

Psalm 74:8 and November 1938: rereading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Kristallnacht* annotation in its interpretive context

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Abstract

Following *Kristallnacht*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer marked the date of the pogrom beside Psalm 74:8 in his personal Bible. This annotation has been frequently cited; however, though scholars have recognised historical implications of associating this psalm text with *Kristallnacht*, the discourse has yet to examine this annotation thoroughly in the context of Bonhoeffer's figural interpretation of the Psalms during this period. This article will establish the context of Bonhoeffer's figural approach to the Psalter in order to address this question: by connecting Psalm 74:8 with *Kristallnacht*, what theological claim might Bonhoeffer have been making about the events of November 1938?

Keywords: biblical interpretation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, figural interpretation, *Kristallnacht*, Old Testament, Psalms

Introduction: Bonhoeffer and *Kristallnacht*

On 13 November 1938 – the Sunday following the eruption of anti-Jewish Nazi brutality known as the Night of Broken Glass, or *Kristallnacht*¹ – Dietrich Bonhoeffer had no pulpit from which to preach a sermon.² He made no public comment about these widespread pogroms.³ Scholars, then, search elsewhere for Bonhoeffer's response to this outbreak of violence. Eberhard

¹ Alan E. Steinweis notes that though controversy has surrounded usage of the term 'Kristallnacht', especially in German-language scholarship, it remains the standard nomenclature in English writing. See his *Kristallnacht 1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 1–2.

² Eberhard Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: One of the Silent Bystanders?', *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 25/1 (Spring 1992), p. 35. See also Bethge's 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer unter den Verstummen? Vortrag 1990 über Bonhoeffers Situation am 9. November 1938', in *Erstes Gebot und Zeitgeschichte: Aufsätze und Reden, 1980–1990* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1991), pp. 100–11.

³ Dirk Schulz, 'Editor's Afterword to the German Edition', in *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*, DBWE 15, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 572.

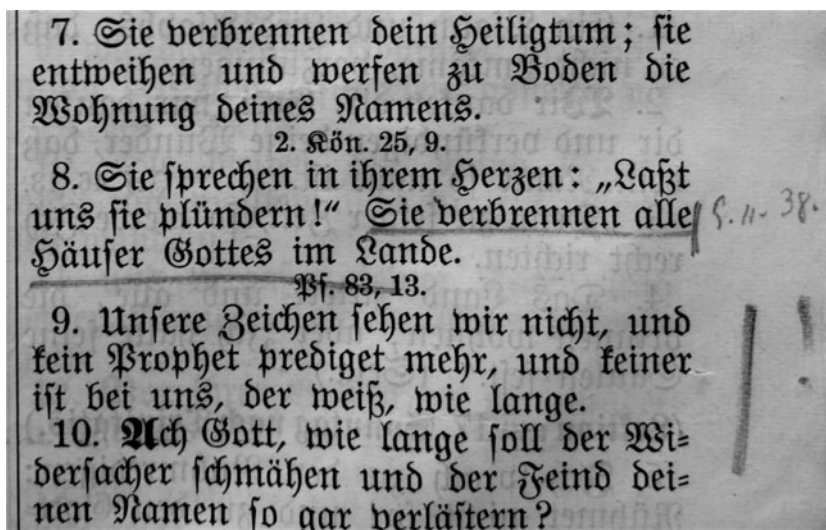


Figure 1. The *Kristallnacht* Annotation: Nachl. 299 (Bonhoeffer), Bibliothek, 1 A 6: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung
Photo credit: David A. R. Clark / courtesy of bpk-Bildagentur / Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin / Art Resource, NY

Bethge, the theologian's friend and confidant, recalls that Bonhoeffer was in Groß-Schlönwitz at the time, where he did not directly witness any violence, but soon after travelled to Berlin to survey the extent of attacks against Jewish persons, property and places of worship – including the burning of synagogues and the desecration of Torah scrolls.⁴

Shortly thereafter,⁵ in his regular study of scripture, Bonhoeffer made an annotation in the margin of the Psalms, writing, '9.11.38', the date of *Kristallnacht*.⁶ This annotation appears next to Psalm 74:8. The full verse reads: 'They say in their hearts, let us plunder them! They burn all the houses of

⁴ Bethge, 'Silent Bystanders?', p. 34. See also Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. edn (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 607.

⁵ According to Bethge, students' notes show that 'Bonhoeffer made these pencil marks and wrote the date at that time ... in the midst of the realization ... of the first dreadful news', as opposed to it being 'a note added later as a result of reflection' (Bethge, 'Silent Bystanders?', p. 36).

⁶ This annotation appears in Bonhoeffer's personal Bible, which I have consulted: *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments nach der deutschen Übersetzung D. Martin Luthers, Durchgesehen im Auftrag der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchenkonferenz, Mitteloktav-Ausgabe* (Stuttgart, 1911), located in the Nachlass Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (NL-Bibl. 1 A 6).

God in the land.’⁷ According to Bethge, this annotation is unparalleled in Bonhoeffer’s Bible, since ‘apart from here ... , there is not a single note in his Bible giving a date or key word for something contemporary or of political or family or personal importance’.⁸ The place of Psalm 74 in Bonhoeffer’s response to *Kristallnacht* was further accented by his 20 November 1938 letter to former students of Finkenwalde, where – in a reflection on recent events – he refers to it once more: ‘In the last few days’, Bonhoeffer wrote, ‘I have thought much about Ps. 74, Zech. 2:8, Rom. 9:4–5, and 11:11–15. That leads deeply into prayer.’⁹

In the absence of any other explicit response to the crimes of *Kristallnacht*, Bonhoeffer scholars have devoted considerable attention to the meaning of his marginalia. Yet, as I will argue, while scholars have helpfully recognised possible political or historical implications of associating this psalm text with *Kristallnacht*, the discourse has yet to examine this annotation more thoroughly in the context of Bonhoeffer’s then-burgeoning commitment to figural interpretation of the Psalter. This article will establish the backdrop of Bonhoeffer’s figural approach to the Psalms, in order to address this question: by connecting Psalm 74:8 with *Kristallnacht*, what theological claim might Bonhoeffer have been making about the events of November 1938?

From rejection to approval: Bonhoeffer on figural interpretation, 1925 to 1935

Before analysing the annotation in relation to Bonhoeffer’s figural practices, I must first detail the context of his appraisal of figural exegesis – especially as it applies to his interpretation of the Psalms. Bonhoeffer’s position on figural interpretation shifted notably, from outright rejection of figural exegesis in the mid-1920s to his adoption of figural practices by the mid-1930s.¹⁰ In

⁷ In Bonhoeffer’s edition, Psalm 74:8 reads: *Sie sprechen in ihrem Herzen: „Laßt uns sie plündern!“ Sie verbrennen alle Häuser Gottes im Lande.* The annotation ‘9.11.38’ is adjacent to the second part of the verse (‘They burn all the houses of God in the land’), which is underlined in Bonhoeffer’s hand. Verses 9–10 are also marked by a vertical line in the margin, accompanied by an exclamation mark; however, only v. 8 – and specifically v. 8b – is explicitly annotated with the date of *Kristallnacht*.

⁸ Bethge, ‘Silent Bystanders?’, p. 36.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘To the Finkenwalde Brothers’, *DBWE* 15, p. 84.

¹⁰ I adopt Barry Harvey’s description of figural interpretation as it applies to Bonhoeffer’s work: a practice that ‘posits an intrinsic relation between what might otherwise seem as unrelated persons, practices, or events, but which in actuality constitute concrete moments in the single divine utterance in and of history’ (*Taking Hold of the Real: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Profound Worldliness of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), p. 218). For consistency in describing Bonhoeffer’s interpretive work, particularly as it relates to the *Kristallnacht* annotation, I employ the terms ‘figural interpretation’ or

1925, while a student at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer wrote a paper on the ‘Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture’, in which he unambiguously dismisses the validity of figural exegesis.¹¹ Bonhoeffer cites figural interpretation as an example of the interpretive ‘abuses’ that result from applying ‘hermeneutical standards external to scripture’ to the exegetical task.¹² As Bonhoeffer explains, ‘The method of allegorical interpretation completely ignored historical reality. It used speculative and rationalistic methods that could read into the text whatever one wished.’¹³ Nowhere in the paper does Bonhoeffer mollify this rejection.

However, in August 1935, Bonhoeffer delivered a lecture on ‘Contemporizing New Testament Texts’, in which he voices approval of figural exegesis: ‘The right of the allegorical interpretation’, he writes, ‘consists in acknowledging the possibility that God does not allow his word to be exhausted in its grammat[ical], logical, unequivocal meaning, but rather that this word has even other perspectives and can better serve understanding.’¹⁴ While preserving the validity of non-figural interpretations, Bonhoeffer concedes that figural readings may additionally be valid: ‘why’, he asks, ‘should the word not *also* have symbolic or allegorical meaning?’¹⁵ Bonhoeffer qualifies figural practices by delimiting conditions under which such exegesis is admissible,¹⁶ yet the contrast to his earlier work is clear. Bonhoeffer may have been influenced by the figural practices of Luther or Wilhelm Vischer, but these influences seem inadequate to account for the marked change in Bonhoeffer’s position.¹⁷ Rather, the key

‘figural exegesis’ as a broader classification, while the terms ‘typology’ and ‘allegory’ will appear in quotations.

¹¹ Such assignments can make dubious sources, as students may adjust their positions in order to cater to a professorial constituency; however, since in this essay Bonhoeffer was willing to make claims likely to offend his professor, Reinhold Seeberg, the document seems a reliably frank statement of his own position (Bonhoeffer, ‘Paper on the Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture’, in *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918–1927*, in DBWE 9, p. 294, n. 72).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, ‘Lecture on Contemporizing New Testament Texts’, in *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, in DBWE 14, p. 428.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 428–9 (original emphasis).

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer stipulates: ‘The decisive element and only criterion is whether something other than Christ is disclosed here – hence the issue is (1) the *What!* the *content* of the allegorical and symbolic and typological exposition; (2) that only to the *word of Scripture* itself can this power to witness allegorically, symbolically, etc. to Christ, this transparency, be attributed’ (*ibid.*, p. 429, original emphasis).

¹⁷ When Bonhoeffer cites Luther in this paper, he highlights his inconsistent treatment of allegory: ‘Luther emphatically insisted on the *unequivocal meaning of Scripture* over against

to Bonhoeffer's acceptance of figural interpretation may lie in his conviction that a christological definition of holy scripture at times requires figural practices. In the same lecture, Bonhoeffer explains: 'Because Scripture as a whole and in all its parts is to be understood as a witness to Christ, and because difficulties do apparently arise in the concrete demonstration of this assertion – the question arises whether it is permissible to employ *allegorical exegesis* for obscure scriptural passages.'¹⁸ Bonhoeffer's qualified acceptance of figural interpretation, then, appears to arise from his view that such practices are necessitated by the conviction that all of scripture bears witness to Christ.¹⁹ For Bonhoeffer, it seems, figural interpretation is required in order for a christological construal of scripture to be hermeneutically sustained.

After emerging in 1935, seemingly out of theological necessity,²⁰ figural interpretation occupied a prominent role in Bonhoeffer's exegetical work, notably in his treatment of the Psalms. In the same summer of 1935, Bonhoeffer delivered a lecture titled 'Christ in the Psalms', which indicates the subsequent direction of his figural approach to the Psalter. In this lecture, he considers the tension that a psalm is the divine word of God yet also a human prayer to God: 'How can the prayerful word of

the four- or sevenfold meaning of Scripture – unanimity, truth ... – he himself *allegorized* in his own lecture on the Psalms!' ('Lecture on Contemporizing New Testament Texts', p. 428, original emphasis). Parallels with Vischer in Bonhoeffer's exegetical work led Walter Harrelson to conclude that Bonhoeffer 'interprets the Old Testament much in the manner of Wilhelm Vischer' ('Bonhoeffer and the Bible', in *The Place of Bonhoeffer: Problems and Possibilities in His Thought*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 118). However, it may be that seeming traces of Vischer's approach in Bonhoeffer's work comprise coincidence rather than influence. Martin Kuske notes that the chronology of Vischer's publications led Bethge to infer 'that Bonhoeffer was not influenced by Vischer, but rather thought parallel to him' (*The Old Testament as the Book of Christ: An Appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Interpretation*, trans. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 17).

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, 'Lecture on Contemporizing New Testament Texts', p. 428 (original emphasis).

¹⁹ According to Bonhoeffer, the function of holy scripture in bearing witness to Christ applies equally to both testaments. As Kuske explains, 'Bonhoeffer reads all Holy Scripture as the book of Christ, therefore the Old Testament as well' (Kuske, *Old Testament*, p. 32, original emphasis).

²⁰ Cf. Harvey's observation that figural approaches were necessitated by Bonhoeffer's broader theological outlook: 'Bonhoeffer's reclamation of typological interpretation is consistent with his overall theological approach with respect to the Bible, as his rejection of principles and ideals as the primary mode of theological ethics, when taken together with his emphasis on participating in the revelatory action of God in Christ, makes something like this approach necessary' (Harvey, *Taking Hold of the Real*, p. 225).

the church-community', he asks, 'simultaneously also be God's word?'²¹ Bonhoeffer harmonises these seemingly incompatible functions of the Psalms christologically: 'God as the one praying and God as the one answering the prayer' is a problem that, he maintains, 'is resolved only in Jesus Christ'.²² The Psalms can be the divine-human word only insofar as they are the word of the divine-human Jesus, for 'Christ is the supplicant in the Psalter'.²³ Historical considerations regarding the provenance of Psalms are accordingly marginalised for Bonhoeffer since, as Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm observe: 'What matters to him is that the voice of Christ is to be heard in every psalm.'²⁴

Indeed, Bonhoeffer does not apply this christological lens exclusively to Psalms closely associated with Jesus either in the New Testament or in the later Christian tradition. Rather, Bonhoeffer specifies that 'the whole Psalter can be understood as the prayer of Jesus Christ'.²⁵ In Bonhoeffer's understanding, since it is Christ who speaks through every psalm, the frame of reference for interpreting Psalms becomes Christ himself, since '[w]hat is important now' is that 'we understand and pray together these psalms as the prayers of Jesus Christ in his church-community'.²⁶ This christological construal of the 'I' of the Psalms decisively shapes Bonhoeffer's subsequent exegesis of the Psalter.

Psalms of suffering in Bonhoeffer's figural exegesis

The manifold interpretive implications of Bonhoeffer's christological understanding of the Psalter became evident in two later works, one written shortly before *Kristallnacht* and the other written just over a year afterward. These works offer a valuable glimpse of Bonhoeffer's figural approach to the Psalms around the time of *Kristallnacht*, which will help illuminate the correlation that his annotation implies between Psalm 74:8 and the pogrom of 1938. Significantly, the figural exegesis in these two works includes particular attention to the voice of lamentation and suffering in the Psalms, of which Psalm 74:8 is an example.

In *Life Together*, written just prior to *Kristallnacht* in September and October 1938, Bonhoeffer reiterates the figural claim that the one who prays the Psalms is Christ himself: 'The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ in

²¹ Bonhoeffer, 'Lecture on Christ in the Psalms', in *DBWE* 14, p. 387.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 387–8.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

²⁴ Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 397 (original emphasis).

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, 'Lecture on Christ in the Psalms', p. 389.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the truest sense of the word. He prayed the Psalter, and now it has become his prayer for all time.’²⁷ Bonhoeffer had previously stated that ‘Christ in the Psalms is Christ the Crucified’,²⁸ and in *Life Together* he elaborates by clarifying how the voice of the suffering Christ speaks in psalms of suffering. The one ‘who has come to such infinite depths of suffering’ in the Psalms, Bonhoeffer declares, ‘is none other than Jesus Christ himself’.²⁹ Accordingly, Bonhoeffer reasons that those who pray psalms of suffering ought not to feign personal familiarity with such suffering, but rather must recognise the suffering of the Psalms as an expression of – and indeed inscribed in – the suffering of Christ. Bonhoeffer explains:

And how should we pray those prayers of unspeakable misery and suffering, since we have hardly begun to sense even remotely something of what is meant here? We can and we should pray the psalms of suffering, not to become completely caught up in something our heart does not know from its own experience, nor to make our own complaints, but because all this suffering was genuine and real in Jesus Christ, because the human being Jesus Christ suffered sickness, pain, shame, and death, and because in his suffering and dying all flesh suffered and died.³⁰

Thus, Bonhoeffer’s earlier claim that the Psalms express the voice of Christ takes on interpretive specificity in *Life Together*, as he explains that psalms of suffering in particular must be heard as the despairing cries of Christ himself. As Patrick D. Miller remarks, this realisation proved momentous to Bonhoeffer: that ‘[t]he Psalms were the prayers of a suffering and dying Christ’ was, to Bonhoeffer, ‘the most important thing to say about the Psalms’.³¹

In *Prayerbook of the Bible: An Introduction to the Psalms*, published in 1940, we see Bonhoeffer’s figural approach to the Psalter receiving its most extensive treatment. In this work, Bonhoeffer leaves historical-critical considerations aside as he explores the interpretive reach of figural exegesis. Bonhoeffer restates his prior conclusion that Christ prays the Psalms,³² then premises his exegesis on christological considerations: ‘we must not, therefore, first ask what [the Psalms] have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, in *DBWE* 5, pp. 54–5.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, ‘Lecture on Christ in the Psalms’, p. 392.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 54.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7.

³¹ Patrick D. Miller, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Psalms’, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15/3 (1994), p. 280.

³² Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible: An Introduction to the Psalms*, in *DBWE* 5, p. 160.

Christ'.³³ Basing his approach in *Prayerbook* on the figural framework already established in 1935 and 1938, Bonhoeffer moves systematically through types of psalms, showing how each psalm can – and, in his understanding, must – be interpreted primarily as the prayer of Christ.³⁴

In this context, Bonhoeffer applies his christological approach to interpreting psalms of suffering. He repeats his caution against reading such psalms as expressions of one's own suffering: 'No single human being can pray the psalms of lamentation out of his or her own experience.'³⁵ Rather, Bonhoeffer advocates hearing these psalms as the prayers of Christ, who 'has known torment and pain, guilt and death more deeply than we have'.³⁶ Accordingly, in psalms of suffering such as Psalm 22, 'we always hear Jesus Christ praying'.³⁷ Bonhoeffer had previously established these themes, but here he extends this christological reach into the present, claiming additionally that the voice of Christ in psalms of suffering discloses the presence of Christ in human suffering today: 'psalms of lament', he states, 'proclaim Jesus Christ as the only help in suffering, for in Christ God is with us'.³⁸ Indeed, in the same context Bonhoeffer adds: 'Now we know that there is no longer any suffering on earth in which Christ, our only helper, is not with us, suffering and praying with us.'³⁹ Thus, Bonhoeffer concludes that, inasmuch as Christ is the one praying psalms of suffering, Christ promises his presence in the midst of all contemporary suffering.

To summarise: Bonhoeffer did not claim merely that certain psalms prefigure Christ or find their full meaning in Christ, but instead made the more radical claim that all psalms must be interpreted as the very prayers of Christ. And, importantly for the purpose of analysing his *Kristallnacht* annotation, Bonhoeffer emphasised the need to hear the suffering Christ as the voice speaking in psalms of suffering, revealing Christ's presence amid contemporary suffering, lamentation and abandonment.

Reinterpreting the *Kristallnacht* annotation

Bonhoeffer's figural engagement with the Psalms – and with psalms of suffering, in particular – suggests striking theological implications for

³³ Ibid., p. 157.

³⁴ Bonhoeffer classifies psalms according to the categories of 'creation, law, the history of salvation, the Messiah, the church, life, suffering, guilt, enemies, the end'. Ibid., p. 162.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

³⁹ Ibid.

the *Kristallnacht* annotation. Nonetheless, the scholarly discourse has tended to register the historical and political implications of the marginalia while overlooking the context of Bonhoeffer's figural approach to the Psalter. Influentially, Bethge construes the annotation specifically in terms of historical parallels. According to Bethge, the annotation indicates that Bonhoeffer discerned similarities between the ancient historical context of Psalm 74 and the recent history of Nazi Germany, a historical correspondence that purportedly evoked in Bonhoeffer a heightened sympathy for the Jewish victims of *Kristallnacht*. Bonhoeffer 'was struck', Bethge writes, 'by the shattering experience of abandonment felt by the desperate victims of the pogrom two and a half thousand years earlier, when the Babylonians laid waste the Temple and deported the people, and now, through the strength of his identification with them, he was similarly struck by the acute and real cries of abandonment of that night' in November 1938.⁴⁰ To Bethge, the *Kristallnacht* annotation is a historical rather than a theological comment.

Scholars are indebted to Bethge's work on this topic, since without his personal recollections and historical reconstructions we would have little knowledge of Bonhoeffer's private responses to *Kristallnacht*. Nonetheless, it seems that Bethge analyses the *Kristallnacht* annotation in isolation from Bonhoeffer's figural interpretation of the Psalms during that period. This approach, I suggest, yields a narrowly historical construal that is incommensurate with Bonhoeffer's contemporaneous approach to the Psalter. Since in the late 1930s Bonhoeffer interpreted the Psalms through a radically ahistorical lens, privileging christological resonances over historical-critical considerations, it seems inadequate to read the *Kristallnacht* annotation as implying a purely historical correlation between an ancient event and its contemporary counterpart.

Still, Bethge's analysis of this subject in the early 1990s influenced subsequent scholarly discussions of the annotation. Miller, for instance, reiterates Bethge's historical position, describing how 'there came to [Bonhoeffer] this shattering awareness of the loneliness of the despairing Jews in the pogrom over two thousand years before when the Babylonians destroyed the temple and deported the people', which resonated with 'the burden of a solidarity he felt with the despairing cries of the Jews on that Crystal Night of the later pogrom'.⁴¹ Similarly, Martin Rumscheidt maintains that, for Bonhoeffer, Psalm 74 'described the utter desolation felt by Jews in Germany over the Nazis' desecration of the Holy, the action that manifested

⁴⁰ Bethge, 'Silent Bystanders?', p. 36.

⁴¹ Miller, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Psalms', p. 281.

their idolatrous veneration of blood, soil, fatherland, their nationalism, xenophobia, patriotism, their veneration of the Führer'.⁴² The profound connections Rumscheidt suggests between Psalm 74 and Nazi Germany again preserve Bethge's appraisal of the essentially historical correlation between the psalm and *Kristallnacht*.

Scholars have usefully examined the place of this annotation in the matrix of political and historical forces that shaped Bonhoeffer's context; however, I suggest that our understanding of the *Kristallnacht* annotation will be enriched by attending more closely to Bonhoeffer's figural work, which reveals the deeper theological resonance of connecting *Kristallnacht* with Psalm 74. As David McI. Gracie states in his brief discussion of the annotation: 'It is important to note at the outset that Bonhoeffer taught that the psalms were to be prayed, prayed with Christ, whose prayers he believed they really were – in this case with the Christ who was being driven out of Germany when the Jews were driven out.'⁴³

Particularly problematic to a purely historical understanding of the *Kristallnacht* annotation is that it assumes Bonhoeffer construed connections between psalms and the present-day in terms of linear, temporal and historical correlation. Scholars such as Bethge have read the annotation as a claim about similarities across time, a comment on correspondences between two temporally remote events. However, in Bonhoeffer's figural approach, the time between these events can effectively be collapsed. Friedrich Ohly describes figural interpretation as 'the rendering visible of a simultaneity of what is not simultaneous',⁴⁴ and this feature of

⁴² Martin Rumscheidt, 'The View from Below: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Reflections and Actions on Racism', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 24, suppl. 1 (2008), p. 69. Rumscheidt's excellent discussion requires, however, a technical correction, when he describes the *Kristallnacht* annotation as follows: 'In the margin Bonhoeffer put a large X with his pencil at verse 7 – 'They set your sanctuary on fire' – and next to it: 9 November 1938' (ibid.). In fact, v. 7, including the text Rumscheidt cites (*Sie verbrennen dein Heiligtum*), is unmarked in Bonhoeffer's Bible.

⁴³ David McI. Gracie, 'Our Need for God's Word', in David McI. Gracie (ed.), *Meditating on the Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1986), p. 6. Cf. Geoffrey B. Kelly's comment on Bonhoeffer's 20 Nov. 1938 letter to former Finkenwalde students (which, like the marginalia, invokes Psalm 74 in connection with *Kristallnacht*): 'It is important to note that Bonhoeffer had taught these seminarians that they were to pray these psalms with Jesus Christ, who, in this case, was being brutalised anew in the person of the Jewish victims of Nazi ideology' (Geoffrey B. Kelly, 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition', *Prayerbook of the Bible*, in *DBWE* 5, p. 148).

⁴⁴ Friedrich Ohly, *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significs and the Philology of Culture*, ed. Samuel P. Jaffe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 40.

figural exegesis seems especially operative in Bonhoeffer's work. As Harvey observes:

Bonhoeffer uses figural exegesis to posit a real connection grounded in the revelatory activity of God in Christ between the people and events narrated in the Old Testament and those in the Germany of his day. Through these interpretations he endeavors to show the way that these people and events, separated in time and space, nonetheless belong together as two aspects of a single economy or pattern orchestrated around the one divine utterance made incarnate in Christ. Though events never repeat themselves identically, there is the contention that a nonidentical repetition is at work in God's redemptive activity in the world, a repetition articulated through typological interpretation.⁴⁵

This 'real connection', as Harvey explains, does not merely involve noting parallels across time, but indeed entails the compression of temporal distance: figural interpretation draws together what historical distance would seem to separate. It is in this way that, as Jeremy Worthen observes, when Bonhoeffer reads Psalm 74 in the context of *Kristallnacht*, the subject of the psalm is not 'merely "some ancient Israelites"', but indeed 'might be extended to include the Jewish people' of 1938.⁴⁶

I conclude, then, that a more plausible reading of the *Kristallnacht* annotation is that Bonhoeffer is making a stronger claim than a historical reading would imply. The connection Bonhoeffer discerned between Psalm 74 and November 1938 seems unlikely to consist only in historical parallels, but rather entails christological presence: Bonhoeffer heard the voice of Christ praying in despair in Psalm 74:8, and – in keeping with the revelatory simultaneity of figural interpretation – he heard this voice not in the distant past of Israelite history but in the contemporary persecution of present-day Jews. Kelly argues that Bonhoeffer's theology implies 'the presence ... of Jesus Christ himself' in the victims of the Holocaust,⁴⁷ and something similar may be discerned in this context, as the annotation testifies to a connection that is more appropriately understood as christological than historical. Bonhoeffer did not, I suggest, view Psalm 74 only as a historical

⁴⁵ Harvey, *Taking Hold of the Real*, p. 227.

⁴⁶ Jeremy Worthen, 'Praying the Psalms and the Challenges of Christian–Jewish Relations', *Studies in Christian–Jewish Relations* 9/1 (2014), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Kelly, 'Bonhoeffer and the Jews: Implications for Jewish–Christian Reconciliation', in Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg (eds), *Reflections on Bonhoeffer: Essays in Honor of F. Burton Nelson* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1999), p. 162.

precursor to November 1938, but rather heard in Psalm 74 the voice of Christ crying out in human suffering amid the Jewish victims of *Kristallnacht*.

Concluding note: assessing the stakes

This article may appear to give inordinate attention to brief marginalia, so I will conclude by attempting to clarify the stakes involved, as I wish neither to exaggerate nor to minimise the importance of this marginal artefact. As noted at the outset, Bonhoeffer made no public comments on *Kristallnacht*, a historical circumstance that leaves scholars scouring margins for hints of his private reflections. At least in terms of the historical and biographical reconstruction of Bonhoeffer's life and thought, then, the annotation requires scholarly attention.⁴⁸ And indeed, the *Kristallnacht* annotation is frequently cited in Bonhoeffer scholarship, especially in two contexts: Bonhoeffer's reading of scripture, and Bonhoeffer's relationship to Jews and Judaism in Nazi Germany.⁴⁹ With respect to the former context, this article may highlight the importance of reading this marginal note within the wider framework of Bonhoeffer's figural exegesis of the Psalms. With respect to the latter context, this article may problematise attempts to invoke the annotation as a clear illustration of Bonhoeffer's personal

⁴⁸ Bethge argues, for instance, that Bonhoeffer's annotation reveals 'the decisive impetus of his life' (Bethge, 'Silent Bystanders?', p. 40). Ann L. Dickson also discusses the annotation in the context of a turning-point in Bonhoeffer's life. See her *Bonhoeffer on Freedom: Courageously Grasping Reality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 120–2.

⁴⁹ For discussions of the annotation in the context of Bonhoeffer and the Bible, see Keith W. Clements, 'How I Love Your Law: Bonhoeffer and the Old Testament', in *What Freedom? The Persistent Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Bristol: Bristol Baptist College Press, 1990), p. 137; and Stephen Plant, 'God's Dangerous Gift: Bonhoeffer, Luther and Bach on the Role of Reason in Reading Scripture', in Ralf K. Wüstenberg and Jens Zimmermann (eds), *God Speaks to Us: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Biblical Hermeneutics* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 42–3. For discussions of the annotation in the context of Bonhoeffer in relation to Jews, Judaism, and Nazi antisemitism, see Kenneth C. Barnes, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hitler's Persecution of the Jews', in Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (eds), *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 123; Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews', in *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), pp. 74–6; Clements, 'The Mutual Contributions of Church History and Systematic Theology: The Holocaust and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Case Study', *Pacifica* 20 (June 2007), p. 172; F. Burton Nelson, 'The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. 38; and Jane Pejsa, "... they burned all the meeting places of God in the land'", in *Reflections on Bonhoeffer*, pp. 129–32. For a rare discussion of the annotation from a Jewish perspective, see Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible After the Holocaust: A Re-reading* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 24–5.

solidarity with Jews, since his christological reading of the Psalter introduces added complexities in this regard.⁵⁰

At the same time, it is important not to exaggerate the gravity of Bonhoeffer's act itself, and I do not intend to lionise this annotation as some sort of resistance by marginalia. As Stephen R. Haynes underscores:

Not all interpreters have been impressed by these notations in Bonhoeffer's Bible. Wolfgang Gerlach observes that it was probably during this period that Bonhoeffer famously remarked, 'Only he who cries out for the Jews may also sing Gregorian chant.' Yet, Gerlach complains, Bonhoeffer himself 'did not cry out but only underlined Ps. 74:8 in the Bible that he used for prayer and meditation.'⁵¹

For his part, Bethge makes clear that Bonhoeffer's – and indeed, his own – response to *Kristallnacht* ought not to be likened to those of rare Christian leaders who reacted by publicly decrying the Nazi barbarity.⁵²

My more modest objective is to offer an interpretation of the annotation that, simply put, fits with Bonhoeffer's treatment of the Psalms during this period. Previous discussions, including Bethge's influential work, have foregrounded historical perspectives, suggesting that Bonhoeffer connected Psalm 74 with *Kristallnacht* on the basis of historical parallels. Historical resonances likely figured somewhat into Bonhoeffer's construal of Psalm 74, but – as we have seen – historical considerations occupied a relatively minor role in Bonhoeffer's reading of the Psalter in this period. Accordingly, I suggest that a more plausible interpretation, which more adequately accounts for Bonhoeffer's figural exegesis of the Psalms in the late 1930s, is that Bonhoeffer understood Psalm 74:8 and *Kristallnacht* not as incidentally related by the accidents of history, but as profoundly and timelessly yoked in Christ, the one who knew the fullness of human suffering and who, in

⁵⁰ A member of the Canadian Theological Society, hearing an earlier version of this article, questioned whether the annotation could entail a kind of 'supersession of *Kristallnacht*'. This respondent's concern suggests how the *Kristallnacht* annotation could, when understood within the context of Bonhoeffer's figural approach to the Psalms, raise challenging new questions for the place of Bonhoeffer in Jewish–Christian relations.

⁵¹ Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 92, quoting Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 147.

⁵² Bethge, 'Silent Bystanders?', p. 33.

Bonhoeffer's understanding, was present and praying the psalm alongside the Jewish victims of November 1938.⁵³

⁵³ I wish to thank the staff of the Handschriftenabteilung at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin for their patient assistance. I also wish gratefully to acknowledge funding from the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, which supported my work through a Research and Travel Grant.