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Article abstract

In this essay I compare Bonhoeffer's and Tillich's perspectives on divine suffering and suggest that Bonhoeffer's (and to a lesser degree Tillich's) notion of both divine and human vicarious suffering is a way of re-framing Anselm's so-called "forensic" theory of atonement, in which Christ takes upon himself the undeserved condemnation of fallen humankind and dies vicariously on our behalf in order to satisfy divine justice.

JESUS CHRIST, THE MAN FOR OTHERS

THE SUFFERING GOD IN THE THOUGHT OF PAUL TILLICH AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

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RÉSUMÉ : Dans cet article, je compare les perspectives de Bonhoeffer et de Tillich sur la souffrance divine et suggère que Bonhoeffer et, dans une moindre mesure, Tillich, par leur concept d'une souffrance vicariale à la fois humaine et divine, reformulent la théorie anselmienne de l'expiation « légale », selon laquelle le Christ assume la condamnation de l'humanité déchue et meurt à notre place pour satisfaire la justice divine.

ABSTRACT : In this essay I compare Bonhoeffer's and Tillich's perspectives on divine suffering and suggest that Bonhoeffer's (and to a lesser degree Tillich's) notion of both divine and human vicarious suffering is a way of re-framing Anselm's so-called "forensic" theory of atonement, in which Christ takes upon himself the undeserved condemnation of fallen humankind and dies vicariously on our behalf in order to satisfy divine justice.

INTRODUCTION

Anselm's so-called "forensic" theory of the atonement, in which Christ takes upon himself the undeserved condemnation of fallen humankind and dies vicariously on our behalf in order to satisfy divine justice — the dominant view of western Christianity, especially mainline Protestantism — has been severely criticized from many quarters in recent years. In its place other approaches, like Abelard's "moral influence" theory (in which a God of love and solidarity reconciles the world to Himself on the cross, thereby influencing human beings likewise to become involved in the world of reconciliation) or the ancient *Christus Victor* model (in which the cross and resurrection represent God's victory over the cosmic principalities and powers) have been strongly defended in new and revised forms. Commonplace in current theological reflection on the topic is the claim that God suffers in, alongside of, and in solidarity with all who suffer — i.e., where suffering occurs there God is. In the following pages I compare Bonhoeffer's and Tillich's perspectives on divine suffering and suggest that Bonhoeffer's (and to a lesser degree Tillich's)

notion of both divine and human vicarious suffering is a way of reframing Anselm's theory that is not only meaningful but essential for today. Vicarious, representative suffering, more than suffering in solidarity, is a way of taking seriously sin and the fallenness of the world as well as redemptive transformation and the struggle for social justice.

I. TILlich AND BONHOEFFER : A GENERAL COMPARISON

At first glance, the German-American theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and the German theologian and "martyr" Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) appear to have little in common. Tillich's theological method presupposes an Alexandrian-like fusion of philosophy and theology that is quite foreign to the Barthian-like theology of the Word that characterizes Bonhoeffer's thought, in which theology has its own independent method and subject matter. Tillich's philosophical ontology which grounds his whole theology, including his Christology, as well as his ethics, certainly stands in contrast to Bonhoeffer's repeated emphasis on the concrete nature of Christology, and his view of the "Church as Christ existing." Tillich's rejection of all forms of "heteronomy" and "empty autonomy" in favour of "theonomy" seems quite different from Barth's "command ethics" and, similarly, Bonhoeffer's call, especially in *The Cost of Discipleship*, for obedience to divine will, and the submission of the ego to Christ. Furthermore, Tillich's religious interpretation of culture, in which religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion, seems foreign to Barth's and also Bonhoeffer's critique of all religion as the vain human attempt to climb up the ladder to God. Bonhoeffer, on the contrary, seeks a "religionless Christianity" in which the world is allowed to remain secular. In a June 8, 1944 letter from prison to Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer says :

Tillich set out to interpret the evolution of the world (against its will) in a religious sense — to give it its shape through religion. That was very brave of him, but the world unseated him and went on by itself ; he, too, sought to understand the world better than it understood itself ; but it felt that it was completely misunderstood, and rejected the imputation. (Of course, the world *must* be understood better than it understands itself, but not "religiously" as the Religious Socialists wanted.)¹

Bonhoeffer welcomed the "secularization" of the world, its growing maturity and autonomy from religion, while Tillich allegedly tried to inoculate the last vestiges of a dying liberal culture with the left-overs of a vague generic Protestant religiosity.²

If one reads Tillich and Bonhoeffer more carefully, however, especially in relation to each other, one can't help but notice some remarkable similarities. (See my

1. Dietrich BONHOEFFER, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard BETHGE, new greatly enlarged edition, New York, Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972, p. 327-328. Hereafter cited in the body of the text as *Letters*. See also A. James REIMER, *Paul Tillich : Theologian of Nature, Culture and Politics*, Münster, LIT Verlag (coll. "Tillich-Studien," 6), 2004, p. 3ff. Hereafter cited in the body of the text as *Tillich : Theologian*.

2. Emanuel Hirsch is to have accused Tillich of as much in a 1958 telephone conversation with Tillich. See *Tillich : Theologian*, p. 3, n. 3.

Tillich : Theologian, p. 4ff.) For one thing, as in Tillich, the social sciences and philosophy play an important role in Bonhoeffer's theology. This is especially evident in his two earliest works : *Sanctorum Communio* (1927, published in 1930) and *Akt und Sein* (1929, published in 1931). The first of these, *Sanctorum Communio*, subtitled "A Study of the Sociology of the Church," draws heavily on sociology and psychology to illumine the *structure* of the church, while remaining uncompromisingly theological in analysing the *nature* of the church. Referring to Tillich's *Masse und Geist* (1922), Bonhoeffer praises Tillich for calling on the church to engage the voice of the masses, but regards Tillich's particular understanding of the holiness of the mass[es] as having little to do with Christian theology. For Bonhoeffer, "the Christian concept of the church-community is the criterion for evaluating the notion of the mass, and not the other way around."³ In other words, Bonhoeffer has a much greater regard for the substantive role that other disciplines play in theological work than does Barth (here he is closer to Tillich), but in the end his understanding of theology is much more concretely "churchly" and "confessional," in the Barthian sense, than is Tillich's. This is, as I will argue below, also what separates Tillich and Bonhoeffer, in their understanding of the suffering of God.

It is particularly in the second of the two works mentioned above, *Akt und Sein*, that Bonhoeffer's dependence on a philosophical-ontological analysis of the Christian church is evident. Strong Hegelian and Heideggarian elements in his theology, Christology and ecclesiology distinguish him from Barth and locate him closer to Tillich. And yet, also in this work, Bonhoeffer distinguishes his thought from that of Tillich. Tillich's philosophical-anthropological framework, he says, does not adequately account for human existence determined by sin, guilt and grace. The boundary-situation is defined not by non-being, as in Tillich, but by judgment, sin and grace.⁴

It is interesting how Eberhard Bethge, the definitive biographer of Bonhoeffer, evaluates the similarities and differences between the two :

Bonhoeffer was not the first theologian who welcomed, instead of condemning, the evolution of secularization into a coming of age. If Bonhoeffer had been able to examine the material more thoroughly, he would have seen that the Religious Socialist[s] Leonhard Ragaz and Paul Tillich had made similar breakthroughs earlier. The others, however, had been concerned with turning away from the Christology of the Reformation, whereas Bonhoeffer proclaimed this coming of age in the name of the crucified and risen Christ, and saw it as a necessary part of Christology. For him it was the crucified Christ who enabled, judged, and renewed "true worldliness," "genuine this-worldliness" and "coming of age."⁵

3. Clifford J. GREEN, ed., *Sanctorum Communio : A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, translated by Rinhard Kraus and Nancy Lukens, Minneapolis, Fortress Press (coll. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works," 1), 1998, p. 239-240.

4. Wayne WHITSON FLOYD, JR., ed. *Act and Being : Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, translated by Martin Rumscheidt, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996, p. 77.

5. Eberhard BETHGE, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer : A Biography*, revised edition, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000, p. 133. Hereafter cited in the body of the text as *Bethge*.

Just as Tillich wants to get rid of the “supernatural” and Bultmann the “mythological,” Bonhoeffer is anxious to break up the traditional structure of dogmas and their concepts to discuss “theism” in order to begin a new dialogue with “atheists” (*Bethge*, p. 873-874).

What was different with Bonhoeffer was his much greater concern for the Church : “Bonhoeffer’s nonreligious interpretation is more an ethical than a hermeneutical category, and also a direct call to repentance directed at the church and its present form — for the sake of the kerygma, the language” (*Bethge*, p. 879-880). *Bethge* might be challenged at this point. It could be persuasively argued that in his later prison letters and ethical writings Bonhoeffer himself became disillusioned with the institutional church, including even the Confessing Church, in a way similar to Tillich. He found greater commonality with atheists and others outside of the church, who were ready to risk their lives to save the victims of Nazi oppression (i.e., to live for others, as Christ did) than those inside the church who were concerned above all for the survival of the church.

One wonders what kind of conversations Tillich and Bonhoeffer had at Union Theological Seminary at the time of Bonhoeffer’s brief stay there in the Spring of 1939, before deciding to go back to Germany. I have not been able to establish or to find any record of such a conversation between Bonhoeffer and Tillich, who was a Professor at Union Theological Seminary at the time. It is inconceivable, however, that such a conversation did not take place. I still rue the fact that I didn’t ask Paul Lehmann, a colleague of Tillich’s and close friend of Bonhoeffer’s, about such a possible conversation, when I studied with Lehmann at Union in 1970-1971.

II. BONHOEFFER : JESUS THE “MAN FOR OTHERS”

My reflections here on the life and thought of Bonhoeffer, in particular his Christology and the suffering of God, bears the imprint of my recent experience of a two-week Bonhoeffer study tour in Germany, May 6-20, 2004. Visiting in person the places that were so significant in the life, thought and death of Bonhoeffer — his birth place in Breslau, the universities where he studied (Humboldt and Tübingen), Finkenwalde (now in Poland) where he wrote his *The Cost of Discipleship* while directing the Confessing Church Seminary until it closed in 1937, Koszalin and the area of the collective pastorates, the Bonhoeffer home in Berlin where the conspirators met to plan for the July, 1944 assassination attempt, Tegel prison where he wrote his famous *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the infamous Nazi prison on the Prinz Albrecht Strasse where he was brought after he was implicated in the conspiracy, the beautiful Benedictine Ettal monastery where he wrote parts of his *Ethics* and waited for conspiratorial assignments from the headquarters of the *Abwehr* in Munich, and, finally, Flossenbürg where during the night of April 9, 1945 he was tried and in the early morning hours executed along with other high-ranking conspirators — leaves one with one overriding impression : here was a theologian (he was only 39 when he died) who had an inner religious and moral strength that is hard to comprehend. It is a strength that, despite moments of doubt and even despair (at one point he appears to have contemplated suicide), sustained him to the end and did not waver on that final

naked walk to the place of hanging. It was a courage that was not grounded primarily in his own ego strength, although he did in fact acknowledge having a strong ego and considered it a temptation. Nor was it a courage motivated by a philosophical or ethical system. It was obedience to the living Christ who made concrete moral and ethical claims on Bonhoeffer that gave him the inner centeredness necessary to make clear choices in ambiguous circumstances, and face his executioners with bravery. Sometime in 1932, according to Bonhoeffer's own account, he moved from being an academic theologian to being a Christian, "from the phraseological to the Real."⁶ It was, according to Clifford J. Green, a transition to concrete, existential Christianity, shaped by a greater appreciation for the Bible and a discipleship informed by the Sermon on the Mount. It was not a repudiation of his earlier theological work but an "adding [of] existential reality to the conceptual structure of the theology of sociality" (Green, p. 153).

Pivotal to Bonhoeffer's "conversion" was a fuller appreciation of the meaning of God as one who suffers for the world, and Jesus as a "man for others." These were not new insights for Bonhoeffer in 1932 when he began working on themes of discipleship, but they took on new meaning and urgency, especially with the growing Nazi threat and terror. In his 1927 *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer laid the theoretical foundations for a Christological ecclesiology, in which Christ is understood as historically present in and as the church. The book begins with a careful development of a Christian view of the person as distinct from classical (Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean) and modern (Descartian, Kantian, and Hegelian) notions. In all earlier metaphysical and epistemological conceptions, the individual is subsumed under the universal; in the Christian concept "the individual, concrete [ethical] character of the person as absolute and intended by God" is preserved (*Sanctorum Communio*, p. 44-45).⁷ Furthermore, in the Christian view, the person becomes person (the "I") only as it encounters the other (the "Thou") in the context of the community (the "church"). God, the community, and the individual person are inseparably linked. One can not become a person without a community of others, and one cannot get to God except through the other. It is through the other that the transcendent Other is encountered. This is not a reduction of the divine to the human, for "*God or the Holy Spirit joins the concrete You; only through God's active working does the other become a You to me from whom my I arises. In other words, every human You is an image of the divine You*" (*Sanctorum Communio*, p. 55).

6. In his fine study (*Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, revised edition, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), Clifford J. GREEN devotes an entire chapter to an analysis of this transition from the phraseological to the real in Bonhoeffer's thought and life. See Ch. 4, p. 105-185.

7. It is interesting to note that, in his critique of Idealism, Bonhoeffer is influenced by Emanuel Hirsch, who in turn was influenced by Kierkegaard, whom Hirsch translated into German, although "For Hirsch the encounter with God, out of which faith is born and all genuine personality and community arises, takes place in the realm of the conscience. Bonhoeffer departs from Hirsch in this respect" (*Sanctorum Communio*, p. 55, n. 76).

Behind this analysis lies Bonhoeffer's Christology, central to which is not solidarity but the concept of vicarious (*Stellvertretung*) action and suffering: "*Stellvertretung*," we are told by the translators,

[...] is one of Bonhoeffer's fundamental theological concepts through his writings. Literally the word means to represent in place of another — to act, advocate, intercede on behalf of another; we translate this as "vicarious representative action." As a theological concept in the strict sense it is rooted in Christology and refers to the free initiative and responsibility that Christ takes for the sake of humanity in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection — it is not just a soteriological concept applied only to the cross (as "vicarious" might suggest). By anthropological analogy, *Stellvertretung* involves acting responsibly on behalf of others and on behalf of communities to which one belongs (*Sanctorum Communio*, p. 120, n. 29).

This concept of "vicarious representative action," of which Christ's life and death are the prototype, a notion which becomes so critical for Bonhoeffer in the last years of his life, is first worked out in his first book. It is grounded in his notion of the first Adam as a collective representative of all of fallen humanity, and Christ the second Adam as a collective representative of the new humanity, which for Bonhoeffer is identified with the visible church (*Sanctorum Communio*, p. 157ff). It is only in this light that the later concept of "Jesus as a man for others" and the "God who suffers" can be rightly comprehended.

The theme of God's vicarious action and suffering in Christ on behalf of humanity, and our own analogous vicarious action and suffering on behalf of the world, can be traced throughout all of his subsequent writings: *Akt und Sein* (1929-1931), *Christ the Centre* (1933), *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937), *Ethics* (written 1940-1943), and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (written 1943-1944). I want, however, to conclude my Bonhoeffer reflections by looking at how Bonhoeffer's apprehension of God's vicarious suffering informs human, particularly his own, vicarious involvement in conspiratorial activities, as outlined in *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Ethics was written during Bonhoeffer's conspiratorial activities, it is an ethics of engagement. This fact gives his remarks about "deputyship" a special poignancy. Deputyship, says Bonhoeffer,

[...] is demonstrated most clearly in those circumstances in which a man is directly obliged to act in the place of other men. [...] He is not an isolated individual, but he combines in himself the selves of a number of human beings. [...] This reality shatters the fiction that the subject, the performer, of all ethical conduct is the isolated individual. [...] Responsibility for oneself is in truth responsibility with respect to the man, and that means responsibility with respect to mankind.⁸

8. Eberhard BETHGE, ed., *Ethics*, translated by Neville Horton Smith, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1955, 1978, p. 194-195. I would like here to give credit to my doctoral student Fred Shaffer for whatever influence he may have had in drawing my attention to the concept of *Stellvertretung* (vicarious representation) in Bonhoeffer's thought. Shaffer wrote his doctoral dissertation on Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology at the Toronto School of Theology under my supervision, which he successfully defended in 2006.

Bonhoeffer links this human deputyship explicitly to the deputyship of Jesus :

Here we come already to the underlying basis of everything that has been said so far. Jesus [...] lived in deputyship for us as the incarnate Son of God, and that is why through Him all human life is in essence a life of deputyship. Jesus was not the individual, desiring to achieve a perfection of his own, but He lived only as the one who has taken up into Himself and who bears within Himself the selves of all men. All His living, His action and His dying was deputyship (*Ethics*, p. 195).

This means that in exceptional circumstances [as the one Bonhoeffer finds himself in] there is now no law behind which the responsible person can hide : “In this situation there can only be a complete renunciation of every law, together with the knowledge that here one must make one’s decision as a free venture, together also with the open admission that here the law is being infringed and violated and that necessity obeys no commandment” (*Ethics*, p. 208-209). This breaking of the law is precisely an acknowledgment of the validity of the law in normal circumstances, and means that the responsible agent in this instance incurs guilt : “The ultimate question remains open and must be kept open, for in either case man becomes guilty, and in either case he can live only by the grace of God and forgiveness” (*Ethics*, p. 209). Just as Jesus, in selfless love, takes on the sin of the world, and thus “enters into the guilt of men and takes this guilt upon Himself,” so too every person who acts responsibly enters the sinful situation, and takes on the sin and guilt on behalf of others. “Before other men the man of free responsibility is justified by necessity ; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience ; but before God he hopes only for mercy” (*Ethics*, p. 216).

These profound words give us the clue to understanding his shift from being a virtual pacifist in the years following his encounter with the French pacifist pastor Jean Lasserre at Union Theological Seminary in 1930-1931, to his active participation in the unsuccessful plot to assassinate Hitler. He did not change his earlier views, nor did he justify his involvement on rational Just War grounds. He became involved fully conscious of the sin and guilt he was incurring, but as one acting vicariously on behalf of others as Jesus had acted on behalf of others, ready to suffer the consequences. It is through these same lenses that we must view the fragmentary thoughts in the provocative letters from prison where he ventures some new thoughts about “a world [...] come of age” (June 8, 1944), “the adulthood of the world” (June 8, 1944), a “non-religious interpretation of theological concepts” (June 8, 1944), living “as though God were not to exist” (July 16, 1944), living a secular life and thereby sharing in God’s suffering, and Jesus as a man for others (July-August, 1944).⁹

A religionless Christianity meant for Bonhoeffer to enter fully the secular, human situation without systematic, religious and ideological supports — to live before God and with God in such a way as to be without God : “God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt.8.17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering” (*Letters*, p. 360-361). This is what decisively distinguishes

9. D. BONHOEFFER, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard BETHGE, p. 326, 327, 328, 359, 381.

Christianity from other religions : “The Bible directs man to God’s powerlessness and suffering ; only the suffering God can help” (*Letters*, p. 361). Jesus calls us to life, not a new religion. It is a life for others. In his “Outline for a Book,” written toward the end of his stay in Tegel prison he elaborates on what this “life for others” might look like. In these notes, written sometime in July and/or August, 1944, Bonhoeffer identifies the fact of “Jesus [being] there only for others” with the experience of transcendence, and adds :

Our relation to God is not a “religious” relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable — that is not authentic transcendence — but our relation to God in a new life in “existence for others”, through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form — not, as in oriental religions, in animal form, monstrous, chaotic, remote, and terrifying, nor in the conceptual forms of the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc. [i.e., Tillich ?], nor yet in the Greek-divine form of “man in himself”, but “the man for others”, and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent (*Letters*, p. 381-382).

Bonhoeffer here unabashedly claims the uniqueness of Christianity in relation to other religions, but it is not a uniqueness of superiority over other religions. In fact it is not a comparison of religions at all, but an assertion about the truth of a way of life, in which suffering, weakness and vulnerability become normative. In his non-rule-based ethics, a life lived for others, means vicariously taking upon oneself the sin and guilt of the world and acting responsibly for others. It is a life premised on “Jesus as a man for others” and God as one who suffers on behalf of the world. Bonhoeffer sets the world free to be itself, and other religions free to be themselves. He in effect reverses the absolute and triumphalist claims of much of historic Christianity, without denying classical Christian truth claims.

III. TILlich : THE ONTOLOGY OF DIVINE SUFFERING AND ATONEMENT

Unlike Barth and Bonhoeffer, who were both suspicious if not outrightly opposed to philosophy, metaphysics and ontology playing a foundational role in theology and ethics, Tillich considers ontology to be the basis for all aspects of theology and ethics. In his *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer does modify Barth’s “pure command” or “pure act” theology and ethics by reintroducing the importance of ontology, but it is a different view of ontology than Tillich’s. It is an ontology that is restricted to the church. It is in the church, as Christ existing in history, where, according to Bonhoeffer, we find an ontological continuity to divine revelation that is missing in Barth. Barth has a vertical view of revelation in which divine self-disclosure is discontinuous and occurs anew moment by moment. Bonhoeffer, on the contrary, argues that there is a horizontal continuity in God’s revelation of himself within the church as Christ’s ongoing presence. Tillich’s philosophical and theological ontology is not restricted to the church but is concerned with the structures of being as such. This fact has a profound impact on how he views divine power, suffering, and the atonement and separates him from Barth and Bonhoeffer.

The way Tillich grounds ethics in ontology is perhaps nowhere more clearly articulated than in his *Love, Power and Justice*.¹⁰ In this work Tillich tries to show how each of these three ethical categories, which have been so misunderstood in the history of Western thought, can be properly understood only when seen as rooted in being-itself. Lamenting the fact that as moderns we have all been born nominalists (those who reject the belief in universals as real, and dissolve the world into individual, particular things), he espouses an ontological realism (the acceptance of the reality of “being-itself, or [...] being-in-so-far-as-it-is-being”) (p. 18). Ontology asks the question : “What are the structures, common to everything that is, to everything that participates in being ?” (p. 19). Ontology precedes all other cognitive activity, as do love, power and justice, which, according to Tillich, “points to a trinity of structures in being itself” (p. 21). “Life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life,” the drive towards a reuniting of what is separated and estranged (p. 25). Power is “the dynamic self-affirmation of life overcoming internal and external resistance” (p. 37). Being is power over non-being. There is no being without power. Justice is “the form in which power of being actualizes itself in the encounter of power with power” (p. 67). It is the form of love, the form of the reunion of that which is separated. There can be no love without justice, or justice without love. Everything that has being has an intrinsic claim to justice, which corresponds to its power of being. To give up one’s own power of being, or that of another, would be an act of injustice.

This is the basic argument of the book. However, for my purposes here I want to focus on a few themes in the book which have a more direct bearing on the topic of divine suffering. As Tillich does throughout his theology, he here identifies being-itself with God, in whom love, power and justice are united : “For being itself, according to our ontological analysis, implies love as well as power and justice. God is the basic and universal symbol for what concerns us ultimately. As being-itself He is ultimate reality, the really real, the ground and abyss of everything that is real [...] the God, with whom I have a person-to-person encounter. [...] Everything we say about being-itself, the ground and abyss of being, must be symbolic” (p. 109). Because being is the power of being, and because God is not only the ground of being, but being-itself, it would be a contradiction to talk about the powerlessness of God. Here we see most clearly how Tillich’s ontological approach to theology hinders him from talking the way Bonhoeffer does about the weakness and suffering of God. For Tillich, the negative and the threat of non-being are incorporated into God as being itself :

The answer to the question how non-being can resist the power of being, can only be that non-being is not foreign to being, but that it is that quality of being by which everything that participates in being is negated. Non-being is the negation of being within being itself. [...] The negative “lives” by the positive which it negates. [...] Courage, and that in faith which is courage, affirms the ultimate prevalence of [the power of] being over non-being (p. 38-39).

10. *Love, Power, and Justice : Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications*, New York, London, Oxford University Press, 1954.

The more non-being a being can incorporate into itself without being destroyed by it, the more power of being it has (p. 39-40).

Divine participation in creaturely suffering is a symbolic way of saying that God overcomes estrangement. This is what Christians mean by the cross (p. 113). Considering theodicy in his *Systematic Theology I*, Tillich speaks about divine participation in “the negativities of creaturely existence” with reservations. “Genuine patripassianism (the doctrine that God the Father has suffered in Christ),” says Tillich, “rightly was rejected by the early church. God as being-itself transcends nonbeing absolutely. On the other hand, God as creative life includes the finite and, with it, nonbeing, although nonbeing is eternally conquered and the finite is eternally reunited within the infinity of the divine life.”¹¹ Tillich does not speak the same language as does Bonhoeffer, and would, I surmise, have great difficulty accepting Bonhoeffer’s claim that “God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross,” that, “He is weak and powerless in the world” (see above). Bonhoeffer speaks quite unmetaphorically and unsymbolically here. It is not a literalistic way of speaking either, but an analogical way, in which divine weakness and suffering, including Jesus’ own giving up of power, is asserted as an analogy for human suffering on behalf of others. Tillich’s insistence on all language being symbolic or metaphorical is inseparable from his ontological view of reality, and blinds him to the more literal (not literalistic) and analogical possibilities of theological language. Consequently, he does not speak with the same historical and ethical concreteness that Bonhoeffer does.

In his treatment of the doctrine of the atonement in *Systematic Theology II*, Tillich quite explicitly rejects all “substitutionary” [and therefore implicitly also “vicarious”] language. One can speak symbolically about God taking upon himself the suffering of the world, but this must be understood not as substitutionary suffering but as participation. It is a symbolic way of saying that God conquers non-being: “This element of non-being, seen from the inside, is the suffering that God takes upon himself by participating in existential estrangement or the state of unconquered negativity.”¹² “Substitutionary suffering,” says Tillich, “is a rather unfortunate term and should not be used in theology. God participates in the suffering of existential estrangement, but his suffering is not a substitute for the suffering of the creature. Neither is the suffering of Christ a substitute for the suffering of man” (p. 176).

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of substitutionary suffering as “vicarious suffering” is more profoundly historical and concrete than Tillich’s at this point. For Bonhoeffer, divine suffering is more than Tillich’s “participation.” It is Jesus’ representative suffering for collective humankind, which becomes a prototype for representative human suffering, one that enters fully into the realm of sin, taking upon itself quite literally the guilt that comes with acting responsibly on behalf of others. Even Tillich’s well-known notion of the cross of Christ as the symbol of symbols lacks the concrete-

11. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, *Reason and Revelation, Being and God*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 270.

12. *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, *Existence and The Christ*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 175.

ness of Bonhoeffer's vicarious action. Tillich's symbol of the cross, in which "He who himself embodies the fullness of the divine's presence sacrifices himself in order not to become an idol,"¹³ is an important critique of all religious language and idolatry, and an intriguing way into inter-religious dialogue, but I doubt whether it could motivate one to Bonhoeffer's kind of heroic action. Bonhoeffer's theology of suffering led him back to Germany in 1939, against the pleas of friends like Paul Lehmann, to a life of danger and ultimately death.

13. "The Nature of Religious Language," in *Theology of Culture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 67.