

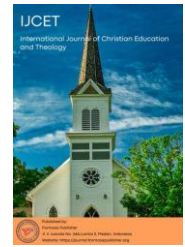


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## The Fellowship of Saints in Christ: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology in Responding to Contextual Challenges in the GKPS Church

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### ABSTRACT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasized that the existence and obedience of church members must go beyond formal affiliation. The true church is not merely a building or ritual but a fellowship rooted in apostolic faith, engaging in moral action, and serving Christ. He rejected a purely institutional-hierarchical view of the church, highlighting the freedom and generosity of Christ, and developed a Christocentric ecclesiology where Christ is the foundation and center of church life. Bonhoeffer criticized rigid, dogmatic forms of the church and underscored the need for an active, engaged church in the world. He also stressed the importance of a personal relationship with Christ as the source of spiritual life, a moral example, and the center of unity.

## INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiology is one of the important themes in systematic theology. This branch of theology studies the church, both in terms of concept, structure, function, and its role in Christian society. The term ecclesiology originates from the Greek language, derived from the roots “ek” and “kaleo,” meaning ‘out’ and “to call” (Verlyn Verbrugge 1980:393–94). From these roots, the term “ekklesia” is interpreted as a gathering of people who have been called out. In the Septuagint (LXX), the word “ekklesia” mostly comes from the translation of “qahal.” Generally, ‘ekklesia’ is a term already known in ancient Greece, translated as “assembly of the people.” “Ekklesia” was then used to refer to the assembly of believers or the church. Ekklesia was later studied as a discipline and referred to as ecclesiology. Ecclesiology, as a discipline, is the study of the church/church activities, and ecclesiology encompasses various aspects related to the existence of the church and the life of the church itself. (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen 2002:33–34)

This includes understanding the nature of the church, its relationship with God, and the church's place in the plan of salvation. Ecclesiology also covers church governance, organizational structure, theological teaching, worship practices, sacraments, and the role of congregants in church life. (Peter Frick 2018:1–2) In ecclesiology, there are various different views and approaches to the church. For example, there is the Roman Catholic view, which emphasizes papal authority and church hierarchy, as well as the importance of sacraments and church traditions that have been in place since apostolic times. On the other hand, there is the Protestant view, which emphasizes the authority of Scripture, the role of personal faith, and the freedom of local churches. The ecumenical approach in ecclesiology also seeks unity among various Christian traditions. The goal is to achieve greater agreement in matters of belief and practice, with efforts to create a more inclusive and united church. (Peter Frick 2018:121).

Ecclesiology also considers how the church interacts with society and the world around it. The Church becomes the body of Christ (sōma tou Christou) which must fulfill the social and mission duties of this world. This includes preaching the gospel, community service, spreading social justice, and fighting injustice and poverty. In addition, Ecclesiology also addresses contemporary issues facing the church, such as the role of women in the church, ecclesiology in multicultural contexts, the role of the church in a secular modern society, and ethical challenges in local and global contexts. (Gregory J. Liston 2022:176) Overall, Ecclesiology is a very important field of study in Christian theology. Through a deeper understanding of the church, Ecclesiology helps to understand the role of the church in Christian life, as well as how the church can serve and contribute to building the Kingdom of God in this world.

In subsequent developments, there were various views that developed on Ecclesiology. One of them is from a famous Christian theologian in the 20th century AD named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. (Larry L. Rasmussen 1970a:121–22) Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906 in Breslau, which is now located in Wroclaw, Poland. His family can be said to be a respected family. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian theologian who lived in the 20th century who had a unique view of Ecclesiology. (A. Curtis 2007:160) Bonhoeffer's views were heavily influenced by his historical context, especially by his life experiences in the midst of the Nazi regime in Germany and the struggle for the church and his criticism of the German church at the time. This led him to eventually join the self-confessed church community (Bekennende Kirche/Confessing Church) which was opposed to the German church (Deutsche Evangelische Kirche) and Hitler's rule. (F. D. Wellem 2003:41).

One of Bonhoeffer's central views on Ecclesiology was the idea of a Separate Church (*Ecclesia sui generis*). (David Emerton 2020:26) For him, the church is not just an ordinary human institution or organization, but a reality that has a unique origin and existence. The Church is seen as the living body of Christ, separate from the political structure and influence of the world, its views also evolving from Christocentric Ecclesiology. (David Emerton 2020:14–15).

Bonhoeffer emphasized the importance of individual existence and obedience in the church. He emphasized that one's faith must go beyond mere formal church membership. For him, the true church is a place where people live in apostolic fellowship, take moral action inspired by their faith, and live as a people committed to serving Christ. In addition, Bonhoeffer rejected the view of the church as a church building that was limited to worship rituals. For him, the church is a living spiritual community, and one that must be actively involved in God's mission to save the world. He emphasized the importance of the church as a forum that encourages and supports moral and social renewal in society. In his thoughts, Bonhoeffer also looked at the role of the church in upholding social justice and empowering the oppressed. He believed that the church should be a voice for those who had no voice in society, and should be involved in the struggle against injustice and oppression.

Bonhoeffer's view of Ecclesiology also includes criticism of the dogmatic form of the church or being trapped in rigid and formalistic understandings. For him, the church must live in the breath of freedom and the generosity of Christ, transcending the institutional and hierarchical limitations that often hinder the church's witness. He then developed Christcentric ecclesiology where the church is centered on Christ or Christ is the basis of the church or the point of departure of the church in its communion. (Steven C. van den Heuvel 2017:33).

Bonhoeffer's thought on ecclesiology has made an important contribution to theology and church thought today. Through its emphasis on an active and engaged life in the world, as well as an affirmation of personal dignity and shared responsibility in the church. Bonhoeffer's views inspire modern churches to express their faith and serve the world with the love of Christ. (Verlyn Verbrugge 1980:24).

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological thought, his views on Christology played a very central role. Bonhoeffer considered Christ to be the irreplaceable center and focus of the Christian faith, as well as a deep understanding of Christ's identity and mission in the world. Bonhoeffer emphasized the importance of Christ as His Lord (*Christus Dominus*). (Agnes M. Brazal 2016:261) To him, Christ is God who has absolute power and authority in the world and the life of every believer. Through the acceptance of Christ as God who transcends all human limitations, the believer surrenders himself completely to Christ and accepts his leadership.

In addition, Bonhoeffer expanded the Christological/Christocentric view with the concept of the Human Christ (*Christus Homo*). For him, Christ was not only a distant and unreachable Heavenly Christ, but also the Christ who lived in human history and shared human life in this world. In Christ, God descended into the lives and sufferings of men to love and save them. Bonhoeffer also emphasized the importance of incarcerated Christology, which is the understanding of the incarnation of Christ as God's grounding in Himself as a human being. He affirms that the eternal and infinite God finds Himself in the simplicity and limitations of man. In the incarnation, Christ is the incarnation of God's love and suffering for mankind. (Joshua A. Kaiser 2015:102).

Christocentric ecclesiology is an extension of Ecclesiology. Christological ecclesiology deals with church organization, church order, Rules of Procedure. The Church is the Body of Christ, which then formulates Christological Ecclesiology. As in Paul's letter to the Corinthians it is said that the church is the Body of Christ, as a whole.

Christocentric ecclesiology should dominate and animate the entire life of the minister and all the elements of the church. Christological ecclesiology must be a praxis theology in the life of the believer. Christological ecclesiology is not only the basis of organization in the church, not only the basis of church order, not only the basis of the Rule of Order. Most importantly, Christology must be the foundation and soul (spirit) of the church that reflects the leadership of Christ.

In the daily life of the church, the voice and instruction of Christ must be heard as the ultimate guide. Church leaders, both pastors and congregations, should put the will of Christ above all personal considerations and ambitions. Church leadership is not merely a position or rank, but a call to illustrate Christ's example in sacrifice, service, and love for others. When worshiping, whether in the liturgy or other religious activities, Christ should be the main focus. Worship is not just a ritual ceremony, but a form of respect, worship, and listening to the voice of Christ. All elements of worship, from prayer, praise, to preaching, should reflect the teachings and values of Christ. (Jens Zimmermann 2019:259)

In church decision-making, the principles of Christ and the gospel should be moral and ethical guidance. Strategic, administrative, and ministerial decisions should always be measured by Christ's moral standards, and should not be separated from truth and justice. In social and humanitarian service, the church must be an extension of Christ's love in the world. Christ, who cared for the weak and the poor, should be an inspiration for the church to be actively involved in helping those in need. Social service is not only a social duty, but also a manifestation of the love of Christ that lives in the church. (Adrian Hastings 2000:121)

Today, there are many challenges in the church in its self-revelation in the midst of the world. The contextual challenges faced by churches today can vary depending on the geographical, cultural, and social changes that occur.

The global context and socio-cultural shifts can pose challenges to the understanding of Ecclesiology in the GKPS church. In the face of these developments, the church needs to adapt and reflect on how the Love of Christ can be shown and applied in a relevant context. Sometimes, these issues involve questions about the relevance and appropriateness of the traditions, ecclesiastical practices, and theology of the GKPS church to current contextual needs and challenges. The application of Christocentric Ecclesiology, which means having Christ as the center and focus of the church, can be a strong foundation for the GKPS church in living the faith and developing the ministry of the people today. (Stuart Scott, 2025).

Through Christocentric Ecclesiology with the church, GKPS can apply Christcentric Ecclesiology by positioning Christ as the focus and center in every aspect of church life. It directs the church to a righteous life and guides the congregation to live the authentic Christian faith and develop a better contribution to society and the world around it. By applying Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology, the GKPS church can make Christ the center of ecclesiastical teaching and practice.

## **METHODS**

In writing this thesis, a qualitative method of literature is used. The author collects, studies and analyzes theological sources regarding Christocentric Ecclesiology in the view of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. These sources of literature can be books, articles and reading sources related to systematic theology in general and the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *A Study of Christocentric Ecclesiological Theology in the Eyes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Bonhoeffer gave his view that Jesus Christ was God who became man-God (the German term is *Menschgewordene*, God became man). The translators argue that the earlier translation does not correspond to the intended meaning because the earlier translator argues that, When Bonhoeffer speaks of God becoming a man, he uses the word *Menschwerdung*, although he warns that this cannot be understood as an answer to the question of "how". That is, this is not an explanation of the process of how God became human. (R. W. Palmer 2007)

Overall, in Bonhoeffer's writings there is always a striking difference in the use of the words *Menschgeworden* and *Menschwerdung*. The word *Menschwerdung* appears consistently in the context of revelation. In contrast, *Menschgeworden* is used in the context of the sacrament and the cross, used in the book *Sanctorum Communio* and *act and being* as God who becomes fully human, respectively. Therefore, the word Bonhoeffer chose in his Christology lectures was *Menschgeworden* over *Menschwerdung*. The word *Menschgeworden* in Bonhoeffer's lecture not only implies the idea of a human God but also signifies the concept of God taking human flesh/body, i.e. God taking our humanity completely and becoming fully human. (Rasmussen et al. 1970:24).

Bonhoeffer used the word *Menschgeworden* to emphasize the concept of the body. In his lectures, Bonhoeffer expanded on the idea of the body, particularly in his discussions of the sacrament and humiliation. The Word of God is not only human but also human by representing "humiliation" theologically. (J. W. De Gruchy 2009:51–52) Bonhoeffer emphasized that the symbol of the cross and sacrifice is an insult to God who became a whole man. The problem of translation mentioned above is important because it is related to the two natures of Christ, because of Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the concept of the body.

In contrast to *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer arranged his Christology lectures in sequence by dividing them into two easy-to-follow sections. Bonhoeffer suggests that Christ should not be seen outside of history, He is the present Christ, both as the crucified and the risen Christ, who is present in the church as a person. Bonhoeffer also examines the existence of Christ in the context of critical Christology, referring to Christology as developed in "the decisions of councils that express only critical Christological conclusions, i.e., the elimination of false views or heretical teachings. (Rasmussen et al. 1970:322) It is also a special study of the development and deviation of Christian thought that occurs regarding the personal doctrine of Christ, namely His humanity, and His divinity. Bonhoeffer concluded that the progress made between one council and the next was always due to the emergence of people working in the field of positive Christology. The official church makes critical Christology its business, setting limits, issuing negative statements, because in the church, the proclamation of the living Christ always occurs at the same time as the decision of the assembly. (Rasmussen et al. 1970:322–23).

Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* may be the best place to begin to trace Bonhoeffer's development and his thoughts on the divinity of Christ. Christology is the dismantling of the aspects of the divinity and humanity of Christ found in his earlier writings by following his understanding of this definition in the Chalcedonian council of the "two natures" of Christ. In summing up their significance, Kelly argues that these lectures are designed for Christological reflection to help and "encourage the church to ask the Christological question: Who is Jesus in the world. (G. B. Kelly 1984:199).

Bonhoeffer's Christological reflections thus posed a challenge to the church. Kelly also argues "that man can encounter Christ as a person only through relationships with others. Therefore, it is the duty of the community of believers to enable people to recognize the presence of Christ in the world" as something human and divine. (G. B. Kelly 1990:119–20) Bonhoeffer's view of Christology seems to have been an outburst of frustration Bonhoeffer's anger at the misinterpreted historical theology of Jesus put forward by Schleiermacher and others, and in their misunderstanding of Christology brought about by the Christological heresy of the fourth to fifth centuries. Therefore, in Christology Bonhoeffer painstakingly explains his understanding of Christology compared to other Christologies. It became important for Bonhoeffer to avoid slipping "into the theological quagmire of speculative analysis of how the incarnation might have occurred" as Kelly put it. (G. B. Kelly 1984:38)

Bonhoeffer refused to begin Christology with any abstract conceptualization of the incarnation. If the Council of Chalcedon can limit Christological discourse by affirming "two natures," this does not mean that Christians must be forever confined to the repetition of the formula of the incarnation. Bonhoeffer introduced a response to the Christological question of transcendence, in particular, of the transcendent human person. Bonhoeffer laid the foundation of Christology in the following way. First, Christology is not only the doctrine of Christ, but Christology is also logos, (M. Jenson 2005:160) and Christology is also about Christ, about Him who is the center of knowledge. Moreover, Christology is about Christ, about Him who is the center of knowledge. The Word becomes man. Finally, Bonhoeffer's Christology is about the "transcendent human person". (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:301) Regarding transcendence, Bonhoeffer's Christological essence of Christ is man-God (Christ is a human person), a transcendent human person. So if it points to Christology as the center of knowledge, then Christology will look at the transcendence of the incarnate One.

For Bonhoeffer Jesus was fully present in the physical world and thus accessible to believers in a variety of ways. The Christian faith affirms the biblical descent of God (this is the first Person in the Trinity) and combines it with His connection to the human universe primarily through the incarnation, the second Person in the Trinity, and also through other "intermediaries." It is important to note in what form this relationship occurs. Presents an opportunity to move on to questions about immanence. In contrast to transcendence which is related to God becoming man, immanence is related to the idea of human reasoning, that is, the logos of man which seeks to understand Christ and to understand Him as a subject. (H. O. J. Brown 2004:24)

Christ is the Christ of history, the whole Christ, whom we ask and answer. But Christology does not ask about what Christ has done but who Christ is. In the abstract, the personal ontological structure of the historical whole of Christ is the subject of Christology. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:124) Bonhoeffer's concern was not with what Christ had achieved, but with Christology, which had to ask who Christ was because the historical Christ was then the subject of Christology.

Moreover, in Christology, Bonhoeffer is more concerned with the meaning of Christ's full presence with believers today. Not only concerned with the form of Christ's presence. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the presence of Christ means that Christ is in the same place and time. That means the presence of Christ is found in the church. Bonhoeffer explained, in simple terms, how to understand the real presence of Christ as human and divine. When it comes to Christ's ability to be simultaneously present to all people, Jesus remains Jesus as a man (second incarnation). Just because he was human, he could be present before believers. He is forever with us here, forever with us in this moment, that is his presence as God (his divinity). It is only because Jesus is God (his divinity) that He can be present to us. The presence of Christ forces the statement that Jesus is fully human, as well as another statement that Jesus is fully God. Thus, from the presence of Christ arises

a double certainty that He is both human and God (his divinity).

For Bonhoeffer, God in his human form can be present with us now and only because Jesus is God can He be present with us now. Bonhoeffer not only emphasizes that Jesus is present with us as God, but also explains that Christ is also present with us in all things as human beings. Therefore, for Bonhoeffer, if Jesus were not with us as God and in all things present as a man, then He would not be present at all. The above explanation confirms that Bonhoeffer understood the two natures of Christ, and he understood that Christ is present with us as human and divine. Bonhoeffer held to his conviction by following the Chalcedonian council's definition of the two natures of Christ. Bonhoeffer understood that Jesus and God could not live apart; he concludes that similarly, "it is equally impossible to ask how God can enter into time".

In answering the question of Christ's presence, Bonhoeffer asserts that "the only reasonable and reasonable question to ask is who is present, who is with us here and now?". (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:313) In the first part of Bonhoeffer's Christology focuses primarily on the humanity of Christ. His attention to the second part focuses on the divinity of Christ. He explained this transition by saying that we "cannot know who the man of Christ is if we do not simultaneously think of the God-Christ and vice versa. The God who is limited only in His eternal eternity, is not God, but Jesus Christ, in His time-limited humanity, is not Jesus Christ. Rather, Bonhoeffer affirms that in man, Jesus Christ, is God. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:122) Christ and God are in the same place and time. This is a good starting point for understanding Bonhoeffer's Christology, which centers on God-man as the present Christ who exists as divine.

Bonhoeffer's construction of Christology moves progressively from this idea of the presence of God-man in the Word, the sacraments, and the church community (ekklesia) in relation to the discipleship and practice of the church. Bonhoeffer continued to work to make the "two natures" of Christ understandable. He shared the understanding

that Jesus Christ was the manifestation of the Godhead in history, thus making Jesus fully qualified as God. Bonhoeffer criticized any attack on the council's Christology, or what he called negative or critical Christology. He discusses this in the context of negative Christology, which refers to critical Christology as developed in the decisions of the councils that reveal only critical (negative) Christological conclusions that result in the elimination of wrong views or heretical teachings.

Christology is the study especially of the development and deviation of Christian thought that occurs regarding the doctrine of Christ's person, namely His humanity, and His divinity. Although Bonhoeffer believed that the concept of heresy was an important non-negotiable factor for the professed church, he rejected any heresy as a negative or critical form of Christology. These include Docetism which teaches that Jesus appears only as a human and the Ebionite view that Jesus is still a real man, God's creation. Thus, Bonhoeffer denounced all Christological heresies that denied the humanity of Jesus Christ and separated that humanity from the divinity of Christ. In examining the development of Bonhoeffer's thought and theology, Palmer stated that the development of Bonhoeffer's Christology in his lectures was quite obvious. Bonhoeffer begins first with divinity (Christ as God-man), then proceeds to humiliation (the despised Christ) and finally to exaltation (the glorified Christ). Palmer argues that Bonhoeffer's Christology did not change drastically in Christology, but that the emphasis on incarnation on the one hand and humiliation and exaltation on the other was replaced in the Ethics by the triple pattern of incarnation, cross, and resurrection". (R. W. Palmer 2007:132–33).

The study of Christcentric theology and in relation to Ecclesiology in the view of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a theological approach that emphasizes the role of Christ as the core of the life of the church. Bonhoeffer profoundly developed his view of the church based on Christ as its center. In his writings, Bonhoeffer explored these theological concepts carefully and profoundly.

Before Bonhoeffer, Ecclesiology had been the focus of attention of previous theologians. However, Bonhoeffer's approach brought a new dimension by placing Christ at the main focus, moving the church toward a deeper existence through Christ. To understand Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology, it is important to first understand his view of Christ. For him, Christ is the center of all things, his life, his work, and his teachings are the foundation of the church's existence. (Larry L. Rasmussen 1970b:53) Bonhoeffer saw Christ not only as a historical figure, but also as a reality present in the life of the church today.

As part of Christocentric Ecclesiology, Bonhoeffer emphasized the dignity of every human being as God's creation. This influenced the church's stance on issues such as human rights, social justice, and peace. Through his view of Christcentric Ecclesiology, Bonhoeffer offered a strong theological foundation for the life of the church that was involved, committed to Christ, and serving the world with love. His views include a call for the church to participate in social transformation, fight for justice, and develop a vibrant community of faith.

The understanding of Christocentric Ecclesiology in the view of Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes an important contribution to contemporary Christian theology, especially in the context of complex social, political, and ecclesiastical challenges. Through his work, Bonhoeffer invites the church not only to speak of faith, but also to live that faith in real action in this world, following the example of Christ who is at the center of the life of the church.

Christ was not diminished at all because of Bonhoeffer's progressive change in orientation. The power of Christ's love is not compromised by the universality of His embrace, which now reaches into the most hidden and godless corners of the world. But the very nature of the Christian life had changed for Bonhoeffer. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2008:21–22) The church, to him, has always been more than just "this or that building with a bell tower." Christians still enjoy the benefits of the church community, but there is a real feeling that the whole world is now

their church, because that is where the encounter with Jesus Christ took place. The true measure of faith is no longer loyalty to a particular religious institution, but a sincere willingness to share, wholeheartedly the love of Christ for all mankind.

### *Christocentric Ecclesiology and its Relationship to the *Comunio Sanctorum**

On the whole, nothing is directly said by Bonhoeffer in the *Communio Sanctorum* about the divinity of Christ other than the proclamation of the divine nature of God appointed to the church through Christ. (E. Bethge 1967:61–77) Significantly, Bonhoeffer in *Communio Sanctorum* weaves together the sociological and religious aspects of the church into a community, that is, the church that exists as a church for others. It defines the sociological and ethical issues of the church. Christ lived as a community known today as the church, that is, as the body of the Incarnate-God-man. More precisely, in *Communio Sanctorum*, Bonhoeffer confesses that there is no other God than the one we know as incarnate, the God-man, by claiming the community as Christ that exists as a human-church community.

This phrase used by Bonhoeffer is found in Anselm of Canterbury's *Why God became Man*. Bonhoeffer used these phrases as a Christological model by claiming Anselm's perception that the church is a reality that exists as a human community. (E. Bethge 1967:62–77) Therefore, for Bonhoeffer in doctrinal theology, necessity can only be drawn from reality. This follows from the concept of news. When works of doctrinal theology end up presenting the concept of the church as a necessary consequence of the Protestant faith, this must imply nothing other than an internal connection between the reality of the church and the whole reality of preaching. In order to set clarity about the internal logic of theological construction, it would be best if a doctrinal theological presentation began not with the doctrine of God but with the doctrine of the church. (C. Anthonissen 2016:13–38).

The *Communio Sanctorum*, originally intended as a sociological study, developed into an ecclesiastical writing, or rather, a study of Christological ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer constructed his Christology in a meaningful way. First, Bonhoeffer placed a strong emphasis on the idea of more appropriately emphasizing the image of the divine, which is inseparable from the other and every human being. Second, the other side of Christology that Bonhoeffer developed in *Communio Sanctorum* was the idea of fallen humanity. This idea expresses the end of communion with God and other human beings as described in the following way even though in a fallen state, God's love still achieves and repairs the broken bond between man and God through Christ, man as divine and human. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:299)

These ideas, "You" and "mankind fall," became two important associations in the formulation of Bonhoeffer's Christology in the *Communio Sanctorum*. These ideas allowed Bonhoeffer to secretly explore the concept of God's preaching to reach God's divine reality in the church. Through the preaching of Christ in the church, Bonhoeffer presents a community in which divine preaching dwells through Christ. In Bonhoeffer's *Communio Sanctorum*, the proclamation of God is applied to the proclamation of the God of man through Christ which is realized and given life in the community of saints. Therefore, in the church, the human aspect of Christ unites all human beings and the representative actions that symbolize Christ stand as an archetype before God. In this way, Christ-man becomes the originator of new man and finally Christ exists as the Church.

Bonhoeffer emphasized that the believer's transcendent relationship with God is found in the midst of our social experiences, especially as individuals in the church community. It is in the church that the transcendent God is found through Christ. Bonhoeffer explained that Christ is present in the church as a community of Christ, and that the church is a place where new social relationships established by Christ are realized. He emphasized that the church is a place where Christ is present as

human and divine, and that our closeness to Christ through the church is the result of God's preaching. This then forms the basis for the structure of Bonhoeffer's Christology in his work *Communio Sanctorum*. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1996:1–2).

Scholars often propose that Christology and ecclesiology form a single theme in the *Sanctorum Communio*, thus bringing unity to Bonhoeffer's thought. In fact, this assumption may be acceptable because Bonhoeffer places the church at the center of man's understanding of God, namely, that communion with God exists only through Christ-man who is present only in the church. However, it is arguable that in the *Communio Sanctorum*, Bonhoeffer described the church in a different way. In the beginning, the church belonged only to Christ-man, after which, the church was present in the realized human Christ before time; In the end, the church becomes a visible form of Christ-human existence. Bonhoeffer also points out that God's preaching is in Christ, the community of Christ or the church.

If all of them are combined, it shows a steady development in Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology in the *Communio Sanctorum*. Bonhoeffer's Christology in the *Communio Sanctorum* can be explained clearly as the proclamation of God in Christ and Christ exists in the church as a community, both divine and human (the concept of the two natures of Christ). The preaching of God in Jesus Christ developed in Bonhoeffer's writings (*Communio Sanctorum*) provides a clear clue to the development in Christology itself.

Bonhoeffer's views will always be at the center of Bonhoeffer's Christological orientation only if he dares to examine his Lutheran theology fundamentally. Bonhoeffer's traditional Lutheran conception of the church and Chalcedon's Christology appear clearly in the *Communio Sanctorum*. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1996:1–2).

Christocentric ecclesiology is a theological view that places Christ at the center of the life and mission of the church. The term Christcentric Ecclesiology refers to the view that Christ should dominate all aspects of church life, from organizational structure to worship and ministry practices. Christcentric ecclesiology encourages the church to live in full dependence on Christ, making Him the exemplar and center of everything the church does. (M. Jenson 2005:145–65)

One of the key concepts in Christcentric Ecclesiology is the understanding of the church as the body of Christ. (H. G. Barker 2015:1–2) The Apostle Paul in his letters describes the church as the body of Christ, with Christ as the head and the members of the church as interconnected parts. This concept emphasizes unity in diversity, where each member of the church has a unique and important role in building the whole body of Christ. Christology is an integral part of Christocentric ecclesiology. An understanding of Christ's identity and mission forms the basis of this view. Christ is seen as the source of life of the church, giving grace and salvation to His people.

Christ is also seen as an example for the church, which calls its members to follow in His footsteps in serving others and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. (H. G. Barker 2015:1–2) It involves an unwavering commitment to Christ's teachings and example, as well as obedience to His call to the church. The whole ministry of the church must reflect the merciless love of Christ, which serves all people, including the marginalized and persecuted. The relationship between Christocentric ecclesiology and the *Communio Sanctorum*, which is the definition of the church as a communion of saints. The *Communio Sanctorum* emphasizes the unity in holiness between the members of the church, both living and dead, in Christ. It transcends the boundaries of time and space, connecting all of God's people as one body in Christ. (J. Andrew Kirk 2012:15–16)

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church encompasses a wide range of aspects, encompassing the essence of the church, mission, and the life of discipleship. Bonhoeffer emphasized the concept of the church as a communion of saints (*Communio Sanctorum*), with an emphasis on the non-institutional aspects of the church. Preferring the term *Gemeinde* or *Gemeinschaft* (community) to the *Kirche* (institutional church), Bonhoeffer saw the church first and foremost as a communion of saints, a group of believers.

Bonhoeffer's view of the church as a communion of saints is in line with the Apostolic Creed, which states that the communion of saints is the work of the Holy Spirit. As formulated in the Augsburg Confession (7:1), the church is understood as "the gathering of all believers, in which the Gospel is preached in purity and the holy sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel." Bonhoeffer also applied the principle of *simul justus et peccator*, describing the church as a place where the righteous and the still sinful live together. (H. G. Barker 2015:1–2)

For Bonhoeffer, the church has a divine and human dimension, holy and sinful, and exists in the world but not of the world. This paradox shows the tension in the church's journey as coming from God but also striving to achieve God's purpose. The Church is Christ who is present as a community, a manifestation of Christ in the world, just as Christ is a manifestation of God.

Bonhoeffer emphasized that the church is God's presence in the world, not just as a sanctified place of worship, but as a world called by God to Himself. The church is a community obtained only through and in Christ, distinguishing it from other communities. The Christian community is not an ideal reality, but a divine reality, continuously proclaiming God's forgiveness to others. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2010:27)

In Bonhoeffer's understanding, the church is not an exclusive place, but must be an open place for others. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2005:17) The church must be present for others, helping, providing protection, and bearing witness to the love of Christ. Service to others is not just about the institutional church, but about how the church helps others in their daily lives. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology was shaped by his unique historical context, particularly in the face of the Nazi regime. In that difficult situation, Bonhoeffer developed his understanding of the church as acting and being present for others, just as Christ was human for others. For Bonhoeffer, the church is not merely a place of worship or a religious organization, but a concrete manifestation of Christ's love in the world.

Bonhoeffer emphasized the importance of the church living according to the principle of the church for others, where the church is present for others. This is reflected in his personal life, which fought for truth and justice, even to the end of his life. Through his understanding of the church as a community that acts and is present for others, Bonhoeffer provided the basis for a relevant and meaningful ecclesiology for the twenty-first century.

The relationship between Christocentric ecclesiology and *Communio Sanctorum* is based on the same Christological perspective. Both place Christ at the center and as the source of the church's unity. Christ is seen as the head of the church, uniting all its members into one body. This emphasizes the vertical unity between Christ and the church, where Christ is the head who leads and directs the church in every aspect of its life. The importance of loyalty and devotion to Christ is also a central theme in the relationship between Christocentric Ecclesiology and *Communio Sanctorum*. Loyalty to Christ results in loyalty to one another among church members. This creates a strong bond between fellow believers, where the love of Christ becomes the foundation for relationships between believers. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2010:27–28).

*Communio Sanctorum* also offers a deep understanding of the importance of prayer for church unity. Prayer becomes a means of strengthening spiritual relationships between church members, both living and deceased. The importance of community life is also a relevant aspect in the relationship between Christocentric Ecclesiology and *Communio Sanctorum*. Both concepts emphasize the importance of living in close fellowship among church members. This includes active involvement in various church activities, serving one another, and providing moral and spiritual support. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2010:27)

The practical implications of unity in Christocentric Ecclesiology and *Communio Sanctorum* are significant. This includes the glorification of Christ as the head of the church, who leads and directs the church in every aspect of its life. The empowerment of every church member in ministry is also a key focus, where each church member is considered to have an important role in building the whole body of Christ. In addition, unity in Christocentric Ecclesiology and *Communio Sanctorum* also has profound implications for the church's ministry in the world. This includes effective preaching of the Gospel, service to others, and witnessing to the truth of Christ in the midst of the world. Through the realization of this unity, the church is called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, spreading the love and truth of Christ to all people.

### ***Christocentric Ecclesiology in Church Life***

Bonhoeffer offered numerous insights into the church and explained its reality in terms of its structural existence for others. This structure exists both internally in terms of its members' relationships with one another and externally in terms of the church's relationship to the world. Ecclesiology is both a fundamental concept and the starting point for God's work of salvation. (Steven C. van den Heuvel 2017:33) Salvation represents the concept of restoration for all things still contaminated by mortality. (Larry L. Rasmussen 1970a:24).

God intends to represent humanity in the struggle to overthrow the power of the kingdom of death through supernatural means. Bonhoeffer was driven by the conviction that *Communio Sanctorum* offers a promising contribution to contemporary ecclesiological reflection. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is governed by the dialectic of creation, sin, and redemption, which explains the concrete social reality of the church with theological and sociological integrity. (Larry L. Rasmussen 1970a:78)

In the fellowship of the body of Christ, the limitations and weaknesses of each individual are complemented, and the people of God grow together toward maturity in Christ. (Bruce Milne 1993:174) What is distinctive is that in these Pauline letters, Christ is highlighted as the head. The emphasis is on the relationship between the congregation and Christ, not merely the unity between its members.

While the starting point of discussion remains the local congregation in Paul's letters, Christ's position as head of the fellowship must be seen in relation to the entire cosmos. Thus, the understanding of fellowship takes on a new meaning, namely as the place of Christ's presence in the world (cosmos). Fellowship is also placed more clearly within the context of the mystery of God's salvation. Fellowship is always viewed from the perspective of God's plan of salvation. From the perspective of unity of faith (unity with Christ is unity in faith that automatically gives birth to the *ekklesia*). In other words, Paul's theology in his letters is the unity of believers as a body with Christ as the head.

Christocentric ecclesiology is a theological foundation that recognizes Christ as the center of church life. This concept is not merely a theological understanding but also a lived practice for the Christian congregation. (R. W. Palmer 2007:132–42) In this context, church life refers to how the church, as the body of Christ, acts and develops in the world. Christocentric ecclesiology unites the congregation in communion that enlivens them as a community united in Christ. Christocentric ecclesiology places Christ as the primary focus of church life. This means that everything that occurs in the life of the church

must be closely linked to the person, mission, and teachings of Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared that he would build his church, and the powers of death would not prevail against it. Christ is the leader who grounds the church's existence and gives identity and purpose to his body. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2010:28)

With Christ as its center, the church is called to follow his example in love, service, and faithfulness to God. Paul explains the importance of Christ in the church in his letter to the Colossians: "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the first and foremost, even the one who rose from the dead, that he might have preeminence in everything" (Colossians 1:18). Christocentric ecclesiology views the church as a community of faith living in communion with Christ and one another. This communion is not only horizontal, but also vertical, namely communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the importance of unity in the Spirit: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope" (Ephesians 4:4).

This communion encompasses various aspects of church life, from worship and fellowship in the Word, to ministry and daily life. As members of the body of Christ, every believer has a vital role in building and maintaining church communion. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as the body of Christ, composed of diverse members with varying gifts, yet united in one Spirit.

In relation to *Communio sanctorum*, it emphasizes that the church is not simply a local community or a particular institution, but a network of spiritual relationships that transcends all human limitations. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2010:30) This reminds us that we are not alone in our journey of faith; we are connected to all believers throughout the world and throughout church history. As Hebrews 12:1 tells us, we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, the believers who have gone before us. Christocentric ecclesiology and the concept of *Communio Sanctorum* are intertwined and complementary to each other. Christocentric ecclesiology affirms that Christ is the source and goal

of all things in the church, while *Communio Sanctorum* underscores the unity of all believers in Christ, regardless of differences of time, culture, or denomination. In practice, Christocentric ecclesiology encourages the church to build a strong and diverse communion, where all members of the body of Christ are valued and empowered in their ministry. This requires collaboration between believers from different backgrounds and traditions, but with Christ at the center, that unity becomes possible.

Christocentric ecclesiology offers a solid theological framework for Christ-centered church life. In this context, the concept of *Communio Sanctorum* broadens our view of the communion of saints across time and space. By understanding and practicing Christocentric ecclesiology and building a strong communion, the church can be the light of the world and fulfill its calling to be the living and moving body of Christ in this world. All of this glorifies Christ, the Head of the church, and strengthens the communion of saints, which is always directed toward God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer discusses the concept of Christ's "vicarious action" (*Stellvertretung*) in his work *Communio Sanctorum* and how this concept relates to Christ's two natures. Bonhoeffer developed this idea as the foundation of his theology, which is based on God's relationship with humanity. This concept affirms that Christ, in His human nature, acts as humanity's representative to restore community with God. Bonhoeffer's Christology emphasizes that Christ is truly present in the church as His community, and the church itself is the body of Christ present in history.

Bonhoeffer also considered the idea of revelation in social relations, stating that revelation exists within human social relations. This relates to the concept of God's transcendence and how it relates to the sociological perspective of revelation. For him, God's revelation is present in the community and in human relationships with one another, especially through Christ within the church community. Bonhoeffer stated that the church is Christ's presence in history and the place where Christ's divine-human

nature is concretely revealed. The church, as a community of faith, becomes the concrete embodiment of Christ and serves as the bearer of the Gospel message in the world. (Yohanes Gunawan 2018:103)

Throughout his thought, Bonhoeffer emphasized that Christ, in His human nature, is responsible for the salvation of humanity and is present in the church community as the source of revelation and transformation. This idea leads to Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ's two natures: Christ takes the free initiative and responsibility for the salvation of humanity, and is also concretely present through the church as His body present in history. (Christopher J.H. Wright 2006:162).

### ***An Analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology in the Context of the GKPS Church Today***

An analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology in the Context of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) will provide a deeper understanding of how the church understands and applies the theological concepts introduced by Bonhoeffer, and how these concepts are relevant to the current reality of the GKPS church.

#### ***Christocentric Concept***

Bonhoeffer emphasized the importance of making Christ the center of all aspects of church life. This leads to the understanding that the church must be based on Christ's teachings and example in all things, including worship, service, and interpersonal relationships. In the context of the GKPS, this requires the church to prioritize Christ in all aspects of church life, from Bible teaching and worship to church leadership. (Yusak Soleiman 2015:36)

The principle of prioritizing Christ in all aspects of church life is a crucial foundation. It is not only a theological perspective but also a practice that governs how the church functions, develops, and interacts with its members and the wider community. To understand how this principle plays a role in the

GKPS, it is necessary to further analyze several key aspects.

For example, Bible teaching. In the GKPS, Bible teaching is at the heart of spiritual life. Emphasizing Christ in Bible teaching means ensuring that all that is taught and studied points to Him as the center. This requires a deep understanding of Christ's teachings, the application of His principles to daily life, and teaching that is appropriate to the cultural and social context of the Simalungun community. Furthermore, Bible teaching must also emphasize the importance of personal transformation through faith in Christ.

Second, in terms of worship. Worship in the GKPS must be based on the primacy of Christ. This means not only that Christ is the subject and object of worship, but also that worship reflects His character and values. This includes selecting worship songs that emphasize love, forgiveness, and praise for Christ, as well as using worship elements such as prayer, Bible reading, and sermons that draw people closer to Christ. Worship that prioritizes Christ must provide opportunities for the congregation to experience His presence in a tangible way and strengthen their commitment to follow Him. (Andry Saputra Ligawan 2023:76) The principle of prioritizing Christ must also be reflected in the leadership of the GKPS church. Church leaders, both pastors and members of the congregation who have leadership roles, must act according to Christ's example in their ministry. They must serve humbly, set a good example in teaching and shepherding, and prioritize the interests of the congregation above personal interests. The selection and development of church leaders must also consider the character of Christ as the primary standard. (Yusak Soleiman 2015:36)

Next is service and mission. In this regard, the GKPS is expected to serve and participate in Christ's mission in the world. This means that all ministry and mission activities must be inspired by Christ's love and directed toward spreading the Gospel and serving others. In the context of the GKPS, this could include social service, religious education, humanitarian aid, and evangelism efforts within and

outside the church community. The ministry and mission carried out must reflect Christ's character of compassion and justice. (J. Todd Billings 2011:10)

While prioritizing Christ, the GKPS must also recognize and value diversity within the body of Christ. This means that while Christocentric principles are the foundation of all church activities, it must also allow for differences in culture, tradition, and theological understanding among church members. Unity in diversity reflects the richness of the body of Christ as recognized in Scripture. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2009:313)

By prioritizing Christ in all aspects of church life, the GKPS has the potential to be a powerful and impactful witness in the Simalungun community and beyond. This will strengthen the church's identity as a vibrant and relevant community, transforming the lives of those around it through the love of Christ expressed in teaching, worship, leadership, service, and mission.

### ***Living Communion with God***

One of the key points in Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is the importance of living communion with God. This emphasizes that the church is not just about organizational structure or activities, but about a living relationship with God. In the context of the GKPS (Gerindra Christian Church), this demands that the church focus on the spiritual growth of its members, their personal experiences with God, and their engagement in prayer and meditation.

In his theology, Bonhoeffer emphasized that the church should not be merely an organizational structure or a place for religious activities, but rather, a place for individuals to have a living relationship with God. In the context of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS), this principle has significant implications for how the church functions and develops in accommodating the spiritual needs of its members.

The GKPS is a fellowship of believers who are its members, called and sent by God to carry out the GKPS's mission within the framework of God's mission. To this end, God grants all GKPS members various spiritual gifts of equal value to carry out their missionary service, both individually and collectively. All GKPS members are servants. God calls some GKPS members through GKPS to become special ministers, either through ordination, called ordained special ministers, or without ordination, called non-ordained special ministers. The relationship between members and special ministers is equal, functional, and reciprocal based on love. GKPS special ministers are theologically equal. GKPS special ministers are still GKPS members who function specifically and receive authority from God to equip all or some GKPS members so that they can carry out the GKPS mission. Operationally, in carrying out their different functions, special ministers can have unequal organizational positions. (Author Team 2022:13–14)

First, the importance of a living fellowship with God emphasizes that the church must be a place that facilitates the spiritual growth of its members. This means that beyond simply providing Bible teachings or holding worship services, the church must also prioritize the spiritual development of individuals within the congregation. This can be done through various spiritual development programs such as Bible classes, spiritual seminars, and spiritual retreats designed to deepen understanding of God's Word and strengthen a personal relationship with Him. (Yusak Soleiman 2015:25)

Furthermore, this concept emphasizes the importance of personal experience with God. In the GKPS, the church must be an environment that encourages its members to experience a personal encounter with God through prayer, meditation, and intimate fellowship with Him. This requires a pastoral approach that is attentive to individual needs, provides space for personal spiritual growth, and supports every step of their personal search and experience with God. (Kambium Writing Team 2011:14–15)

Engagement in prayer and meditation is essential to building a living fellowship with God. In the context of the GKPS (Global Christian Religious Service), the church must be a place where the practice of prayer and meditation is not only taught but also consistently practiced by its members. This includes opportunities for communal prayer in congregational worship, prayer groups, and the development of personal habits of prayer and meditation on God's Word.

The importance of a living communion with God also demands a transformation in the understanding of the church itself. More than just a building or institution, the church must be seen as a living community fueled by the Holy Spirit, where each member is connected by their personal relationship with Christ. In the GKPS, this leads to an understanding of the importance of making Christ the center of all church activities and prioritizing spiritual growth and personal communion with Him in every aspect of church life. (Kambium Writing Team 2011:2)

A living communion with God also influences how the church responds to the challenges and struggles faced by its members. In the GKPS, the church must be a place that provides support, comfort, and spiritual guidance for those experiencing difficulties or doubts in their faith. This can be done through counseling services, prayer support, and small, supportive communities within the church.

In addition, this principle also emphasizes the importance of developing a balanced spiritual life among congregation members. (Yohanis Enci Patandean 2023:73–81) This means that the church must accommodate the various spiritual needs of individuals, including those who are in the early stages of faith, those who are growing in faith, and those who have adequate spiritual experience. In GKPS, this can be realized through various spiritual development programs tailored to various levels of spiritual maturity.

Finally, this principle also demands a commitment from the church to continually encourage its members to develop in a living fellowship with God. In the GKPS (Gemini Church of Christ), the church must be a place that empowers its members to continually grow in their knowledge and love for Christ, and inspires them to be bold and impactful witnesses in their respective worlds.

In conclusion, the principle of living fellowship with God, as taught by Bonhoeffer, has significant implications in the context of the GKPS. It demands that the church focus on its members' spiritual growth, personal experiences with God, and engagement in prayer and meditation. (Al Danks 2022:8) By applying this principle, the GKPS can be a place where its members experience ongoing spiritual growth, deepen their personal relationship with Christ, and become bold witnesses for His love and truth in an ever-changing world.

### ***Fellowship Among Believers***

The GKPS inherits and embraces the noble values of Simalungun culture and philosophy. A prominent value is the Simalungun ahap, which expresses a sense of belonging and togetherness in community life. A prominent Simalungun philosophy is habonaron do bona, which means upholding the values of truth, and sapangambei manoktok hitei, which signifies the spirit of mutual cooperation. In realizing itself as a church and carrying out its mission, the GKPS continuously utilizes these Simalungun cultural and philosophical values in a constructive and transformative manner. (Author Team 2022:13)

Bonhoeffer emphasized the importance of fellowship among believers in the church. This includes compassion, support, mutual faith growth, and sharing in ministry. In the GKPS, this is reflected in the strong culture of mutual cooperation and togetherness among the congregation, as well as the support they provide one another in their spiritual and practical lives.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thinking on ecclesiology, the importance of fellowship between believers within the church is paramount. This is not merely a theological concept but also a practical foundation that influences how the church functions and interacts with its members and the world around it. In the context of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS), this principle has profound implications for how the congregation builds strong relationships, cares for one another, and grows together in faith.

According to Bonhoeffer, fellowship between believers encompasses several important, interrelated aspects. First, it encompasses compassion. Compassion is at the heart of Christ's teachings, and in the context of the church, compassion should be a primary characteristic. This means that congregation members should have genuine feelings and care for one another, ready to help and support each other in every situation, whether joyous or difficult. At GKPS, the culture of mutual cooperation ingrained in the Simalungun community is reflected in the way the congregation helps one another, shares burdens, and celebrates together in joy.

Beyond compassion, support is also an integral part of fellowship between believers. Support can take the form of moral, spiritual, or practical support in daily life. In the GKPS, this support can mean providing assistance or advice to congregation members experiencing difficulties, offering moral encouragement in facing challenges, or providing practical assistance with physical or financial needs. The importance of supporting one another in the church is a strong foundation for building a healthy and strong community. (I. Wardi Saputra 2016:86)

Furthermore, growing in faith together is also a crucial aspect of fellowship among believers. The church should be a place where its members grow together in faith, deepen their knowledge of God's Word, and experience spiritual transformation together. This can be a means of strengthening and deepening the faith of congregation members, enabling them to grow as mature and responsible

disciples of Christ. (Andry Saputra Ligawan 2023:86–87)

Finally, fellowship among believers also includes sharing in ministry. The church is not only a place to receive, but also to give. This means that congregation members must be actively involved in serving one another and in serving the surrounding community. In the GKPS, this can be reflected in various church service programs, such as serving the poor, religious education, visiting the sick, or supporting those in need. By sharing in service, congregation members not only strengthen their fellowship but also provide a powerful witness of Christ's love to the world around them. (T. Krispurwana Cahyadi 2012:26).

By applying these principles, the GKPS can become a strong, vibrant, and impactful community serving the spiritual and practical needs of its members and the surrounding community. As part of the body of Christ, the church has a responsibility to be a place where Christ's love is clearly demonstrated through strong relationships among its members, genuine support, mutual faith growth, and shared service. In this way, the church can be a light to the world, bringing hope and comfort, and providing a powerful witness to God's liberating presence.

In implementing these principles, the GKPS can develop various service programs tailored to the needs of the surrounding community. For example, the church can organize social service programs such as soup kitchens for the hungry, health centers for the sick, or schools for children in need. Furthermore, the church can also involve its members in mission and evangelism, both through direct participation in evangelistic activities and financial support for missionaries and ministers of the Gospel. (Arthur F. Holmes 2005:206)

Furthermore, it is important for the GKPS to build partnerships with other organizations and institutions that share similar goals in serving the community and spreading the Gospel. This could include partnerships with social service agencies, evangelistic organizations, or other churches in carrying out joint mission projects. By collaborating and working together, the church can expand the

impact of its ministry and mission, as well as build stronger communities and engage in bringing positive change in society.

Therefore, as witnesses of Christ, the GKPS has a great responsibility to engage in social service, mission, and evangelism to those around it. Through these principles, the church can become a powerful agent of transformation in society, bringing light and hope to those in need, and providing a tangible witness of Christ's love and truth to the world around it. In this way, the GKPS can fulfill Christ's missionary calling faithfully and effectively, and be a blessing to many.

### ***The sovereignty of Christ in the Church***

Bonhoeffer emphasized that Christ must be the true head of the church, and His authority must be recognized in all things. This challenges the view that the church is a purely human structure and emphasizes that Christ is the one who leads and controls His church. In the context of the GKPS (Gerindra Christian Church), this demands that every church decision and action be based on the principles of the Kingdom of God and the will of Christ. Several decisions and changes are contextualized within the current struggles facing the congregation. This relates to the synchronization and actualization of the new understanding.

In the context of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS), this principle has profound implications for how the GKPS church functions and interacts with its members and the world around it. First and foremost, this principle demands that every church decision and action be based on the principles of the Kingdom of God and the will of Christ. This means that in everything, from electing church leaders to organizing worship, the church must ask, "What will please Christ? What is in accordance with His will?"

This concept also emphasizes the importance of the church's loyalty to Christ as the true head of the church. This means that every church member must fully submit to Christ's authority in their personal and church lives. In the GKPS, this is reflected in the congregation's commitment to living

according to Christ's teachings and the principles of the Kingdom of God in all aspects of their lives.

Furthermore, this principle requires that the GKPS church practice Christocentric leadership. This means that church leaders must recognize that they are servants of Christ and that their responsibility is to follow and serve Him. Church leaders must lead by Christ's example, with love, humility, and discerning wisdom.

Furthermore, this principle emphasizes the importance of unity within the body of Christ. In the GKPS, the church must value and foster unity in diversity, recognizing that each member has a distinct but equally important role in the body of Christ. In this context, the church must promote cooperation, mutual support, and mutual appreciation among its members, remembering that Christ is the sole head who governs and unites them. (Daniel W. Doerksen 1997:134)

Furthermore, this principle emphasizes the importance of church integrity in realizing Christ's vision and mission. The church must ensure that every activity, program, and initiative it undertakes is in accordance with the will of Christ and the purposes of His Kingdom. In GKPS, this requires continuous reflection on whether the church truly reflects the values and principles proclaimed by Christ, and if not, how the church can improve and adapt itself to be more in line with His will. (Daniel W. Doerksen 1997:134–35)

This also requires that the GKPS church prioritize obedience to God's Word as the highest authority in church life. Christ, as Head of the Church, speaks to His church through His Word, and therefore, the church must honor and obey His teachings in all things. In this context, the church must prioritize biblical teaching, worship services in accordance with Christ's teachings, and spiritual practices based on the principles of God's Word.

By implementing these principles, the GKPS can become a stronger church, more focused on Christ, and more effective in fulfilling His calling and mission in the world. As a church based on Christ's authority, the GKPS has the potential to be a powerful agent of transformation in society, bringing

light and hope to those in need, and providing a tangible witness of Christ's love and truth to the world around it. In this way, the GKPS church can faithfully fulfill Christ's calling and be a blessing to many. By applying Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Ecclesiology concepts, the GKPS church can strengthen its identity as a living, active, and impactful Christian community proclaiming the love and presence of Christ in today's world.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bonhoeffer's views on ecclesiology also include a critique of dogmatic forms of church life, or those trapped in rigid and formalistic understandings. For him, the church must live in the breath of Christ's freedom and generosity, transcending institutional and hierarchical boundaries that often hinder the church's witness. He then developed a Christocentric Ecclesiology, in which the church is centered on Christ, or Christ as the foundation or starting point of the church in its fellowship.

Bonhoeffer's thoughts on ecclesiology have made significant contributions to theology and church thought today. Through his emphasis on an active and engaged life in the world, and his affirmation of personal dignity and shared responsibility within the church, Bonhoeffer's views inspire modern churches in expressing their faith and serving the world with Christ's love. Bonhoeffer's views on Christology also encourage believers to have a living and personal relationship with Christ and to live a life that reflects His character in every aspect of life.

His thinking underscores the importance of Christ as the source of spiritual life, moral example, and center of unity for Christians. Grace comes from God and has become the property of all humanity while it remains in Him through His Church, of which He is the head of humanity, His body. Therefore, salvation is one of God's mysteries that is, will be, and has been fulfilled through His redemption. Bonhoeffer stated that ecclesiology moves from the common perspective, leading to the meaning of *communio sanctorum* and *communio*

sacramentorum. The manifestation of the Church can only be bridged to its fluidity when all its elements are grounded solely in God, and this is indeed undeniable.

The vessel of God's saving work is the Church, which can generally be understood as the pure essence of God's saving mission through the redemption of His people. *Communio Sanctorum* is a Latin term meaning the assembly of saints or communion of saints. This term is used in Christian creeds such as the Apostles' Creed, which expresses faith in the communion of saints. *Communio Sanctorum* refers to the fellowship or spiritual connectedness between all believers, living and deceased.

This reflects the belief that the church is not only composed of those living in this world but also includes the deceased saints who are present before God. In this communion, all believers share a relationship and unity based on their faith in Christ. This term also emphasizes the importance of unity within the community of believers, not only within a specific time and place, but also beyond the boundaries of time and generations. The living and the deceased spiritually share new life in Christ and are brothers and sisters as part of God's wider family.

The image of the communion of saints in Christ in the GKPS Church is a beautiful fellowship of diversity united by faith in Jesus Christ. Although the GKPS Church is a tribal church specifically for the Simalungun tribe, there is a diversity of backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences gathered in one spiritual unity to glorify God in this church.

The GKPS Church is a place where Bible teaching dominates. God's Word is the foundation for all teaching and activities. Through sermons, Bible classes, and group discussions, people are called to deepen their understanding of biblical truth and apply it to their daily lives. Bible teaching forms a solid foundation of faith for every GKPS Church member, preparing them to live a Christian life growing in Christ.

Fellowship at the GKPS Church is driven by deep worship. Worship is not just about singing praises and worship, but also about experiencing God's presence personally and corporately. During worship, people can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens, heals, and comforts their hearts. Worship is also a time when people gather to offer prayers, share testimonies, and express their gratitude to God. Christ-centered worship and church procedures strengthen the bonds of fellowship among believers.

The GKPS Church is a place where interpersonal relationships are driven by Christ's love. People at the GKPS Church are taught to love others as Christ loves them. This means respecting, serving, and forgiving one another. When conflict arises, they are encouraged to seek peace and reconciliation according to biblical principles. Fellowship among GKPS Church members is built on the foundation of Christ's love, which overcomes differences and unites people in one spirit.

GKPS Church can be a place where the call to mission is emphasized. People in GKPS Church are assured that they are called to be witnesses of Christ wherever they are. They are encouraged to spread the Gospel through their words and deeds, both in their own communities and throughout the world. GKPS Church actively supports local and international missions, whether through prayer, financial support, or sending missionaries. The spirit of mission moves the hearts and minds of GKPS Church members to expand God's Kingdom worldwide.

GKPS Church can be a place where spiritual formation and character growth are emphasized. People in GKPS Church are encouraged to continue growing in their faith through prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship with other believers. Furthermore, they are guided to develop character traits consistent with Christ's teachings, such as patience, humility, and love. Through mentoring, counseling, and spiritual classes, the GKPS Church ensures that each member is equipped to face life's challenges with Christ-like conviction and integrity.

The GKPS Church must be a place where spiritual leadership is developed and respected. GKPS congregants are assured that every member has a vital role in the body of Christ and is called to serve according to their gifts and calling. Through training and formation, spiritual leaders are cultivated to lead with wisdom, integrity, and love. The GKPS Church respects spiritual authority and collaborates in making decisions that affect the congregation as a whole.

The image of the fellowship of the Saints in Christ at the GKPS Church is a fellowship of a community united in faith, love, and service. With a focus on biblical teaching, in-depth worship, social service, Christ's love, mission, spiritual growth, and spiritual leadership, the GKPS Church becomes a vibrant and influential place for the surrounding community. It is a place where people seek and find God's love and mercy and are prepared to proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom throughout the world.

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