

## Living with an undivided heart – simplicity as a Christian way for the future

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### Abstract:

Drawing on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reflections on the *anthropos teleios* and Raimundo Panikkar's articulation of monastic archetype, this article seeks to put forward an account of Christian simplicity and a spirituality of worldliness within the context of ever-growing acceleration, digitalisation and over-organisation.

### Keywords

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Raimundo Panikkar, institutionalism, simplicity*

“How is a new generation to go on living?”<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer's question brought together Christian theologians from all over the world at the International Bonhoeffer Congress at Stellenbosch in January 2020. As a theologian doing pastoral work in the Catholic Archdiocese of Munich for more than 25 years, I ask this question in view of my own Church as an institution. Presently, she finds herself amid a process of immense re-organisation in the context of global digitalisation. Much of the institutional time and energy goes into this project. Supported by international service networks, she undergoes a massive digitalisation, mainly in the sector of financial and personnel administrations. This makes me wonder if the institutional action basically separates from Christian vocation and life in discipleship within society.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Cf. *DBWE* 8:42.

2 The intention of the following reflections is not to deny the necessity of institutional Church structures from her early days on (Cf. Acts 6:1–6). But amid massive growth of “organisational” structures in societies, Churches should rather strengthen themselves as “organic” communities in discipleship.

In the Baptism letter to his godson Dietrich Bethge in May 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer draws his vision of a future society and the concrete place of the Church within it.<sup>3</sup> He asks himself, if humankind is either moving towards “an age of colossal organizations and collective institutions”, or if “the desire of innumerable people for small, manageable, personal relationships be satisfied”.<sup>4</sup>

To adapt herself to global society standards, the Church may have different reasons. In our days, many German Church leaders feel quite uneasy being questioned by their members as well as by people outside the institution. Questioned for their hesitation in clearing up sexual abuse cases, questioned for the waste of money in certain financial scandals during the last decade, as for example in the diocese of Limburg in 2013. Facing strong public pressure, they probably feel obliged to better fulfil statutory requirements, so that the Church may – again? – be recognized as a full and reliable member in the organised system of society.

Re-reading these lines in Corona times in Germany, I witnessed a vivid public discussion on how the Churches – mainly Catholic and Lutheran – could further prove their “systemic relevance”.<sup>5</sup> Seldom enough a word was heard or written about the relevance of God calling people to discipleship.

Any such one-sided adaptation of the Church, as a so-called “normal” part of an over-organised society, neglects the basic fact that real Christian life primarily means life of a spiritual organism within the public sphere. Or, in Bonhoeffer’s words, a community in discipleship.<sup>6</sup> Such a spiritual organism is grounded – as we shall see with the support of Bonhoeffer and Raimundo Panikkar<sup>7</sup> – in simple-minded hearts and their personal answer to Christ’s call. For the vision of such a Christian existence in

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3 DBWE 8:381–91.

4 DBWE 8:388.

5 Cf. [Online]. Available: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Too\\_big\\_to\\_fail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Too_big_to_fail); <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systemrelevanz> [Accessed: January 15th, 2023].

6 Eberhard Bethge, “The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life and Theology”, in *A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer: World Come of Age*, ed. Ronald G. Smith. (London: Collins, 1967), 54–58.

7 Raimundo Panikkar (1918–2010), Spanish Indian Catholic Jesuit, engaged in interfaith dialogue. Cf. [Online]. Available: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raimundo\\_Panikkar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raimundo_Panikkar) [Accessed: January 15th, 2023].

simplicity both theologians may be counted amongst the most important 20th-century realists as well as convincing witnesses for a Christian future.

## **Over-organisation and its dangers for an organic Christian life today**

Over-organisation of present Church administrations tends to paralyse personal Christian witness in the public sphere. Where organisational church structures become more and more complicated, personal relations – including the disciples’ relationship to Christ – might rather be relegated to the individual space.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, less and less baptised persons willingly accept a spiritual vocation within the institutional Church today. Only few choose to work as priests or pastoral assistants, many hesitate before working vast and anonymous pastoral areas. Many members leave their church, whereas religious individualism keeps growing inside and outside the official organisation. People who seriously define themselves to be religious, no longer seek to satisfy their religious needs within traditional Christian parishes. Some of them rather find spiritual support as guests or friends of a monastic community in their region.<sup>9</sup>

Facing this present situation namely of the Western Churches, Bonhoeffer’s final words from his Baptism letter come to my mind:

Our church has been fighting during these years only for its self-preservation, as if that were an end. ... So, the words we used before must lose their power, be silenced, and we can be Christians today in only two ways, through prayer and in doing justice among human

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8 After the Enlightenment, “faith” became just another term for “lack of reasonable thinking” in Western Europe. The Church lost her *Definitionsmacht* (authority to define) of what was the right or wrong way of personal life. Religion became a private matter. The actual over-organisation in many societal fields combined with the idea of patchwork religion might even re-enforce this tendency: Everybody may combine elements of spirituality from different religions, no religion owns truth. Cf. Hermann Denz, “Religion, Popular Piety, Patchwork Religion”, in *Church and Religion in Contemporary Europe: Results from Empirical and Comparative Research*, ed. Hermann Denz, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, GWV Fachverlage GmbH, 2009).

9 Many religious communities witnessing a considerable decrease in membership today, receive practical support by growing circles of volunteers and friends, with whom they share their spiritual and liturgical life.

beings. All Christian thinking, talking, and organizing must be born anew, out of that prayer and action.<sup>10</sup>

Bonhoeffer openly criticises his “Church” of the 1930s and 1940s as a self-preserving one, and then continues speaking about his own vision of “being Christian in the future”,<sup>11</sup> which will be characterized as a rebirth of “thinking, talking and organizing” rooted in prayer and actions of justice. Moreover, such new ways of organizing church life will differ from those of the past by using a new, non-religious language.<sup>12</sup> One might call this renewed view on the Christian life a more “organic” and a less “organisational” one, even if Bonhoeffer does not generally loose organizing out of sight.<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer holds that one should think of the church not so much as an institution but rather as “bodily *person* albeit a very unique person.”<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the development of organisational structures in modern society, we are told that organisations are more interested in well running processes than in persons:<sup>15</sup> “To accomplish its tasks and for the regulation of the workflow, the organisation gives itself a structure. Moreover, this structure is determined by a respective formation in dealing with the outside world.”<sup>16</sup>

In more detail, the structural development of modern organisations can be described under the three main aspects of “economisation”, “acceleration of work”, and “pressure on the autonomously working subject”:

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10 DBWE 8:389.

11 When he criticises the organisation, Bonhoeffer speaks of the “Church” in a rather static manner. When it comes to the hope for Church renewal, he speaks of “being Christian” in terms of personal actions enrooted in prayer.

12 DBWE 8:389.

13 Jens Zimmermann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christian humanism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21: ‘Bonhoeffer ... opposes bureaucratic organization of mass society as detrimental to organic and natural structures of life.’

14 Zimmermann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christian Humanism*. 85, n. 48. Cf. DBWE 4:218.

15 The following considerations are mainly cited from a paper presented by the German supervisor (DGSv) Claudia Enders, “Betrachtungen von Organisation in der Supervision”, *Fachtagung Supervision in kirchlichen Feldern* (18–21.03.2019). Christian Fleck, pastoral assistant, and supervisor in Munich, made it accessible to me when we discussed the above-mentioned structural changes in our Archdiocese. English translation of the German text is my own.

16 Enders, Thesis 2, 1.

## Economisation

In our days, organisations undergo an economisation in their conditions as well as in their structural workflow. Subsequently the concept of work and the areas of human life have changed with this dominating economisation of the world.<sup>17</sup>

One important consequence of this development is the ongoing acceleration of work itself and the necessary structures linked to it, such as different techniques of “information and communication, the introduction of organisational and concept development, against the backdrop of economic public management.”<sup>18</sup>

Change of work thus can be described by a heightened degree of subjectification in a sense of autonomous job completion (Selbsterledigung) and self-responsibility of the working person. Reflections on efficiency, cost control and forms of controlling become more and more a part of over organisational reality, directly influencing various forms of work. Self-management linked with a postulated freedom (autonomy, self-responsibility) finds itself in tension of fatigue, pressure (through target agreements, control) and feelings of excessive demands.<sup>19</sup>

Enders finally shows that “organisations complete tasks – be it in their function for society or in the sense of entrepreneurship. To complete their tasks and workflow, the organisation gives itself its structure and therein implement management and leadership.”<sup>20</sup>

The organised structure may be regarded as a perfect one in itself, run and regulated by masses of flowing information. But Panikkar does not hesitate to call such systems: “‘de-centred’, off-kilter, distorted; it has lost (or never found) its centre’.”<sup>21</sup> For him, over-organisation helps to split reality into

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17 Enders, Thesis 4, 2.

18 Enders, Thesis 4, 2

19 Enders, Thesis 5, 2.

20 Cf. Enders, Thesis 6, 2.

21 Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity – The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), 106.

an inside and an outside.<sup>22</sup> At this point Bonhoeffer makes a significant difference between “being informed” and “knowing reality”:

Knowledge of reality is not just knowing external events but seeing into the essence of things. The best-informed person is not the most intelligent. Precisely the best-informed people are in danger of missing the essential amid the variety ... So the wise person will seek to obtain the best possible information about the course of events without becoming dependent on it. Wisdom is recognizing the significant within the factual. Wise people know the limited receptivity of reality for principles, because they know that reality is not built on principles, but rests on the living, creating God.<sup>23</sup>

As Panikkar puts it from his Eastern point of view, our global world is dominated by a one-sided Western strategy of over-institutionalisation:

I think an institution should not only be an organisation but also an organism. And this tension between organism and organisation is a very delicate one. The organisation runs where there is money; the organism runs where there is life ... The organisation needs a boss, a leader, an impulse from the outside to let it function. The organism needs a soul, health, i.e., the harmonious interaction of all the parts of the whole.<sup>24</sup>

Over-organisation lets the sense for the essential get lost, therefore it needs measure and balance. Moreover, Panikkar observes that modern believers do no longer like either internalization or eschatology.<sup>25</sup> They rather regard worldliness as a new moment of integration. In a polyphonic context humans try to develop attitudes like personal responsibility or freedom of mind and heart. They do not want to let the system reign over them but recognize legitimate and responsibly acting power in the public sphere, basically oriented towards community life.<sup>26</sup>

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22 Cf. *DBWE* 6:239.

23 Cf. *DBWE* 6:81–82.

24 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 19.

25 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 22.

26 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 124.

Having a similar view on Christian worldliness, Bonhoeffer comments on the problem of organisation. He opposes bureaucratic organisation of mass society as detrimental to organic and natural structures of life.<sup>27</sup> In his first dissertation, *Communio Sanctorum*, Bonhoeffer defines the Church as a “community of human beings consisting of body and soul”.<sup>28</sup> Human beings, seen from the perspective of God who became human, body and soul, say reality as a whole, becoming a real and simple (gr. *teleios*) being in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

As his disciples, Christians are called to overcome division by learning to see God and world in one simple reality instead of creating two different realms of them.<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer encourages his readers to overcome not only the split in reality, but also over-adaptation to organisational existence. For “God has no patience with our dividing the world and humanity according to our standards and imposing ourselves as judges over them.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The biblical type of the *anthropos teleios* in Bonhoeffer’s thought**

From the 1930s on, Bonhoeffer asks for a life in Christian discipleship that no longer tears world and God apart, as the Church kept teaching and influenced many Christians’ understanding for a long time throughout history. The driving moment of Bonhoeffer’s strongest concern, until the end of his short life, will be his searching for reality – worldly *and* divine – unified in Christ. Not only reality but every single human being should be(come) a whole one in Christ. In his 1933 lectures about Genesis 1–3, Bonhoeffer shows that the initial human desire to become godlike (*sicut deus*) led to man’s fragmentation and was initiated by the question of the snake.<sup>32</sup> A fragmentation that leads Adam away from a unified existence right from the beginning. What comes in with the snake’s demand in the

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27 Cf. DBWE 8:500.

28 DBWE 1: 229.

29 Cf. DBWE 6:84.

30 Cf. DBWE 6:81.

31 DBWE 6:84.

32 Cf. DBWE 3:1762 (Kindle version).

Garden of Eden, is a dilemma of conscience: “Did God really say?” This question initiated the Fall, because the snake’s question constituted the person of the two hearts or souls respectively. The personal way back to simple, unified existence in discipleship is based on Bonhoeffer’s sketch of the biblical *anthropos teleios*.<sup>33</sup> *Teleios* biblically means something very different from being morally perfect in a narrow understanding of monastic life.<sup>34</sup> Bonhoeffer insists on the notion of *teleios* in New Testament Greek, which stands both for the “simplicity of heart” – in contrast to “double-mindedness” – which enables the disciple to fix his or her view firmly on God and his reality.<sup>35</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s type of a double-minded person can be recognized in the rich young man asking Jesus about what he has to do to gain eternal life.<sup>36</sup> Unable to separate from all his wealth, the young man sadly leaves Jesus, troubled by the dilemma of his conscience. Bonhoeffer in a very original way unmask the young man’s intentions:

He hoped Jesus would offer him a solution to his ethical conflict. But Jesus lays hold, not of the question, but of the person himself. The only answer to the predicament of ethical conflict is God’s commandment itself, which is the demand to stop discussing and start obeying.<sup>37</sup>

The unified Christian self, for Bonhoeffer, is the childlike adult person free from moral dilemma.<sup>38</sup> The Christian way back to simplicity would be the way of him or her who – like Jesus Christ himself – see God’s will before their eyes and do it in childlike simplicity. Their prototype, the biblical *anthropos teleios*, can be found in Jesus Christ the new Adam, freely focused on God’s will and reality in its fullness:

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33 Cf. Katharina D. Oppel, *Nur aus der Heiligen Schrift lernen wir unsere Geschichte kennen ... – Bibel und Biografie bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Ostfildern: Gruenewald, 2017), 64.

34 James 1:8; Matthew 5:42.

35 Cf. *DBWE* 6:81 within the special context of “wisdom”.

36 Matthew 19:16.

37 *DBWE* 4:72

38 Cf. Oppel, *Nur aus der Heiligen Schrift*, 67.



... independent and free in decision, not bound to the law or conflicts or alternatives, but to God's will. Instead of his knowing about good and evil, provoked by the question of the snake: "Did God really say" – yes God speaks really, not in ideals or conflicts of conscience or between inner and outer life.<sup>39</sup>

Here we find the *Ecce Homo*, the human being before God, uniting in himself simplicity and wisdom.<sup>40</sup> The first step to a unified or undivided existence will be one of conversion in freedom:

Not fettered by principles but bound by love for God, liberated from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision, and ... no longer beset by them. Such a person belongs to God and to God's will alone. The single-minded person does not also cast glances at the world while standing next to God and therefore is able, free and unconstrained, to see the reality of the world.<sup>41</sup>

Simple-hearted Christians, we can resume, never lose reality out of sight because Christ himself did not. Amid worldly reality, Bonhoeffer's *anthropos teleios* is capable of creative formation (*Gestaltung*):

A person is simple who in the confusion, the distortion, and the inversion of all concepts keeps in sight only the single truth of God. This person has an undivided heart, and is not a double psyche, a person of two souls (James 1[:8]). Because of knowing and having God, this person clings to the commandments, judgment, and the mercy of God that proceed anew each day from the mouth of God.<sup>42</sup>

Not only in *Ethics* but also later in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer criticises the so-called "religious" or "inner" life<sup>43</sup> standing in contrast to the simplicity of the *anthropos teleios*. To be religious, for him means to split reality: "The 'religious act' is always something partial,

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39 DBWE 6:81. Also Zimmermann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism*, 130.

40 DBWE 6:81; also cf. Jacob Phillips, *Human Subjectivity in Christ: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology Integrating Simplicity and Wisdom* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 99.

41 DBWE 6:81.

42 DBWE 6:81.

43 DBWE 8:586.

whereas “faith” is something whole and involves one’s whole life. Jesus calls not to a new religion but to life.”<sup>44</sup>

Reading the Old Testament two and a half times during his stay in prison, Bonhoeffer discovers the human heart as the core organ for Christian perception of reality as a whole:

... the Bible does not know the distinction that we make between the outward and the inward life. How could it, actually? It is always concerned with the ἄνθρωπος τέλειος, the whole human being, even in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Decalogue is extended into the “innermost” interior.<sup>45</sup>

So the “heart” in a biblical sense does not primarily signify the inner life of a person, it means the whole person living before God. A relating “worldly” image for the whole-hearted person comes to Bonhoeffer’s mind when reading Adalbert Stifter’s *Witiko*. The medieval literary figure of young Witiko “goes out into the world ‘to do *the whole*’”.<sup>46</sup> He does this by trying to find his way into real life, listening to the advice of experienced persons, becoming himself a member of the “whole”.<sup>47</sup> Drawing the connection between Witiko’s story and his own family, relations and friendships, the prisoner Bonhoeffer comes to his decisive insight that “one becomes ‘a whole person’ not all by oneself but only together with others.”<sup>48</sup>

## Bonhoeffer and monasticism

Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the biblical *anthropos teleios* – representing the undivided, simple person, focussed on the centre of reality – is more closely linked to the archetype of the monk (*monachos*) than Bonhoeffer himself might have consciously admitted from his Protestant point of

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44 DBWE 8:484; Cf. 480; 501; emphasis in original.

45 DBWE 8:456; emphasis in original.

46 DBWE 8:278, emphasis in original; German: “Ich will das Ganze tun”; own translation; cf. Oppel, *Nur aus der Heiligen Schrift*, 84–88.

47 DBWE 8:278.

48 DBWE 8:278; emphasis in original.

view.<sup>49</sup> Though he obviously longed for a renewal of his dying contemporary Church through a “new kind of monasticism”,<sup>50</sup> he was sceptical about monasticism as an institution and its dangers of a spirituality for a few,<sup>51</sup> acknowledging Luther’s interpretation. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer kept focussing on the Christian as a human being with an undivided heart, following the way of Jesus in community. This comes very near to the basic Greek meaning of *monachos* as a person focussed on “one” thing, “one” person, say the Kingdom of God and Jesus as its representative who calls to discipleship.

Since 1932, Bonhoeffer kept thinking about the proper place of the Church in post-war German society. She appeared to him double minded and actually dependant in her relation to culture, thus giving up her proper place in the world:

In modern society, the church [has] supposedly become autonomous, it has made itself harmonious with culture, and it seeks new cultural forms; therefore, it has become the slave of culture ... What is the proper place of the church? [This] cannot be stated concretely. [It is the] place of the present Christ in the world.<sup>52</sup>

Step by step Bonhoeffer will unfold this firm conviction that this presence of Christ finds its way through the formation of the individual disciple in community life by following Christ’s call into consequent this-worldliness.<sup>53</sup> New resources for such a change in faith and community life, Bonhoeffer

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49 DBWE 8:230, his critique of Paul Gerhardt’s *Ich steh an Deiner Krippen hier* (I stand here at Your Manger): “Up till now I had never really made much of it. Probably one has to be alone a long time and read it meditatively in order to be able to take it in. Every word is extraordinarily replete and radiant. *It’s just a little monastic-mystical*, yet only as much as is warranted, for alongside the “we” there is indeed also an “I and Christ,” and what that means can scarcely be said better than in this hymn.” (emphasis added).

50 Cf. DBWE 13:3063 (Kindle version), Bonhoeffer’s letter to his older brother Karl-Friedrich, January, 14<sup>th</sup> 1935.

51 Cf. DBWE 4:47, “Rather, the mistake was that monasticism essentially distanced itself from what is Christian by permitting its way to become the extraordinary achievement of a few, thereby claiming a special meritoriousness for itself.”

52 DBWE 11:278 (Kindle version).

53 Cf. DBWE 8, 486, Bonhoeffer’s letter, 21st July 1944: “Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life.”

could perceive only in the East. Thereby he certainly alludes to the Indian spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi and his ashram community:

I believe the time has come and I am becoming more convinced every day that in the West Christianity is approaching its end – at least in its present form, and its present interpretation – I should like to get to the Far East before coming back to Germany.<sup>54</sup>

In his recently discovered letter to Gandhi, Bonhoeffer wrote to the Mahatma, what he expected for his own Church from sharing the life in one of Gandhi's ashram communities:

I feel we Western Christians should try to learn from you, what realisation of faith means, what a life devoted to political and racial peace can attain. If there is anywhere a visible outline towards such attainments, then I see it in your movement. I know, of course, you are not a baptised Christian, but the people whose faith Jesus praised mostly did not belong to the official Church at that time either.<sup>55</sup>

### **Raimundo Panikkar's *archetype of the monk* and Bonhoeffer's *anthropos teleios***

At this point we will try to link a central concept of the Indian-Spanish Jesuit Raimundo Panikkar to Bonhoeffer's concept of the *anthropos teleios*. [As a](#) Roman-Catholic theologian Panikkar – from a similar Eastern point of view that Bonhoeffer hoped to learn from – argued, that fragmented Western structures rule our modern world.<sup>56</sup> He claims the archetype of the monk, as inherent not only to the life of monastic “professionals” like monks and nuns, but to everyone.<sup>57</sup> “Simplicity” in his view describes the “archetype of the monk” basically given to each human being of our times. Fully living this archetype could be the Christian way of reflecting its obvious losses to a complex Western society and what it better might be

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54 *DBWE* 13:1076 (Kindle version), Bonhoeffer's letter to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, 13th January 1934.

55 Clifford Green, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letter to Mahatma Gandhi”. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 72, no.1 (January 2021): 119.

56 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 19.

57 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 14.

searching for. If we ask about the essential connections between Bonhoeffer and Panikkar on a Christian way for the future, we will find mainly three of them: First, they share a biblically enrooted concept of the human being in relation to the world which is neither “individualistic” nor “systemic”. Secondly, a similar effort to close the ancient gap between inside and outside, individual and community, between worldly and religious life within the double-minded human being.<sup>58</sup> Finally, both Bonhoeffer and Panikkar are convinced, that the “simple-minded” and thus “whole-hearted” human being is enrooted in Mother Earth.<sup>59</sup> Both men see before their eyes a changing world, growing in complexity by technology, industrialisation and – as for Panikkar mainly – consumerism.<sup>60</sup> Panikkar emphasizes, that to live with other people and to stay connected with the earth in concrete responsibility is the central concern of a simple-minded human being or the archetype of the modern monk respectively.<sup>61</sup> A letter to his fiancée Maria v. Wedemeyer, shows an “earthly” concern when thinking about their future as a couple of Christian faith: “I think that those who only stand with one foot on the ground, will also have only one foot in heaven.”<sup>62</sup>

## Worldly monasticism in Panikkar and Discipleship in Bonhoeffer

Money, social injustice, and political manipulations, play a decisive role in our achieving societies, and many people wait for the dawn of a spirituality of reality.<sup>63</sup>

Like Bonhoeffer in his understanding of the *anthropos teleios*, Panikkar presents his vision of a fully standing monastic archetype in each of us within the wider context of community life. It forms an important element for a future church model based on human persons answering

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58 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 36–39.

59 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 51–52.

60 Cf. DBWE 8:386; Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 106–108.

61 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 124.

62 Cf. Ruth-Alice v. Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz (eds.), *Brautbriefe Zelle 92*, 2nd edition (München: H.C. Beck, 1993), 38. (own translation)

63 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 43.

responsibly to their personal vocation.<sup>64</sup> As the early Bonhoeffer put it in his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*: “A coming Church will not be bourgeois.”<sup>65</sup> For Panikkar, today’s world with its economic, political, and social structures, asks the Christian community for resistance against system and technocracy.

The archetype of the new monk in simplicity tends to integrate spatial – temporal elements of human life into his personal way which is connected to the wider community.<sup>66</sup> Similar to Bonhoeffer, Panikkar claims for concreteness of faith within the world by using the Eucharist as an underlying symbol for it: “Bread must be eaten and digested”<sup>67</sup> – thus its spiritual reality is to be transformed into the material of our bodily being. In this transformation, Panikkar finds a physical impulse to overcome the separation between the temporal and the eternal world, between physical and spiritual, most of all, between ideal and concrete worldly reality.<sup>68</sup> For the new monk, in Panikkar’s view, there is no politically neutral ground within our achieving society.<sup>69</sup> Today’s monk is physically engaged without imposing himself, he does not submit to the rules of competition. In an achieving society people have pleas for corporeality, not for escaping from it.<sup>70</sup> Like Bonhoeffer, Panikkar points to the necessity of being related to avoid societal isolation. Like Bonhoeffer, Panikkar hopes for a rebirth of personal discipleship with an undivided heart, and personal discipleship becoming whole in community. The two men independently from one another agree that the person of the “simple, undivided heart” is a childlike human being. They both speak against further moralism and false standardisation of piety in monasticism, where inadequate ideas of monastic life have been misused to split reality into two realms. Panikkar states: “Once monkhood becomes institutionalized, it begins to become a specialisation and it runs the risk of becoming exclusive.”<sup>71</sup>

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64 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 68–71.

65 *DBWE* 1:272.

66 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 83.

67 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 87.

68 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 56.84.

69 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 80.

70 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 80.

71 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 14.

But what is needed in our day, is “no special form or exaggerated ideal, but monastic as personal vocation”.<sup>72</sup> For him the critical question about idealised forms of monasticism is: “How is it possible to sacrifice a whole life to god without living it?”<sup>73</sup> Christian monks today do not want to be something special; they want to be but simple Christians. Bonhoeffer, following Luther, speaks against the traditional understanding of monastic perfection in contrast to “normal” Christian life. Panikkar – thus coming very near to Bonhoeffer’s concept of reality united in Christ – says: “The monastic ideal does not seek an egotistic perfection (that is to say of the individual) but locates the meaning of life in the total perfection of the person which reverberates in its benefits unto the entire reality.”<sup>74</sup>

Transformation does not only concern selfishly defined individuality but concerns the human being as a person. A person that reflects the whole of reality in her proper being influences reality herself. The emphasis lies on the concrete person, listening to her vocation. One who clearly sees the necessity of conversion in today’s world of systems and technocracy, where old dichotomies are no longer experienced as valid, and where a spirituality of worldliness is dawning.<sup>75</sup> Here we may find a further reason why Dietrich Bonhoeffer kept searching for a non-religious language: a language that is new because it comes from the undivided heart of biblical men and women, not from religious ideas.<sup>76</sup> If this is valid for the individual disciple, not less than for the community of discipleship.

Sometimes Panikkar comes very near to the non-religious language of Bonhoeffer. In fact, Bonhoeffer is searching for a more organic, more biblical language, bound to the earth of tomorrow. Just as he discovers that the Old Testament language is strongly bound to earthly reality.<sup>77</sup> For this same necessity, Panikkar finds a new and – so-to-say sacramental – expression: “The modern monk challenges: ‘if not on Earth, then not in

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72 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 15.

73 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 34.

74 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 69.

75 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 41.

76 Cf. DBWE 8:390.

77 Cf. DBWE 8:366–367.

Heaven'; because 'him who has, more will be given' – since all that we have is what we are."<sup>78</sup>

Bonhoeffer and Panikkar share the conviction that a more personal contribution of future Christians will shape the spiritual formation (*Gestalt*) of their communities within society. A contribution possible for every person, to live his /her witness in his/her place within in deep connection to worldly reality. Christians of the future hopefully will take up their personal freedom and responsibility to fully live their vocation. They will be less dependent on their Churches perceived as complicated religious organisations. They rather will enroot themselves in the simplicity of their hearts and live their worldly lives in organic spiritual growth. They will be able to reflect to their contemporaries what being simple Christians can contribute to an over-organised society.

### **A brief outlook: prayer and friendship – living together in simplicity as a next generation**

In Bonhoeffer's thought, the concepts of community, person and God belong together and cannot be treated separately.<sup>79</sup> When Bonhoeffer and his Finkenwalde Community were praying psalms this fulfilled a primary function in community building.<sup>80</sup> A community's responsibility does not consist merely in organizing actions. Prayer, as Bonhoeffer states in his meditation on Psalm 119, has a lot to do with the personal human answer to God, considering, that walking my way in simplicity tells me who I am.<sup>81</sup> Ernst Feil mentions Bonhoeffer's reference to Psalm 119:112 in his catechism from Finkenwalde: ... you must know that all the head-learning in the world will not help if you do not obey with your heart and with your deeds.<sup>82</sup> Psalm 119:113 confirms this view, saying: "I hate double-minded

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78 Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 57.

79 Cf. Ernst Feil, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Leben, Werk, Wirken. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben von Mechthild Feil* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018), 18.

80 Cf. Brad Pribbenow, *Prayerbook of Christ, Prayerbook of the Church: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological Interpretation of the Psalms* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

81 Cf. *DBWE* 15:515 (Kindle version).

82 Quoted in Feil, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 130; n.9.



people but I love your law”, connecting the image of the way and the type of simple-minded discipleship in Bonhoeffer’s favourite Psalm. At the end of his Tegel poem “Who am I?”, the prisoner Bonhoeffer finally finds a way out of the endless doubts about his identity: “Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!”<sup>83</sup> For a person walking in simplicity, prayer is the basic intervention. As Panikkar would agree that “true prayer is not an excuse for inaction in the world but is actually an intervention in the dispute itself”.<sup>84</sup> Simplicity of the heart following Panikkar – and I suppose Bonhoeffer would agree as well – is not only corresponding to reality, because the last reality is always present and concerns me.<sup>85</sup>

Simplicity also is interpersonal in the human realm. Between simple persons, there will be friendship. For Bonhoeffer, mostly in the last years of his life, the friendships in the seminary and the “singular community” with Eberhard Bethge at his side in prison by his letters and visits were the forms of Church he experienced.<sup>86</sup>

Bonhoeffer describes friendship as a special form of community that gives one a place to stand, a stability in the midst of flux that allows one to draw strength from outside one’s own possibilities.<sup>87</sup> For Panikkar, friendship in the context of blessed simplicity is no purely individualistic matter but can never work without friends, male or female, who face together the challenge of worldliness.<sup>88</sup>

In Bonhoeffer’s sight, Christ’s love makes this friendship possible. Friendship with others is possible because of wisdom which is Christ experience (*Christuserfahrung*), the Gospel in daily life.<sup>89</sup> In this

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83 DBWE 8:460; cf. Psalm 119:94a.

84 Panikkar, 80.

85 Panikkar, 88–89.

86 Cf. Ryan Huber, *Singular Community – The Challenging Significance of Friendship for Spiritual Formation in Bonhoeffer’s Life and Thought*. In *Christian Humanism and Moral Formation in “A World Come of Age”: An Interdisciplinary Look at the Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Marilynne Robinson*, eds. Jens Zimmermann, and Natalie Bold (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 95–121, 101.

87 Huber, *Singular Community*, 105–113 passim.

88 Cf. Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity*, 114–115.

89 Huber, 106.

concrete life, responsibility is “friendship called to action”.<sup>90</sup> A treasured relationship of faithfulness and secure rest in which partners can share everything (intellectual, personal, professional) with a “particular other” while remaining individuals before God in honesty and gratitude.<sup>91</sup> Here we find the basic condition for spiritual growth and growth in relationship.

Bonhoeffer’s discovery of the simple human being mostly grew from concrete relation and friendship with others. He grounded himself in prayer and scriptural meditation, which had a concrete formative effect on his life.<sup>92</sup> Through various personal relations he was “drawn out of his lonely Ego and into real communion with Jesus Christ and, for the first time in his life, with other human beings in his Body.”<sup>93</sup>

It helped him, as it can help us to grow into a simple-hearted, organic Christian life before God amid an over-organised world, as members of Christ’s Body – the Church. Today – and surely tomorrow.

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90 Huber, 107.

91 Cf. Huber, 109.

92 Cf. Lisa E. Dahill, *Reading from the Underside of Selfhood – Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 60–70. Huber, 117.

93 Dahill, 63.

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