

[1962. Review of *Act and Being*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Christianity Today* 22 Jun.]

## AS A MAN IS ...

*Act and Being*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Harper, 1961, 192 pp., \$3) is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, Professor of Philosophy, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The main concern of contemporary theology, according to this author, is the problem of act and being, a legacy from Kant and idealism. Act is wholly alien to being. The former has outward reference, infinite extensity, existentiality and discontinuity; the latter comprises strict self-confinement, infinite intensity, and continuity. All theology depends on which of these two receives the stress.

The solution of the theological problem is found only in transcendentalism; that is, the assertion of an unknowable *Ding-an-sich* to which thought refers. Thus questions of being are foreign to transcendentalism. The opposing view is idealism; and only a bad man can be an idealist because, as Fichte said, a man's philosophy depends on what sort of man he is.

For a satisfactory solution, however, transcendentalism needs radical transformation and completion. The author accomplishes this by beginning with Kant, adding something of Fichte, plus a good amount of Soren Kierkegaard, along with a contribution from Martin Heidegger.

All that is needed from the Bible is a couple of phrases divest of their biblical meaning. To be "in Adam" is to be in sin. "Sin is the narcissism of the human will, which is to say, 'essence'" (p. 1620). "I myself am Adama, am I and humanity together; in me falls humanity" (p. 165). To be "in Christ" is salvation. Salvation is the release of the *Da in Dasein* "from oppression by the *Wie of Wesein*, while conversely the *Wie* rediscovers itself in the divinely appointed *Da*" (p. 183). "In Adam" and "in Christ" are thus both existentialized; there is no clear hint in the book that Christ was an historical person. Sometimes the living person of Christ is referred to as "it."

The style of the book is pontifical and oracular. Seldom are reasons given for the crucial assertions. The reader apparently is expected to get the same unintelligible mystic experience that moved the author, a "revelation" that reveals nothing definite. No doubt this is essential to a transcendentalism that bases itself on the unknowable. A man's philosophy depends on what sort of man he is.

GORDON H. CLARK