



MAKERS  
*of the* MODERN  
THEOLOGICAL  
MIND

DIETRICH  
BONHOEFFER

Dallas M. Roark

Edited by Bob E. Patterson

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 HENDRICKSON  
PUBLISHERS

**Makers of the Modern Theological Mind**  
**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

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To Elaine and Lyman and Dalaine

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## Publisher's Preface (2016)

The *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* series was first published in the early 1970s and comprises eighteen volumes, each looking at the life and work of a highly influential modern theologian. Today's reader may wonder why we are reprinting these books after so many years, especially since much has been written in the intervening decades on most of these theologians. The answer is that Hendrickson Publishers remains committed to serving the church in theological education, and we believe the original series editor's purpose still holds true: "*These books will give a new generation the opportunity to be exposed to significant minds.*"

While readers may notice that some word choices and writing styles are dated, we chose to leave the original text intact in order to preserve the historical integrity of the books. Additionally, although the series represents a specific perspective in modern Western thought, these theologians nevertheless serve as forerunners to the many outstanding theological voices we hear in today's much broader perspective. It is for their sake and the sake of new generations that we are reprinting this series, thereby ensuring continued accessibility to these formative and important modern theologians.

Another unique feature of this series is that many of the authors studied with the particular theologian about whom they wrote. And because some of these books were written almost half a century ago—published during the political and social turmoil of the latter decades of the twentieth century—they also serve as historical accounts of how these theologians impacted the authors at the time that they themselves were writing.



We are confident that readers will continue to find these books interesting and useful, which is why we are releasing them with a new look and in paperback and also as e-books. As these theologians continue to influence the global church, this series remains a helpful overview of their historical context and their life's work.

PATRICIA ANDERS, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR  
HENDRICKSON PUBLISHERS

## Editor's Preface (1972)

Who are the thinkers that have shaped Christian theology in our time? This series tries to answer that question by providing a reliable guide to the ideas of the men who have significantly charted the theological seas of our century. In the current revival of theology, these books will give a new generation the opportunity to be exposed to significant minds. They are not meant, however, to be a substitute for a careful study of the original works of these makers of the modern theological mind.

This series is not for the lazy. Each major theologian is examined carefully and critically—his life, his theological method, his most germinal ideas, his weaknesses as a thinker, his place in the theological spectrum, and his chief contribution to the climate of theology today. The books are written with the assumption that laymen will read them and enter into the theological dialogue that is so necessary to the church as a whole. At the same time they are carefully enough designed to give assurance to a Ph.D. student in theology preparing for his preliminary exams.

Each author in the series is a professional scholar and theologian in his own right. All are specialists on, and in some cases have studied with, the theologians about whom they write. Welcome to the series.

BOB E. PATTERSON, EDITOR  
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

## Author's Preface

An invitation to do a short work on Bonhoeffer was an opportunity for me to dig deeper into this brilliant theologian. This work will not command the attention of the devotee of Bonhoeffer. It is designed to give the reader a quick snapshot view of the man, his life and thought. If I have succeeded in doing this, I will have more than passed my hopeful expectations.

There are always numerous people that help in making a book possible. First on the list is Dr. Bob Patterson of Baylor University, who serves as the General Editor of this series. His kindness in asking me places me in debt to him. A special word of gratitude goes to various library resources: The library of the College of Emporia, the library of the United Christian Fellowship, and the William Allen White Library. These libraries have been patient with me although I had several of their books over a period of some months.

As usual, an author owes gratitude to his wife and children while he removes his presence from their activities, and this one is no exception. Thus I must dedicate this work to my wife, Elaine, and my two loving children, Lyman and Dalaine.

DALLAS M. ROARK

# 1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Man and His Interpreters

## **BONHOEFFER THE MAN**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become a man with mystique. His life commands intense interest because of his opposition to the Nazi state and its infiltration of the German church. His theological works remain a source of inspiration not only for his vivid exposition of profound issues, but also for the well-turned phrases such as “cheap grace” or “world come of age.” His involvement in the ecumenical movement as a young theologian brought immense respect from older and better known men. Whether Bonhoeffer has been interpreted rightly is still debated, but no one doubts that he has had a remarkable influence in contemporary Protestant theology.

Dietrich and his twin sister Sabine were born on February 4, 1906, in Breslau, Germany (which is now part of Poland). His mother was descended from the famous nineteenth-century church historian, Karl von Hase, and his father, Karl Ludwig Bonhoeffer, was a noted physician and soon to be professor of psychiatry at the University of Berlin. The fact that his father distrusted Freudian psychoanalysis may be the explanation for his own barbs at psychotherapists and existentialists.<sup>1</sup>

The names of neighbors and friends coming into the home of young Dietrich have the aura of greatness. Adolf von Harnack, the eminent historian of the church and of dogma, was both a neighbor and teacher. Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian and philosopher, was a frequent guest in the Bonhoeffer home. Other eminent people included Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max and Alfred Weber.

By age sixteen, Dietrich had decided to enter the ministry of the church. The decision gained little comment from his parents, but his brothers opposed it. His brother Klaus attempted to impress

him with the purely provincial nature of the Protestant church in Germany and regretted that his brother should give his life to a superfluous cause. With resolution Dietrich replied, "If the Church is feeble, I shall reform it."<sup>2</sup> However facetious his reply might have been, it was portentous of the future way Bonhoeffer felt about the church's needs.

Karl Friedrich, another brother, talked with Dietrich about science and the universe it held up to behold, but at this point Dietrich would have nothing to do with science. When he could not argue against Karl Friedrich he simply commented, "You may knock my block off, but I shall still believe in God."<sup>3</sup> It was not until the years of his imprisonment that he seriously began to come to terms with science. This is one reason the *Letters and Papers* often sound so revolutionary.

Bonhoeffer began his study at Tübingen, but after a year moved to the University of Berlin in 1924. At Berlin, Bonhoeffer encountered a galaxy of erudite but often liberal scholars. Here Adolf Deissmann had made his contribution to New Testament studies. Hans Lietzmann was teaching the history of the early church, and Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl, and Reinhold Seeberg were in one way or another connected with theology. Seeberg was the man under whom Bonhoeffer worked for the licentiate of theology, a degree comparable to the doctor of theology.

As a student, Bonhoeffer was precocious and independent. He did not simply absorb the liberalism of Berlin, nor did he become a true follower of the theologian Karl Barth, with whom he had many sympathies. Bonhoeffer did his homework well, and one of his fellow students described his performance:

What really impressed me was not just the fact that he surpassed almost all of us in theological knowledge and capacity; but what passionately attracted me to Bonhoeffer was the perception that here was a man who did not only learn and gather in the *verba* and *scripta* of some master, but one who thought independently and already knew what he wanted and wanted what he knew. I had the experience (for me it was something alarming and magnificently new!) of hearing a young fair-haired student

contradict the revered historian, his Excellency von Harnack, contradict him politely but clearly on positive theological grounds. Harnack answered, but the student contradicted again and again. I don't remember the content of the discussion—the talk was of Karl Barth—but I remember the secret enthusiasm that I felt for this free, critical and independent judgement in theology.<sup>4</sup>

In 1927, Bonhoeffer submitted his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Investigation of the Sociology of the Church*, to the faculty of the University of Berlin. This work was praised as a “theological miracle” by Karl Barth and was published three years later.

After his formal theological training at the university, Dietrich went to Barcelona, Spain, where he served in a position comparable to an assistant minister on an intern basis with a German-speaking congregation. His ability to relate to people of diverse conditions became apparent here in this congregation of small businessmen whose religious and cultural advancements had been small. As he worked with the elderly pastor and shared his life with the congregation, the church was resurrected in spirit and doubled in size. He started a service for children and a study group for boys in the sixth form (the last year) of their education. He gave pastoral care to the people and preached every two weeks. He became very attached to the people, and they returned the affection.

Upon his return to Berlin in 1929 Dietrich worked on his inaugural dissertation, a requisite for being permitted a faculty position in theology. In 1930, after completing *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, he was given a position teaching systematic theology.

Before getting to the serious work of teaching, Bonhoeffer came to America for a year of study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. His descriptions of religious life in America are revealing. He saw the students as less interested in real theology than in the practical element in Christianity. Their lack of interest in serious theology was partially expressed in their laughing out loud when a passage from Luther was quoted on sin and forgiveness.

Yet Bonhoeffer noted the students' concern for the poor and needy, and he entered into their attempts to help relieve some of these problems. At Union also, he became aware of the growing problem of the Negro in America. He visited with Negroes in Harlem and attended a large Negro Baptist church for about six months.

Greatly unimpressed with American theology, he was more susceptible to its piety and social concern. Although Bonhoeffer impressed many American theologians with his own ability, he did not think too highly of the trend that theology was taking in America. A young Frenchman probably had more long-range influence on him than the American theologians. Jean Lasserre was an advocate of and a participant in the ecumenical movement. Moreover, he was a pacifist. Before meeting him, Bonhoeffer followed a traditional line of supporting a nationalistic attitude toward war and a critical attitude toward the ecumenical movement. In conversation Lasserre countered with: "Do we believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of the Saints, or do we believe in the eternal mission of France? One can't be a Christian and a nationalist at the same time."<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer later changed both his attitude toward pacifism—first accepting it and then modifying his view again—and his critical feelings toward the ecumenical movement.

By 1931, although he had enjoyed his stay in America, he was ready to return home and begin his period of lecturing at the University of Berlin. As a beginning lecturer, he had to depend upon his ability to attract students. They came out of curiosity at first. One student recalled, "He looked like a student himself when he went to the desk. But then our attention was so much riveted by what he had to say, that we no longer came for the sake of the very young man, but for the sake of his subject."<sup>6</sup> Except for the enjoyment of the students, Bonhoeffer led a rather lonely life in the unbending liberalism of the university. His independence of mind plus his affinity for Barth's theology made him suspect among the old-line theological liberals.

The year of his return to Germany brought momentous events in his life. In the summer of 1931 he journeyed to Bonn and met

Karl Barth. His only regret was that he had not come sooner. A mutually respectful relationship grew through the years as indicated from the extant correspondence<sup>7</sup> and Barth's references in *Church Dogmatics* to Bonhoeffer's published works.<sup>8</sup> Barth's extremely critical letter about Bonhoeffer's later move to London could only have been written by a real friend.<sup>9</sup>

Also in this year, Bonhoeffer began an important relationship with the ecumenical movement. His flair for languages, theological precocity, and friendliness won him respect in the movement, and he was elected International Youth Secretary for Germany and Central Europe for the World Alliance of Churches. His involvement in the ecumenical work enabled him to convey to the free world the real status of Hitler's oppression of the church.

Meanwhile, in addition to his duties at the university which involved him in lecturing on systematic theology and leading a seminar on "The Idea of Philosophy and Protestant Theology," he became further involved in the ministry. He became student pastor at the Technical College in Berlin, and at the same time was requested to take over a confirmation class of fifty rowdy boys who lived in one of the roughest areas of Berlin. As the elderly pastor and young Dietrich ascended the stairs of the multi-storied building where the boys were, the children dropped rubbish on the two men below. At the top of the stairs the pastor tried to gain attention by shouting an introduction of Bonhoeffer. Some of the children only heard the word "Bon" and began to chant it, until the bewildered, frustrated old pastor left.

At first Dietrich stood in silence against the wall while the boys chanted. Then he began to speak softly to those near him. Out of curiosity the others began to be quiet. When the noise had subsided, he told them a story about Harlem and promised more next time if they behaved.<sup>10</sup> Not only did he win their attention for class instruction, but he moved into their neighborhood for two months to live among them. This most "hopeless" class was carried to its completion, and many of the boys remained long-time friends.



While busily engaged in the work of the university, Bonhoeffer continued to broaden his ecumenical contacts that would prove immensely helpful as the church situation became more crucial in the short years ahead. In 1932 he was very busy in his role as International Youth Secretary for Germany and Central Europe. He delivered an address, "The Church Is Dead," to the International Youth Conference meeting in Switzerland.<sup>11</sup> In the fall of 1932, he began a series of lectures which were later published as *Creation and Fall*.

The elections in Germany in 1932 brought about the Nazi rise to power, and the stage was set for the German church struggle. Bonhoeffer aligned himself with the evangelical opposition to Hitler. This alignment ultimately cost him his life.

In 1933 he gave a series of lectures on Christology which were never completed, nor published, except as they were reconstructed from the notes of students and published under the title *Christ the Center*. Following the summer session, Bonhoeffer took a leave of absence from the university and went to London to be minister of two German-speaking congregations. Although this move was opposed strenuously by Karl Barth, who looked upon Bonhoeffer's role in the church struggle as vital, the period served to strengthen his ties with the ecumenical movement, particularly with George Bell, Bishop of Chichester. During this interim period in London, Bonhoeffer attended the World Alliance of Churches meeting in Fanö, Denmark. Germany was represented only by the "German Christians," the pro-Hitler group. The council, due in part to Bonhoeffer's influence, denounced the "German Christians" and aligned its sympathies with the Confessing Church.

Through his growing world-wide friendships, Bonhoeffer received a letter of introduction to Gandhi and hoped to travel to India to study the methods of pacifism. These plans were interrupted by a call from the Confessing Church to come home and assume the leadership of an "illegal" seminary for training ministers. The call of duty won out over the desire to go to India, and he returned to a most dangerous task in Germany.

The seminary was eventually located at Finkenwalde, a tiny village south of Stettin on the Oder River in what was then Pomerania and is now Poland. There Bonhoeffer instituted a new type of theological education. He organized the students into a community with a “proper balance between work and worship, the academic and the practical, discipline and freedom.”<sup>12</sup> The curriculum of the seminary provided for lectures by Bonhoeffer, reading of books, pastoral duties such as visitation, times of worship and confession of sin. Extracurricular community involvement included just plain fun, singing, doing dishes, and cleaning house. The experiences of the “brother-house” were recorded in *Gemeinsames Leben* (*Life Together*), published in 1939.

As his work at the seminary progressed, Bonhoeffer attempted to retain his teaching post at the University of Berlin and did so until August 5, 1936, when it was withdrawn because of his opposition to Hitler’s innovations in the church. His imperturbability was expressed in his comment, “I have long ceased to believe in the University.”<sup>13</sup>

At Finkenwalde romance entered his life. Maria von Wedemeyer was seventeen years younger than he. Their first meeting was without meaning. She was only one among several grandchildren of Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, a well-to-do, spiritually minded widow who attended church at the seminary. Maria was to be included in the confirmation classes. Much later, after her graduation from high school she saw him again, and the rapport was spontaneous and immediate between them. Shortly after their engagement he was imprisoned. She saw him at least once a month in prison, and letters were exchanged as permission was allowed. Their engagement was a source of delight to him. Her visits formed a feeling of anticipation he treasured. He always wanted to know of her coming in advance, for without knowing he was cheated “out of the joy of anticipation and that is a very necessary part of your visit.”<sup>14</sup>

During the troubled days of the late thirties, Bonhoeffer spoke a number of times on the subject of the “Visible and Invisible Church.” The theme is one that had held his interest from his student days.

He was very much concerned with the inner life, the question of communion, and the confession of the church. Bonhoeffer's ecumenical interest was not the kind that could overlook false doctrine as manifested in the German church. One of the weaknesses of the ecumenical movement, he wrote, was its lack of theology.<sup>15</sup>

Bonhoeffer's first popular work was published in 1937. As a study of the Sermon on the Mount, *Nachfolge* (*The Cost of Discipleship*) harshly criticizes "cheap grace," which churches had been preaching, and calls for "costly" discipleship to Jesus Christ. In this same year the seminary was officially disbanded by the government, but it nevertheless maintained an underground existence until 1940.

Life was becoming more difficult for Bonhoeffer. He was faced with military service—a difficult thing for one who held pacifist views—but was needed by the Confessing Church for his leadership. Friends like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Lehmann tried to persuade him to come to America and were successful for a short time. Bonhoeffer was appointed to the faculty of the Union Theological Seminary for an indefinite period of time, and arrived in the United States on June 12, 1939. But the safety of America was too much for him, and he was back in Germany on July 25.

Bonhoeffer's diary records two different episodes during this brief period: "I do not understand why I am here. . . . The short prayer in which we thought of our German brothers almost overwhelmed me. . . . If things become more uncertain, I shall not stay in America. . . ." Later, after his decision to return home, he wrote, "Since I came on board ship, my mental turmoil about the future has gone."<sup>16</sup>

Back in Germany restrictions were placed on his movements. Berlin had been off-limits since 1938, although occasional visits were permitted. Now he was denied the right to speak anywhere in the Reich.

Bonhoeffer escaped military service by serving as a courier in the Intelligence Service, and thus was able to enjoy certain freedoms from the interference of the Gestapo. Certain members of the German Military Intelligence Service opposed Hitler, and eventually planned to assassinate him. Bonhoeffer came to accept the full

implications of the resistance movement, justifying his position as follows: "It is not only my task to look after the victims of madmen who drive a motorcar in a crowded street, but to do all in my power to stop their driving at all."<sup>17</sup>

With an official pass, Bonhoeffer was able to travel outside Germany on behalf of the resistance movement without the Gestapo's awareness. In Geneva he talked with Visser't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who asked him, "What do you pray for in these days?" Bonhoeffer replied, "If you want to know the truth, I pray for the defeat of my nation, for I believe that is the only way to pay for all the suffering which my country has caused in the world."<sup>18</sup>

Bonhoeffer was a liaison between the resistance movement and the free world, particularly Britain. He hoped that the Allied mandate of unconditional surrender might be changed if Hitler were overthrown and a new government formed, but the Allied forces proved adamant. Nevertheless, those in the Abwehr, the German Military Intelligence Service, went forward in their plans to eliminate Hitler. Bonhoeffer, forsaking his pacifist's views, agreed to cooperate but requested advance knowledge to enable him to sever ties with the Confessing Church. Not only would the Confessing Church not approve of the act, but it would mean the end of his career as a pastor.

Details of the plot against Hitler were worked out minutely for each person to have alibis for his actions. However, the rival spying arm of the Gestapo had been hoping to discredit leaders of the Abwehr on trumped up charges of bribery for helping Jews to escape Germany or, in the case of Bonhoeffer, of evading the draft. It was presumably on this charge that he was arrested on April 5, 1943. Two men arrived at his father's house in Berlin requesting to see Dietrich in his room. Without a search warrant or notice of arrest, Bonhoeffer was ordered to accompany them. He was taken to Tegel Military Prison in Berlin. At first conditions were extremely bad—the blankets, for instance, were too smelly to use. But after it was known who he was, his position improved.

Six months were to drag by before he was given a warrant for his arrest. The alibis of the plotters were all in order, and each played his part well. Bonhoeffer was able to have communication with the outside by means of coded messages passed in books and food parcels. Good-hearted guards made it possible for members of the family to visit and keep him informed.

Bonhoeffer spent eighteen months in Tegel Prison. Here he wrote the letters later incorporated into the intriguing work *Letters and Papers from Prison* (or as some editions title it, *Prisoner for God*). In passing the long hours of imprisonment, Bonhoeffer read the Bible and works ranging over such diverse subjects as literature, science, philosophy, theology, and history. Much of his reading related to the nineteenth-century cultural heritage of Germany.

In July 1944, another attempt on Hitler's life failed. Several had been made from various sources. The Gestapo's desire to incriminate the Abwehr was fulfilled in a dramatic way with the finding of the Abwehr's secret file in Zossen just two months later. The news spread quickly through the secret grapevine of the Abwehr, and Bonhoeffer heard it. Escape was the reaction to the news, and a plan had been made for some time. Arrangements were made with a friendly guard, and Bonhoeffer was to live "underground" until the destruction of Hitler came. Details were set in operation but halted when Dietrich's brother Klaus was arrested. The plan was jettisoned for fear that his family would be the scapegoats for his escape.

After the finding of the Zossen documents, Bonhoeffer was transferred to the Gestapo prison on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. Now along with others he was tortured to squeeze out information on collaborators. The evidence already on hand was enough to have them shot, but Hitler desired to ferret out all conspirators, and this desire prolonged their lives. Bonhoeffer remained on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse until February 1945, when he was removed secretly to Buchenwald. On February 7, the guards assembled twenty of the most important prisoners and ordered them into two vehicles. Bonhoeffer was among them.

Payne Best, one of the survivors of Buchenwald, described Bonhoeffer during this time: “Bonhoeffer was different; just quite calm and normal, seemingly perfectly at his ease . . . his soul really shone in the dark desperation of our prison.”<sup>19</sup> Bonhoeffer served as unofficial chaplain to many of the men of various nationalities. His spirit was gentle, and he became “the man for others” during the crucial days of Buchenwald. Best affirms, “He was one of the very few men I have ever met to whom God was real, and ever close to him.”<sup>20</sup>

Hope and fear arose alternately in the hearts of the prisoners when Allied guns were heard on April 1, 1945. With the breakdown of the Nazi military system, hatred and vengeance yet ground on to the bitter end. On April 3, a lumbering enclosed vehicle pulled up to load sixteen prisoners including Bonhoeffer. Destination: Flossenbürg, an extermination camp in the Bavarian forest. The vehicle was turned away because the prison was full, and this raised the men’s hopes temporarily. For a short time they were imprisoned in Schönberg, until two men appeared before the open door of Bonhoeffer’s cell and called out: “Prisoner Bonhoeffer, get ready to come with us.”

He moved quickly to place certain mementos in the hands of friends with instructions concerning them. He wrote his name in the beginning, middle, and end of a work by Plutarch—a book eventually returned to the Bonhoeffer family. He sent special greetings by Payne Best to his old friend, the Bishop of Chichester: “This is the end—for me the beginning of life.”

At Flossenbürg, on April 8, a court martial met in full session. Dietrich was “tried” and sentenced to death—all in one night! The camp doctor of Flossenbürg recorded this impression of the events:

On the morning of that day [April 9] between five and six o’clock the prisoners, among them Admiral Canaris, General Oster, General Thomas and *Reichgerichtsrat* Sack were taken from their cells, and the verdicts of the court martial read out to them. Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most

deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.<sup>21</sup>

Of these events, the family of Bonhoeffer knew nothing. A month later, Nazi Germany fell. Communication was difficult, and search was made for news of him. Geneva was the first to hear the news which was passed on to Bishop Bell. The elder Bonhoeffers were listening to the radio from London on July 27 when an English voice spoke: "We are gathered here in the presence of God to make thankful remembrance of the life and work of His servant Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life in faith and obedience to His holy word. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

With Bonhoeffer's death the church—and the world—was deprived both of a powerful intellect and of a creative Christian.

## THE INTERPRETERS OF BONHOEFFER

How should one approach Bonhoeffer? This question must be raised because Bonhoeffer has become many things to many people as his influence continues to grow. He has been interpreted along thematic lines; i.e., his total work is viewed from the motif of Christology, ecclesiology, hermeneutics,<sup>23</sup> or some other theme. On the other hand, some interpreters use his later writings, particularly the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, as standard and ignore the earlier works to a large extent.

Our purpose in this work is to survey Bonhoeffer's work and thought. We are not defending any interpretation, but if this be forced upon us we would have to lean toward the "whole Bonhoeffer." Before embarking upon our survey, the reader can bear in mind that Bonhoeffer is viewed along several different lines. We offer the following sketch which is by no means exhaustive.

1. One of the early popularizers of Bonhoeffer was John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, who wrote *Honest to God*.<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer is an acknowledged mentor of Robinson, who draws freely on the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Having read extracts of Bonhoeffer as early as 1952, he obtained the phrases, "God of the gaps," "world come of age," "man for others," and similar terms. But Robinson did not attempt an exposition of these phrases as other interpreters came to do. He attempted a method of correlation between Bonhoeffer and other writers, most often with Paul Tillich, the German-American theologian.

Robinson uses Bonhoeffer to raise what he terms pertinent questions, but with answers coming along Tillich's line of thought. This is unusual and a little strange, because Bonhoeffer's judgment was that the world passed Tillich by because he "sought to understand the world better than it understood itself."<sup>25</sup> In addition to Tillich, Robinson appeals to such diverse ideas as Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing,<sup>26</sup> Julian Huxley's religion without revelation, and Albert Camus's understanding of man without God. These and other writers appear linked to Bonhoeffer either as saying the same thing he said in different words, or as providing answers to questions he raised.

One cannot help being suspicious of the link between Bonhoeffer and many of the writers that Robinson associates with him. The proposals they offered, particularly those of Tillich and Bultmann, were seriously questioned by Bonhoeffer. If this were not enough, one ought to be hesitant in using Bonhoeffer's incomplete, undeveloped, and enigmatic utterances.

2. Bonhoeffer is acclaimed as a major stimulus of the radical death-of-God movement. Paul M. Van Buren, often associated with this movement, uses Bonhoeffer as a springboard for setting forth his own brand of theology. He quotes the July 16, 1944, letter from prison for his platform, calling for a new theology without the God-hypothesis. Van Buren uses the services of linguistic analysis to repudiate any content-meaning for the word "God." In its place he builds his religious system upon the historical Jesus who, after the



crucifixion, exercised a contagious influence on the disciples who perceived anew his unique brand of freedom.<sup>27</sup>

William Hamilton, another acknowledged leader of the movement, affirms Bonhoeffer's influence on his thought. While admitting that Bonhoeffer's meaning of "religionless Christianity" will probably remain unknown, Hamilton uses the term as a stimulus to set forth his own ideas. God as a problem-solver must be rejected, as well as the idea that man has a "God-shaped blank" within him.<sup>28</sup> Hamilton's brief sketch of Bonhoeffer on the twentieth anniversary of his death builds primarily on the *Letters*, showing that Bonhoeffer is important for the concepts of the "world coming of age" and "religionless Christianity."<sup>29</sup> The emphasis of Hamilton and others in the related *Honest to God Debate* has caused some critics to misread Bonhoeffer and accuse him of practical atheism.<sup>30</sup>

The implication of atheism is not the usual story of the interpreters of Bonhoeffer, however. David Jenkins, in his *Guide to the Debate About God*, cautions, "Whatever Bonhoeffer meant by his call to Christians to be 'without religion' it is clear that it was no call to be 'without God.'"<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer criticizes religion but "presupposes the existence of the Christian fellowship and the givenness of the Bible."<sup>32</sup>

3. The literature on Bonhoeffer in Germany is divided into two schools. The position of Gerhard Ebeling centers on the hermeneutical implications of the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The other group considers the "whole Bonhoeffer" and uses a motif study generally along Christological lines. This is the view of Eberhard Bethge,<sup>33</sup> the close friend of Bonhoeffer. Jürgen Moltmann follows this position in his essay, "The Lordship of Christ and Human Society,"<sup>34</sup> in which he analyzes the *Letters* in light of the "complete" Bonhoeffer. Along a similar line is Jürgen Weissbach's essay, "Christology and Ethics."<sup>35</sup>

4. In America one of the early important works was that of John Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.<sup>36</sup> Godsey treats Bonhoeffer's theology from the standpoint of Christ existing as the church, that is, using ecclesiology<sup>37</sup> as the clue to his thought.

Questions have been raised about Godsey's method of fitting the later works into this framework when they do not seem to deal with ecclesiology per se. Yet in spite of criticism of this motif by some writers,<sup>38</sup> a noteworthy work by a Roman Catholic follows this ecclesiological motif. William Kuhns, who is the first Roman Catholic to write a book on Bonhoeffer, stands in substantial agreement with the view of Godsey.<sup>39</sup>

John A. Phillips criticizes Godsey and himself writes of Bonhoeffer from the standpoint of Christology, asserting that Jesus Christ is "the best clue to his thinking."<sup>40</sup> Although Bonhoeffer's Christology developed, Phillips maintained that it is a constant motif throughout his writings. Even in the light of Phillips's criticism of Godsey, it may be questioned whether a real distinction can be made between ecclesiology and the doctrine of Christ in Bonhoeffer.

One other work may be noted in this brief survey. William B. Gould uses discipleship as the basic organizing theme in his work, *The Worldly Christian*,<sup>41</sup> While it is an interesting organizational device, it is doubtful if discipleship means anything without the Christological perspective. There are other interesting and useful works, but we now turn to Bonhoeffer himself.