

Invitation to the workshop:

On the Recovery of Chalcedonian Christology

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology as Focal Point for Contemporary Christology

August 23–27, 2021

Venue: Faculty of Protestant Theology, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Germany

The work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer revolves around Christology. Unusual for his own time, Bonhoeffer, clearly emphasized the importance of Christology for the dogmatic reflection on faith and the necessity of its adequate articulation not only in ecumenism but also in a “world come of age”. The planned workshop, to which we cordially invite you, explores Bonhoeffer’s Christology in its various contexts.

Plurality is the pivotal test of Christian theology today. This plurality is not only brought about by other worldviews from the outside, but also in the context of the global scope of Christianity from within. Recognizing this plurality and fostering its fruitful and constructive reflection is fundamental to both inner-Christian and interreligious dialogue. This applies especially to Christology, which is the core of Christian theology and must therefore always be reflected upon in the light of contemporary circumstances with regard to its underlying *credo* and the respective contexts of meaning. Precisely this requires an ability to articulate one’s own existential knowledge of faith, which manages to constitutively incorporate openness for constructive dialogue. Especially in recent decades, however, a loss of theological articulation in this respect has become apparent in Western theology. The goal of this workshop is therefore to regain the potential of a Christology is capable of precise articulation of the Chalcedonian doctrine by examining the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or more precisely his reflections on Christology, which seem particularly groundbreaking due to their productive openness which at the same time consistently emphasizes the natures of Christ.

Funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science as part of the Excellence Strategy of the German Federal and State Governments we invite you to an international and interdisciplinary workshop on Bonhoeffer’s Christology.

The aim of the workshop is the joint discussion of texts by young researchers on Bonhoeffer’s Christology as well as the joint reading and work on a selection of classical and more recent texts on Christology.



Background:

The origins of the current fundamental debate in Christology date back to the 19th century, when the plausibility of the doctrine of two natures – which expresses the paradoxical unity of Jesus Christ as truly human and truly God – laid down in the Confession of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) was first systematically called into question by academic theology and in some cases ultimately rejected completely. However, even when it is rejected, the doctrine of two natures still provides the framework of the Christological discussion for both the Western and almost all Eastern churches. In contrast to this doctrine, the approach which begins from the human being Jesus, from whom the “Christ of faith” is distinguished, has been seen as the more adequate modern approach. Similarly, recent Christological approaches have spoken of Christ’s divinity as being characterized by his ideal humanity. However, methodological and practical problems arise in this context: Not only is the inner-Christian debate restricted when the dogma of Chalcedon is condemned as an empty dogmatic formula or as simply intolerable. Interreligious dialogue is also broken off from the outset if it is made a condition, as has been common in German-language theology, that all religious self-reflection inevitably leads to the very ideals identified with Jesus Christ. This already points to the core of this old, yet still controversial question the workshop wants to ask again: How are the two natures to be understood as a unity, without them merging into each other in one way or another, so that their paradoxical relationship would be suspended?

The workshop will take Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology as the starting point for this reworking of a Christology that is to be made fruitful for the current debate. His theology offers a starting point for the retrieval of a productive Christology that reflects the plurality of the globalized world. Bonhoeffer accordingly characterizes his enterprise as follows: “What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today.” (DBWE 8, 362) He knows how to bring this “us” to a head with overwhelming directness: A Christology must be able to cope with the fact that this “us” no longer encompasses merely different kinds of Christianity, but also people to whom Christ means nothing. Bonhoeffer’s Christology thus begins precisely with this integration into worldly reality, whereby the world is understood in its plurality and polyphony. Following Bonhoeffer, all Christological discourse must therefore be oriented to its present world-opening meaning and be challenged by the present. In this way, it opens itself up, with simultaneous structural openness, not only to inner-Christian discussion, but also to non-Christian world views, from which a basic ethical demand follows: Christology in this sense does not permit any reinforcing of universally fixed principles, but rather deals with the world for the world in full earnestness and complete openness. This means, as Bonhoeffer’s life has shown, not only acting responsibly, but also concretely embodying responsibility in action. In a multi-perspectival, pluralistic world, Bonhoeffer’s thinking accordingly offers a productive basis for conceptually incorporating the openness required for this task into academic theology.





Brief outline of the workshop

Monday, August 23, 2021: Arrival. Welcome and getting to know each other from 17h00.

Tuesday, August 24-27, 2021, each day will be structured as follows:

9h00-13h00: Presentation and discussion of 2-3 projects.

14h00-18h00: 1-2 sessions each for joint reading of selected Christology texts.

Keynotes: On two afternoons one of the two reading sessions will be replaced by a keynote lecture.

The workshop ends on *Friday, August 27, 2021 at 17h15.*

Project presentations / contributions:

The main interest of the workshop is to discuss contributions that illuminate Bonhoeffer's Christology from different perspectives. To this end, we are seeking contributions from young researchers dealing with Bonhoeffer's Christology, its significance in contemporary debates, its integration into traditional theological foundations, and its relevance for contemporary philosophical contexts. The texts will be distributed to all participants in advance and therefore should be submitted at least 6 weeks in advance (by July 12, 2021). This is the only way to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to read the texts intensively and constructively.

The length of the contributions should be 45,000-65,000 characters (including spaces). There will be 90 minutes time to present the contributions and then to discuss them together.

The language of the workshop is English.

It is planned to publish the elaborated and discussed papers in an anthology.

Call for Papers:

Please send us your feedback as soon as possible (until October 31, 2020) if you would like to participate in the workshop and contribute your own text to the discussion.

We would be very happy to see you in August 2021 in Tübingen!

Dr. Nadine Hamilton

Christian Schlenker





Contact:

Christian Schlenker

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
Evangelisch-theologische Fakultät
Lehrstuhl für Systematische Theologie II / Institut für Ethik
Liebermeisterstr. 12
72076 Tübingen

Tel.: +49 7071 29 78021

E-Mail: christian.schlenker@uni-tuebingen.de

Dr. Nadine Hamilton

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg
Philosophische Fakultät und Fachbereich Theologie
Lehrstuhl für Systematische Theologie I (Dogmatik)
Kochstr. 6
91054 Erlangen

Tel.: + 499131 8522045

E-Mail: Nadine.Hamilton@fau.de

