Title: The End of the Natural Law: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christological Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) has often been understood as articulating an occsionalistic, divine-command theory of ethics. In this regard, he is often seen as aligned with Karl Barth (1886-1968). This study challenges this view by demonstrating that Bonhoeffer's own ethical project was aimed at resuscitating and reviving a distinctively Protestant form of natural-law thinking. Bonhoeffer's approach was characterized by an emphasis on the origin, formation, and goal of natural mandates in, by, and toward Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's early teaching concerning orders of preservation and laws of life was developed into a mature doctrine of divine mandates in his Ethics, which are best understood as christologically defined manifestations of natural law. Christ is the "end" or telos of the natural law for Bonhoeffer, and in this way Bonhoeffer attempts to rehabilitate the concept of the "natural" for Protestant ethics. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the divine mandates, when combined with complementary teachings concerning vocation and vicarious representative action, represent an important resource for contemporary Protestant social thought. His efforts are instructive for contemporary debates and problems, and under each of Bonhoeffer's four mandates (family and marriage, culture and work, church, and government), this study takes up specific contemporary issues in an attempt to constructively engage and apply Bonhoeffer's insights today.