Act and Being*,” in 1966, but it remains unpublished.<sup>[85]</sup> The translation of André Dumas’s *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality* in 1971 offered a tantalizing but finally incomplete glimpse into the philosophical background of *Act and Being*. Heinrich Ott’s *Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* appeared in English in 1972, pointing toward, but not developing, the theme of the sociality of revelation in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. And Thomas Day provided a brief, but less than enthusiastic, overview of *Act and Being* in his *Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Christian Community and Common Sense*, originally written as a Ph.D. dissertation at Union Theological Seminary in 1975.

The first extended treatment of *Act and Being* in English, and the beginning of a new phase of appreciation of this work especially in the United States, began two decades ago with Clifford J. Green’s *Bonhoeffer: The Sociality of Christ and Humanity*, published in 1975, which for the first time took seriously the social ontology Bonhoeffer was attempting to articulate. But a decade was to pass between Green’s book and the excellent English translation of Ernst Feil’s *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, which placed *Act and Being* within the context of Bonhoeffer’s entire the-

[83.] *CD* 143; cf. *E*, N.B. 233–35.

[84.] See below, page 39.

[85.] Cf. his “Bonhoeffer and Deconstruction: Toward a Theology of the Crucified Logos,” *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 207–21.

ological development and pointed out the centrality of the conceptual pair: *actus directus* and *actus reflexus*. My own *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness: On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno*, published in 1988, sought to uncover the extent of the philosophical innovation and insight in *Act and Being*, and to place Bonhoeffer's developing theology of Otherness into dialogue with one other such interpretation of the Kantian-Hegelian-Heideggerian legacy, the 'negative dialectical' project of Theodor Adorno.<sup>[86]</sup> That same year, the late Jörg Rades wrote his stimulating and promising essay, "Bonhoeffer and Hegel: From *Sanctorum Communio* to the Hegel Seminar with Some Perspectives for the Later Works," sketching a longer work that will now never be written. More recently Robert P. Scharlemann's essay, "Authenticity and Encounter: Bonhoeffer's Appropriation of Ontology," published in 1994, has refocused attention on the Bonhoeffer-Heidegger connection in *Act and Being*. And Charles Marsh's *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of his Theology*, published that same year, has reopened the Bonhoeffer-Barth relationship to critical inquiry, using it as a springboard to inquire into Bonhoeffer's notion of selfhood – including a sophisticated reference to the philosophical theology of *Act and Being* – and its relationship to Bonhoeffer's theology of community.

### The Critical Edition, Notes, and Apparatus

The basis of the present translation of *Act and Being* is the German critical edition of *Akt und Sein*, edited by Hans-Richard Reuter, which is volume 2 of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, published in 1988. Since both the original manuscript of Bonhoeffer's *Habilitationsschrift* and any typescript copies are missing,<sup>[87]</sup> the two published editions of the book formed the basis for Reuter's work: (1) *Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie*, by Dietrich Bon-

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[86.] This work in particular was profoundly influenced by the work of Walter Lowe, N.B. his essay, "The Critique of Philosophy in Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being*," mentioned above.

[87.] There is no manuscript or typescript of the work in the *Habilitation* files in the archives of the Humboldt-Universität in (formerly East) Berlin. According to its director, Dr. Kossak, it was not common custom at the time to hand in the work. The archives and library of the publishing house C. Bertelsmann were burned in the war, according to its legal successor, the Gütersloh Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn.

hoeffer. *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, vol. 34. Edited by A. Schlatter and W. Lütgert. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1931. (2) *Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie. Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 5. Edited by E. Wolf. Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1956.

The 1931 edition was used as the textual basis of Reuter's work, although the internal pagination of the 1956 edition was retained, since it was the one most familiar to German readers. In the present English edition of *Act and Being*, the pagination of the German text of *DBW 2* is indicated in the margins of the text in order to facilitate cross-references with that critical edition. No attempt has been made to provide the pagination of either of the former two German editions or the pagination of the previous English translation by Bernard Noble.

Bonhoeffer's footnotes have been retained in a form as close to the original as possible. They are numbered consecutively, using plain Arabic numbers superscripted, beginning anew in each of the four major sections of the book. At times, information missing in Bonhoeffer's footnotes is supplied by the editor, enclosed in brackets, where such information will help the reader not to be misled in attributing a source. Editorial notes may provide further clarification of Bonhoeffer's own notes where necessary, as is the case when missing information is crucial to identify the source being consulted.

Editorial notes provided by the editors of either the German or the English editions are printed at the bottom of the page beneath Bonhoeffer's notes. They also are numbered consecutively, using superscripted Arabic numbers in square brackets, beginning anew in each major section of the book. Translations of Latin and Greek citations, expressions, and vocabulary are placed in double quotation marks in the editorial notes. Cross references to sections of the present work have been placed in editorial notes, if they have been added by an editor or translator rather than by Bonhoeffer. Editorial notes tend to clarify or expand knowledge of persons, issues, and works during Bonhoeffer's own time, rather than providing material placing Bonhoeffer's position in dialogue with subsequent scholarship on him.

A brief chronology follows the afterword by the editor of the German edition. This is not intended to be an exhaustive timetable of Bonhoeffer's life and the events in which it was imbedded; rather it signals the most pertinent dates related directly to the influences upon *Act and Being*, its composition, and publication.

The bibliography at the end of the text provides a list of the “Literature Used by Bonhoeffer” in the writing of *Act and Being*. It provides the complete bibliographical information to supplement Bonhoeffer’s own often scanty and fragmentary documentation. It gives provisional English translations of the titles of books and articles for which there are no published English editions; and it includes the full information about the published English editions of works that Bonhoeffer cites – as well as the German edition originally used by Bonhoeffer himself – where such are available. The “Literature Consulted by the Editors” is listed next in the bibliography, providing titles of the works cited by the editors in their notes throughout the book. Finally, “Other Literature Related to *Act and Being*” is listed, suggesting additional material which may be of special interest to scholars, particularly those in the English-speaking world, who are studying *Act and Being*.

The use of abbreviations in the footnotes, editorial notes, and bibliographies has been held to a minimum. The abbreviations for works written by Bonhoeffer are provided as part of the front matter just before this introduction. All other abbreviations follow the conventions of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th edition.

The indexes for *Act and Being* are based on those in the *DBW 2* German critical edition. They have been revised and expanded significantly, however, to reflect the common usage of theological terms in English-speaking contexts, in addition to material provided in the English edition that did not appear in the German volume.

Because of their technical usage by Bonhoeffer or their significance within the writings of a person to whom Bonhoeffer frequently refers, a small number of German terms have been left untranslated in the present English edition. These include *Dasein*, which Bonhoeffer virtually always uses here in a technical, Heideggerian manner to refer to human existence, and, at times, the terms *existential* and *existentiell*, which also are being borrowed by Bonhoeffer from Heidegger. Other terms proved especially difficult to translate, and editorial notes have been provided to explain the choices that have been made. Such words include *Aufhebung* (usually used by Bonhoeffer in a Hegelian sense), which has been variously translated as “subversion” or “suspension”; *Gegenstand*, the German word for “object,” which Bonhoeffer wishes to be understood as that which “stands over against” the thinking subject; *Mensch*, the usual generic term for “human beings” employed by Bonhoeffer, although at times he uses the more abstract *Menschheit*, which we have

translated as “humanity”; and *Gemeinde*, which can mean “congregation,” “community of faith,” or sometimes simply “community.”

### Acknowledgments

A special note of gratitude is due to several of those who contributed to the production of this entirely new, fresh, and engaging English edition of *Act and Being*. First of all, Martin Rumscheidt has produced a translation that many times reads with even more lucidity than the original and has done so with more charity and collegiality than any editor could deserve. Hans-Richard Reuter read the entire manuscript and graciously allowed much of the research for his own foreword to the German edition to be incorporated into this editor’s introduction to the present volume. Jean Bethke Elshtain and Susan Ford Wiltshire served as official consultants for the volume; their careful readings of the manuscript insured greater felicity in rendering Bonhoeffer’s meaning in this ‘foreign’ tongue. Clifford Green helped with the bibliographical apparatus for this text. Beth Orling Farrera read several provisional drafts of the text, providing always-helpful suggestions with some of the thorniest translation problems. Marshall Johnson and Lois Torvik at Fortress Press have proved invaluable mentors in the editorial process. And Mara Donaldson provided sustenance and cheer throughout a process that seemed to conform to no law save that of Zeno (whose riddles had appeared to demonstrate the impossibility of motion!), and then had the fortitude and compassion to proofread the final manuscript – gifting me in innumerable ways with that presence without whom none of this would have much meaning for her editor-husband.