

FAITH AND POLITICS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFER AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

This research examines Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought on the relationship between faith and politics and explores its relevance for the contemporary Indonesian Church. Grounded in the historical context of the Nazi regime and Bonhoeffer's resistance to totalitarianism, this study asserts that Christian faith cannot be separated from social and political responsibility. A qualitative method with a literature review approach is used to analyze Bonhoeffer's works and ideas and to relate them to the current reality of the Indonesian Church. The findings reveal that Bonhoeffer understands faith as the courage to confront evil, the willingness to engage concretely in the world, and the rejection of religious attitudes that remain indifferent to human suffering. His concepts of the church for others, solidarity with the marginalized, and prophetic witness offer crucial implications for the Indonesian Church amid contemporary challenges such as corruption, intolerance, poverty, and humanitarian crises. The study concludes that Bonhoeffer's perspective provides a public theological paradigm that encourages the Church to participate actively in social and political spheres without compromising its faith identity, affirming that Christian witness must be manifested through concrete actions for the common good and social justice..

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji pemikiran Dietrich Bonhoeffer mengenai relasi iman dan politik serta relevansinya bagi Gereja Indonesia kontemporer. Berangkat dari konteks historis rezim Nazi dan keterlibatan Bonhoeffer dalam perjuangan melawan totalitarianisme, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa iman Kristen tidak dapat dipisahkan dari tanggung jawab sosial-politik. Metode kualitatif dengan studi pustaka digunakan untuk menganalisis karya dan gagasan Bonhoeffer serta menghubungkannya dengan realitas Gereja di Indonesia. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Bonhoeffer memandang iman sebagai keberanian menghadapi kejahatan, kesediaan terlibat dalam dunia secara konkret, dan penolakan terhadap religiusitas yang apatis terhadap penderitaan manusia. Gagasannya mengenai gereja bagi sesama, keberpihakan terhadap yang lemah, dan kesaksian profetis memiliki implikasi penting bagi Gereja Indonesia dalam menghadapi tantangan kontemporer seperti korupsi, intoleransi, kemiskinan, dan krisis kemanusiaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemikiran Bonhoeffer memberikan paradigma teologi publik yang mendorong Gereja untuk hadir secara aktif dalam ruang sosial-politik tanpa kehilangan identitas iman, serta menegaskan bahwa kesaksian Kristen harus diwujudkan dalam tindakan nyata demi kebaikan bersama dan keadilan sosial.

INTRODUCTION

In many people's minds, faith is understood as belief in the existence of God. Literally, faith is loyalty to a task or to someone.¹ The acknowledgment that there is only one God is the foundation of Christian faith. This refers to the apostles' creed. This formulation of faith was born from the historical journey of the Church and has been upheld by Christians for nearly two millennia to this day.² For Christians, faith is closely related to hope. The unity between faith and hope is evident because God is a faithful Person who keeps His covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and obey His commands (Deut. 7:9). Believing in God means trusting in His unfailing faithfulness (Ps. 52:10), for He always keeps His promises to everyone. As St. Paul affirms, "The God who calls you is faithful," and therefore He will not let you be tempted beyond

¹ "Definition of FAITH," December 10, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>.

² Paulus Bagus Sugiyono, "Iman Kristiani Kepada Allah Yang Satu," *Logos* 15, no. 1 (2019): 59–60.

your ability (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13).³ Faith always grows in a community of believers, namely the Church.

The Church is a community of people who believe in Jesus Christ, and its existence cannot be separated from society. As a spiritual organization, the Church is not only called to survive in the face of various changes, but also to give direction and meaning to an ever-changing world. The Church can also be understood as a social organization that provides various forms of service to its members. Therefore, as a service institution, the Church needs to be aware that many non-church institutions now also offer significant public services.⁴ In Catholicism, the Church is even understood as a sacrament.⁵ The Church that lives in the world does not just stand still, but is involved in the dynamics of the world, such as politics. The Church is actually and actively involved in fighting for a better future.⁶

In today's world, politics, which is essentially good, is often viewed negatively. Many politicians act only in their own interests or those of their groups, leading to politics being labeled as "bad politics".⁷ Etymologically, the term politics comes from the Greek word polis, which means a city-state. In the context of ancient Greece, politics referred to the management of communal life in order to achieve common good and welfare, as emphasized by Aristotle. In its development, politics encompasses everything related to power, governance, state structures and institutions, and the goals that the government wants to achieve. Politics is also understood as a set of values, meanings, and choices of the community to maintain the continuity of social order.⁸ Politics is also seen as a method for individuals to gain power in government. Young Catholics also participate in politics through education.⁹

People who live as citizens and members of the Church must live in harmony. However, it cannot be denied that in countries with unstable political systems, the Church is sometimes

³ Jose Maia, "Iman, Harapan Dan Kasih Merupakan Kabajikan Utama Hidup Kristiani," *Jurnal Masalah Pastoral* 7, nos. 0–1 (2019): 1–3.

⁴ Joseph Christ Santo, "Gereja Menghadapi Era Masyarakat 5.0: Peluang Dan Ancaman," *Miktab: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan Kristiani* 1, no. 2 (2021): 223–24.

⁵ Emanuel Martasudjita, *Sakramen-Sakramen Gereja: Tinjauan Teologis, Liturgis, Dan Pastoral* (PT Kanisius, 2003), 83–85.

⁶ Fransiskus Irwan Widjaja, "Peran Gereja Terhadap Kehidupan Politik Di Wilayah Kepulauan Riau," *Real Didache* 1 (2020): 136–38.

⁷ Bernardus Badj, "Kritik Retorika Sofis Dan Politik: Upaya Memprioritaskan Kebenaran Dalam Hidup Berpolitik," *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 2, no. 4 (2025): 280–81.

⁸ Chomarius Robb et al., "Menganalisis Pemahaman Orang Muda Katolik Tentang Politik Praktis Di Stasi Sta. Maria Goreti Aramengi Paroki Salib Suci Hoelea Keuskupan Larantuka," *Pastoralia Jurnal Penelitian Dosen* 5 (June 2024): 45.

⁹ Agustinus Abraham, "Partisipasi Orang Muda Katolik Dalam Dunia Politik: Tinjauan Sistematis Literature," *JPAK: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katolik* 25, no. 2 (2025): 425.

caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, the Church is safe and comfortable when it only operates internally, but on the other hand, it is the Church's duty to go out, speak up, bear witness, and take the side of the weak, the marginalized, and the exiled.¹⁰ The existence of the Church today is important for its presence in society. The Church needs to learn from the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was one of those who fought against the Nazis, fighting for humanity and justice. For him, faith must be expressed through political action for the sake of the common good and harmony.¹¹

The church is often seen as distancing itself from politics.¹² In the Catholic Church, politics is an obligation, except that clergy are not allowed to engage in practical politics. Politics is humanity's response to God's call, which has been incarnated in the concrete history of human life.¹³ Faced with this reality, Bonhoeffer's thinking becomes increasingly relevant for deeper study. Based on this background, this research is urgent for Christians, especially in Indonesia in today's world. Many studies have discussed the Church and politics, each with their own focus. However, this study presents something new through its explanation of Bonhoeffer's thinking and its relevance to the Indonesian Church. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions. (1) Who is Dietrich Bonhoeffer and what is the context of his life? (2) What are Bonhoeffer's thoughts on faith in the political world? (3) What is the relevance of Bonhoeffer's thoughts to the faith of the contemporary Indonesian Church?

METHOD

This study applies a qualitative method with a literature review approach. John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth explain that qualitative research is an activity that places researchers directly in reality being studied, so that this reality can be presented and understood. Through qualitative research, the world is presented in various forms of representation, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and the researcher's reflective memos. Thus, qualitative researchers examine various phenomena in their natural context with the aim of understanding and interpreting the meanings contained therein.¹⁴ Meanwhile, literature studies are an important element in qualitative research, which includes studies of previous research

¹⁰ Kurniawan Madyo Utomo, "Panggilan Gereja Dalam Realitas Ketidakadilan Di Indonesia," 52, no. 1 (2023): 14–15.

¹¹ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Fortress Press, 2000), 3–34.

¹² Markus Dominggus Lere Dawa, "Menyoal Sikap Gereja Terhadap Politik," *SOLA GRATIA: Jurnal Teologi Biblika Dan Praktika* 17, no. 9 (2015): 54.

¹³ Otto Gusti Ndegong MADUNG, *Gereja Dan Politik*, 2014, 2.

¹⁴ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry Research Design* (California: SAGE Publication, Inc., 2018), 45.

that is closely related to the focus of the research being conducted.¹⁵ In this study, the author collected data from previous writings. The author used books and scientific journals accessed online.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Intellectual Biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Context of His Life

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau, Germany, on February 4, 1906, as the seventh of eight children in a respected family. His father, Karl Ludwig Bonhoeffer (1868–1948), was a professor of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Berlin, while his mother, Paula von Hase (1874–1951), was a teacher who came from an educated family with strong Lutheran Protestant traditions. Both of his parents were known as strong-willed, educated individuals who held fast to important values in life. At the age of 14, Bonhoeffer decided to pursue theology. In 1923, at the age of 17, he began studying theology at the Protestant Faculty of Theology at the University of Tübingen, then continued a year later at the University of Berlin. There, he studied under the guidance of Adolf von Harnack, a prominent church historian who greatly influenced his thinking. In 1927, at the age of 21, Bonhoeffer earned his doctorate in theology after defending his dissertation entitled *Sanctorum Communio* (The Communion of Saints).¹⁶

In 1928, because he was not yet old enough to be ordained, Bonhoeffer served as an assistant pastor in the German community in Barcelona, Spain, where he encountered the reality of poverty that drove his social engagement. A year later, he completed his dissertation, *Act and Being*. At the age of 24, he was accepted as a lecturer in systematic theology at the University of Berlin, but before starting his duties, he continued his studies at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and attended Reinhold Niebuhr's lectures. Upon his return from America, he met Karl Barth at the University of Bonn. Bonhoeffer was ordained on November 15, 1931, and in the same year he officially became a lecturer and student pastor at the University of Berlin.¹⁷

From the outset, Dietrich Bonhoeffer realized that National Socialism was an ideology that rejected God and glorified human power. On February 1, 1933, the day after Hitler came to power, he criticized the cult of “Der Führer” in a radio address and called on German Christians to defend Jews and reject Nazi rule without compromise. However, when the German Christian Church allied itself with Hitler's regime, a disappointed Bonhoeffer chose to leave for London in

¹⁵ Agustini Agustini et al., “Metode Penelitian Kualitatif: Teori Dan Panduan Praktis Analisis Data Kualitatif,” *Penerbit Mifandi Mandiri Digital* 1, no. 01 (2024): 53.

¹⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 3–34.

¹⁷ YB Prasetyantha, “Refleksi Teologis Dietrich Bonhoeffer Melawan Sepak Terjang Nazi-Hitler,” *Jurnal Orientasi Baru* 26, no. 2 (2017): 71–73.

October 1933. There he served the German congregation, explained the crisis of the German Church to the international community, and saw the ecumenical movement to reunite the Church and reaffirm the authority of Scripture in the context of the universal Church.¹⁸

In 1935, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany as leader of the Bekennende Kirche, a church that opposed the Nazis and believed that faith must be manifested in political action. He trained prospective pastors at an unofficial seminary in Finkenwalde, emphasizing Christian life in the spirit of “living together.” In 1937, the seminary was shut down by the Gestapo, his underground efforts failed, and Bonhoeffer was dismissed and banned from writing. Nevertheless, he remained active in the ecumenical movement and taught in England and America until 1939. Refusing to live safely in America, Bonhoeffer chose to return to Germany to share the suffering of his people. Upon his return, he became involved in the anti-Hitler movement through the Abwehr and helped smuggle Jews out of Germany.¹⁹

In 1940, Bonhoeffer was banned from speaking in public and was required to report regularly to the police. On January 17, 1943, he became engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, whom he had known since 1942. Following the Abwehr's failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler, Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo on April 5, 1943, along with his sister, Christel, and his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, at his parents' home. He was then imprisoned in Tegel Prison, Berlin, where during his detention he was visited several times by his loyal fiancée, although the two did not have time to marry.²⁰ On October 8, 1944, Bonhoeffer was transferred to the Gestapo's main prison on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse in Berlin. After the prison was destroyed by Allied air raids in February 1945, he was transferred to the Buchenwald concentration camp, and then, on April 3, 1945, to the Flossenbürg camp. On April 9, 1945, Bonhoeffer was executed by hanging along with the leaders of the Abwehr.²¹ When Bonhoeffer was about to be brought to trial, as quoted by Craig Lantz, he cited a passage from Isaiah 53:5: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”²²

Broadly speaking, Bonhoeffer's life was shaped by the Nazi regime, World War II, and the Holocaust. The Nazi Party originated from the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Workers' Party), which had its roots in the Freier Ausschuss für Einen Deutschen Arbeiterfrieden (Free

¹⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 257–304.

¹⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 419–23.

²⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 681–791.

²¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 893–928.

²² Craig Lantz, *The Role of Faith and Grace in the Life and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Theologian, Prophet, and Martyr* (Sophia's House Publication's, 2025), 107.

Committee for a German Workers' Peace), founded in 1918 by Anton Drexler with an ideology of militant nationalism, anti-Versailles, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and suspicion of global capitalism. The transformation into the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party) occurred after Adolf Hitler joined in 1919 and took over the leadership in 1921, which led to the rapid growth of the party and the joining of important figures such as Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler. Under Hitler's leadership, the Nazis expanded their influence to rural areas and achieved a relative victory in the 1932 elections. Through a combination of intimidation, political intrigue, and institutional support, Hitler was appointed chancellor on January 30, 1933, and then used his power to abolish the basic rights of citizens through presidential decrees and build the first concentration camp in Dachau, as the first step in consolidating the Nazi totalitarian regime.²³

In addition to political campaigns, the Nazis used paramilitary violence and anti-communist propaganda to ban the Communist Party and dissolve the Social Democratic Party, until July 14, 1933, when it was established as the only legal political party in Germany. After the death of President von Hindenburg on August 2, 1934, Adolf Hitler unified the positions of head of state and head of government with the title *Führer und Reichskanzler*, thus becoming the sole ruler who ran the government authoritarily. With the end of democracy and the formation of a single-party dictatorship, the Nazi regime launched a massive propaganda campaign to Nazify German society and realize the Third Reich, controlling all means of communication through the Ministry of Propaganda. Intensive anti-Semitic propaganda then gave rise to discriminatory policies such as the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, which revoked Jewish citizenship rights and legitimized open violence against them, culminating in the *Kristallnacht* as a symbol of the escalation of systematic oppression against the Jewish community in Germany.²⁴

After leaving the League of Nations, Adolf Hitler openly violated the Treaty of Versailles by expanding the armed forces, forming an air force, strengthening the navy, and ordering the remilitarization of the Rhineland and the annexation of Austria in 1938. This aggression culminated on September 1, 1939, with a massive invasion of Poland, which immediately triggered declarations of war from Britain and France and marked the beginning of World War II, a global conflict involving more than 100 million military personnel from various countries until 1945. The war resulted in approximately 50-70 million deaths, both military and civilian,

²³ Prasetyantha, "Refleksi Teologis Dietrich Bonhoeffer Melawan Sepak Terjang Nazi-Hitler," 168–170.

²⁴ "Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Rise to Power, 1918–1933 | Holocaust Encyclopedia," accessed December 17, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-rise-to-power>.

including millions of victims of the Holocaust and mass killings of groups deemed unfit by Nazi ideology, making it the deadliest international conflict and one of the darkest humanitarian tragedies in human history.²⁵

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Main Ideas on Faith and Politics

An analysis of Bonhoeffer's thinking confirms the importance of the concept of “things that precede the last” in his theology. According to Bonhoeffer, humans are called to speak about God precisely in the midst of concrete life, in attachment to this world (*Diesseitigkeit*) which also includes suffering. Therefore, “things that precede the last” should not be ignored or rushed through. The “non-religious” interpretation focuses on the real world and the experience of human suffering in all its dimensions, which finds meaning and salvation in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In contrast, Bonhoeffer understood “religious” interpretations as an orientation toward “the beyond” (*Jenseits*), which tends to avoid the reality of “things that precede” and rejects suffering as part of Christian life. In this framework, the “non-religious” interpretation also has ethical-political implications, namely the rejection of the sacralization of the political dimension, because politics belongs to the realm of “things that precede the last.” Thus, Bonhoeffer's idea of Christianity without religion serves as a means of theological criticism of the tendency to elevate religion excessively in political discourse, both during the Nazi era and afterwards, which cannot be justified theologically.²⁶

To Have Faith Means to be Brave in Fighting Evil

When Hitler came to power in 1933, around 60 million Germans, the majority of whom were Christian, 40 million Protestants-Lutherans and 20 million Catholics, generally welcomed Nazism because it was considered capable of restoring the socio-political conditions after World War I and becoming a bulwark against Communism. Some were even tempted by the propaganda of “Positive Christianity” in the 1920 Nazi Platform. However, there were also Christian groups that opposed Nazism, both openly and covertly. The agreement between the Nazis and the Catholic Church in 1933, which promised the Church's political neutrality and protection from state interference, was short-lived, because in 1937 the Nazi regime began to oppress Catholic

²⁵ Prasetyantha, “Refleksi Teologis Dietrich Bonhoeffer Melawan Sepak Terjang Nazi-Hitler,” 169–170.

²⁶ Ralf K Wüstenberg, *Bonhoeffer and beyond: Promoting a Dialogue between Religion and Politics* (Peter Lang, 2008), 2:29.

institutions by arresting priests and nuns, prompting Pope Pius XI to issue the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* as a strong criticism of Nazism and a rejection of anti-Semitism.²⁷

During the Nazi era, the Protestant-Lutheran Church was divided into two camps: the *Deutsche Christen*, led by Ludwig Müller, who supported Hitler in his efforts to establish an Aryan church and remove Jewish elements from Christianity; and the *Bekennende Kirche*, which rejected these views under the leadership of Martin Niemöller, where Dietrich Bonhoeffer actively developed his theological thinking. In this context, Bonhoeffer, through *The Cost of Discipleship*, emphasized the urgency of living an authentic faith in the modern secular world. As a form of moral and theological commitment, he chose to abandon a promising academic career after Hitler came to power and made the Nazis the only political party in Germany.²⁸

Early in his career, Bonhoeffer still accepted the traditional Lutheran view that separated religion from politics, but his awareness of the corruption and immorality of the Nazi regime led him to revise this view, concluding that Hitler was the mastermind behind the crimes or antichrist who destroyed human values and divine morality.²⁹ Convinced that opposing tyranny was not only a right but also a Christian duty, Bonhoeffer decided to return to Germany at the most critical moment, abandoning his peaceful stance in favor of active confrontation to overthrow Hitler, because he felt responsible for preventing greater destruction and was even willing to die to save his people.

Bonhoeffer was aware of the serious consequences of his struggle against the Nazis, including the risks to himself and his supporters, but after his arrest he remained steadfast in refusing to admit wrongdoing and openly declared his hostility toward Hitler. Even when he had the opportunity to escape in 1944, he chose to remain in order not to endanger other prisoners and to remain true to his faith until the end. For him, Christianity should not be limited to personal piety or the sacramental realm alone, but must be present in the world through the Church as the body of Christ, where true faith demands involvement, courage, and a willingness to take risks, even to the point of martyrdom if necessary. Therefore, he rejected a private and apolitical faith, and asserted that Christian belief must be manifested in transformative action in the socio-political sphere, because faith that focuses only on the inner realm is considered an escape from evangelical responsibility in the midst of real life.³⁰

²⁷ Prasetyantha, "Refleksi Teologis Dietrich Bonhoeffer Melawan Sepak Terjang Nazi-Hitler," 173–174.

²⁸ Prasetyantha, "Refleksi Teologis Dietrich Bonhoeffer Melawan Sepak Terjang Nazi-Hitler," 174.

²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), 29–30.

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 24.

In the secular world, Bonhoeffer emphasized that Christian life must be lived publicly by being “the salt and light of the world,” meaning that believers are called to immerse themselves in social life through concrete actions such as poverty, humility, peace, and faithful cross-bearing, so that the Church is present as a visible and impactful community. He rejects faith that focuses only on inner religiosity, and instead emphasizes “faith without religion” that holds fast to the crucified Christ and acknowledges God who is hidden in the world. In the face of a brutal regime that negated God, Bonhoeffer asserted that Christian life is both theological and political: present in the dynamics of the world but remaining in the body of Christ and practicing discipleship. Therefore, the Church becomes authentic when it is oriented toward the Kingdom of God while bearing witness against evil and injustice, because for Bonhoeffer, the sanctification of the Church community has a political character and is a prerequisite for its witness and involvement in the redemption of the world.³¹

To Have Faith Means to Walk with Christ in the World

Bonhoeffer's thoughts on public faith and the theological-political identity of the Church are rooted in the fundamental question he asked throughout his life, “Who is Christ for us in this age?”³² This question became even more acute when Hitler rose to power as chancellor in 1933, prompting Bonhoeffer to redefine the meaning of faith in the context of a world threatened by totalitarianism. In his last Christology lecture at the University of Berlin in 1933, later published as *Christ the Center*, Bonhoeffer emphasized that Christ is the center of the entire life of His disciples, as he drew inspiration from Martin Luther's theology. For Bonhoeffer, no law, personal piety, or world could hinder the direct relationship between disciples and Christ, and ultimately that absolute center was the crucified Christ, who became the basis for a real, prophetic, and relevant commitment to faith in the circumstances of his time.

Russell W. Palmer asserts that Bonhoeffer's Christology departs from the understanding that the Divine Logos is not merely an idea, but a Person who became human, so that human reason cannot classify Him and can only ask, “Who are You?” For Bonhoeffer, this question is answered through faith that acknowledges Christ as a present Person: Christ crucified and risen, historical as Jesus of Nazareth, yet real in the “here and now” through the community of faith, the Word, and the sacraments. Thus, Christology becomes possible because of the presence of

³¹ Stanley Hauerwas, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Political Theology,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 20, no. 3 (2002): 26.

³² Frits De Lange, “Against Escapism: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Contribution to Public Theology,” *Christians in Public. Aims, Methodology and Issues in Public Theology, Editado Por Len Hansen* 3 (2007): 8.

the risen Christ who continues to be present in the life of the Church, so that theological reflection on the person of Christ is rooted in the experience of faith in His actual presence.³³

According to Russell W. Palmer, Bonhoeffer developed two main themes in his Christology, namely Christ as God incarnate and Christ as both humbled and exalted, with an emphasis that Jesus' divinity must be understood not through His omnipotence, but through His humility as a human being born in a manger and dying on the cross, without diminishing His divinity or humanity. Bonhoeffer asserts that Christ's humiliation and exaltation do not make Him more God or more human, but rather He is always fully God and fully human. Bonhoeffer's basic intuition in answering the question "Who is Christ for us today?" grew in three periods of theological reflection, as noted by Frits de Lange: in the early period, Christ was understood to be present in the poor and oppressed; later, He was recognized in the Jews in the context of resistance to the Nazis; and finally, He was understood as a responsible citizen, so that Bonhoeffer's Christology became increasingly contextual, historical, and relevant to the ethical responsibility of believers.³⁴

For Bonhoeffer, Christ is God walking with humanity and present in a concrete way in the reality of the world, so that only through Christ can humanity know God and understand the essence of its own humanity. In the incarnation, God and humanity are not separated into two different realities, but are united in one divine reality manifested in the world, so that there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Using the ideas of Frits de Lange, Bonhoeffer viewed incarnation as God entering into human reality, embracing and acknowledging it as His own, so that all reality must be understood through the lens of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, which invites involvement in humanity, the struggle against evil, and eschatological hope. Ultimately, faith for Bonhoeffer is not merely intellectual assent, but existential trust and total surrender to the reality of God in Christ.³⁵

Relevance for the Contemporary Church

Church for Others

For Bonhoeffer, the Church as a community of believers must be present and responsible in the public sphere. Bonhoeffer's idea of the Church for others integrates the understanding that the Church does not live for itself but is called to be present in the world and bear social responsibility. The Church is called to be actively involved in the concrete realities of a society

³³ Russell W Palmer, "The Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1977): 133.

³⁴ Palmer, "The Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 134.

³⁵ De Lange, "Against Escapism: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Contribution to Public Theology," 4–5.

experiencing poverty, injustice, intolerance, and ecological crisis as a manifestation of faith incarnated in action. Bonhoeffer's thinking about responsibility and sacrifice culminates in total witness of life. The Church is understood as a community that walks together, practicing solidarity with the weak and marginalized.

For the Indonesian Church, this means living out faith as public theology, that is, a tangible witness of faith in social, national, and humanitarian life, without losing Christian identity amid plurality. This is in line with the spirit of synodality, in which all the faithful actively participate in the Church's mission. The witness of faith does not always take the form of physical martyrdom but is manifested in daily martyrdom such as fidelity to the Gospel through siding with the little ones, the courage to do what is right, and the willingness to take risks for the sake of love. The Church for others means that the Church must walk together or synodality. The principle of synodality is the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God. In fact, as the *nexus amoris* [relationship of love] in the life of God as Trinity, the Spirit gives this same love to the Church, and the Church is built into the communion of saints (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13).³⁶

Prophetic Spirit of the Church

Courage to fight injustice and abuse of power. Bonhoeffer emphasized that the Church must not remain silent in the face of evil, because silence means compromise. This prophetic spirit unites the Church's call to speak out critically against structural injustice, authoritarianism, and violations of human dignity. For the contemporary Indonesian Church, this prophetic calling demands the courage to speak out against corruption, human rights violations, economic exploitation, and religious manipulation, even though this carries social and political risks. In the context of Catholicism in Indonesia, since the colonial era, faith and politics have been inseparable. Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata gave a motto or spirit as quoted by Eka, namely 100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian.³⁷ Bonhoeffer's thinking also touches on the mature world closely related to his criticism of cheap grace. Christian faith must not stop at ritualism, private piety, or institutional comfort, but must be manifested as discipleship that demands obedience, sacrifice, and ethical courage. In the context of the Indonesian Church, mature faith requires believers to integrate faith and life, so that following Christ means being willing to carry the cross in the form of loyalty to truth, justice, and social solidarity.

³⁶ "Sinodalitas Dalam Kehidupan Dan Misi Gereja," Departemen Dokumentasi dan Penerangan Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI), 2018, 42 article, 46.

³⁷ Samudra Eka Cipta, "100% Katolik 100% Indonesia: Suatu Tinjauan Historis Perkembangan Nasionalisme Umat Katolik Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 14, no. 1 (2020): 118.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thinking on faith and politics provides an important foundation for the Church to be responsibly present in public life. Through his life journey and involvement in the resistance against the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer showed that Christian faith is not a matter of private religiosity but a concrete call to fight for human dignity, justice, and truth. His understanding of “things that precede the last,” the idea of the Church for others, and his non-religious interpretation of faith show that Christianity must be incarnated in social reality, even when it requires the courage to face evil and the risk of sacrifice. In the Indonesian context, Bonhoeffer's thinking is relevant as an inspiration for the Church not to be apathetic towards public issues, but to actively voice its prophetic voice, build solidarity with the weak, and develop a public theology based on dialogue, justice, and humanity. Thus, Bonhoeffer offers a transformative paradigm of faith, namely faith that walks with Christ in the world and presents the Church as a sacrament of hope for a pluralistic and ever-changing society.

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