

## **At All Costs**

Fabian von Schlabrendorff began experimenting with explosives in February of 1943. The assassination of Adolf Hitler would be attempted. Schlabrendorff quickly rejected the German made bombs because of the hissing sound they made prior to detonation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor, non-violent resister, children's Sunday School teacher, and pacifist, prayed for Schlabrendorff's success. How had it come to this? Was the author of **The Cost of Discipleship** able to pursue Jesus Christ and the death of a dictator at the same time? Did the first pursuit finally compel the other? What does it mean to be child of heaven while living on this earth? Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced such questions without the luxury of time. World altering events demanded decision from those living within the explosive caldron of Hitler's Third Reich.

### **The Silver Spoon**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born, along with his twin sister Sabine, on February 4, 1906 in Breslau (present day Wroclaw, Poland) into an impressive aristocratic family. Among the Bonhoeffer's, precociousness in children was usual—expected as a matter of course. Accomplished musicians, lawyers, physicians, ministers and scientists punctuated both paternal and maternal family lines. His father Karl, Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at Berlin from 1912, was arguably among the five most prominent psychiatrists in the world. Having relocated to Berlin when Dietrich was six years of age, the Bonhoeffer's neighbors included many noted figures, including the famous physicist Max Planck and the celebrated Church historian and theologian, Adolf von Harnack, who would later become Dietrich's teacher.

As to the expected precociousness, Dietrich did not disappoint. He was playing Mozart's sonatas at the age of ten and was expected by many to pursue a career in music. As a young student, Bonhoeffer immersed himself in philosophy, history, Greek and Hebrew with unusual zeal. Much of his early education was provided by tutors at home, with the result that Dietrich was able to skip years of school by virtue of his intellect and industry. As for sports and games, these became outlets for his intense competitiveness which he also expected and celebrated in others. From childhood, conspicuous seriousness and intensity characterized Bonhoeffer's approach to life in every dimension.

Dietrich also marched to the beat of his own drummer. One classmate remembered the impression Bonhoeffer made during Harnack's last seminar at the University of Berlin—"I was struck by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not only because he outdid practically all of us in theological knowledge and ability . . . but because here was someone who thought for himself and already knew what he wanted and also wanted what he knew." Owing partly perhaps to his being the sixth of eight children with a separation of five years from his next oldest brother, but, no doubt, chiefly because of his own particular constitution, Dietrich consistently asserted his independence. He was always standing for something.

Though his mother was a Christian believer and incorporated religion into the household routine, his father and brothers were largely agnostic and the family rarely darkened the door of the church—yet, at no later than age fourteen, young Dietrich announced that he would become a theologian. Considering the prominent ministers among his forebears, such a decision should not have come as the shock it did. His family, especially his male siblings, urged him to reconsider, begging their baby brother

not to squander his life in such a “poor, feeble, boring, petty, bourgeois institution as the Church.” “If what you say of the church is true,” Bonhoeffer retorted, “I shall reform it!”

Bonhoeffer took immense pleasure in the benefits of his aristocratic upbringing but also felt keenly his separation from those he called “the others.” Bonhoeffer’s discomfort with a purely academic life and his periodic plunges into hands-on ministry reflect a deep desire to identify with humankind in ways he suspected his privileged station in life had denied him. Still, young Dietrich discovered soon enough that, for the Bonhoeffers, cultural and material privilege did not provide escape from duty and sacrifice. When Dietrich was only twelve years old, two of his brothers, Karl-Friedrich and Walter, enlisted as volunteers in the Great War. On April 23, 1918 Walter was wounded and, five days later, following an operation, he died. Grief gripped the Bonhoeffer household, sending the bereaved mother, Paula, into a prolonged depression and leaving a profound mark upon Dietrich.

### **Bonhoeffer the Student and Scholar**

At age seventeen, Bonhoeffer matriculated at Tübingen to study theology. There he concentrated especially on philosophy and textual criticism and earned a reputation as a brilliant, competitive, and independent soul possessed of sharp wit—poised to tease but also ready to make himself the object of his own pointed humor. He joined the Swabian fraternity Hedgehog, which later accepted the insertion of the Aryan Clause into its constitution, prompting Dietrich’s withdrawal. During this time, Dietrich apparently gave little attention to the fierce public debate raging in the pages of the widely circulated periodical journal *Christliche Welt* (The Christian World) between the Bonhoeffers’

famous neighbor Adolph von Harnack and Swiss theologian at Göttingen, Karl Barth.

Within a year Bonhoeffer's encounter with the theology of Barth would permanently set him on a course opposed to the liberalism of Harnack and toward a more dogmatic, more conservative, Biblical trajectory in his thinking.

## **Rome**

After his first term at Tübingen, Bonhoeffer sustained a serious injury while ice skating. Following his recovery he spent the next term in Rome where, for the first time, Roman Catholicism made a deep and lasting impression upon him. The antiquity and universality of the Church impressed him as he explored Catholic Rome and Vatican City. A certain weightiness and sense of the permanence of the Church extended in time and space, along with an exalted spiritual unity, seemed to inhabit the place. The Protestant Church appeared narrow and provincial in comparison. The following excerpt from a sermon preached four years later to an expatriate German Community in Barcelona captures something of the affect Rome had upon the young Bonhoeffer:

There is a word that when a Catholic hears it kindles all his feelings of love and bliss; that stirs all the depths of his religious sensibility, from dread and awe of the Last Judgment to the sweetness of God's presence; and that certainly awakens in him the feeling of home; the feeling that only a child has in relation to its mother, made up of gratitude, reverence and devoted love; the feeling that overcomes one when, after a long absence, one returns to one's home, the home of one's childhood.

And there is a word that to Protestants has the sound of something infinitely commonplace, more or less indifferent and superfluous, that does not make their heart beat faster; something with which a sense of boredom is so often associated, or which at any rate does not lend wings to our religious feelings—and yet our fate is sealed if we are unable again to attach a new, or perhaps a very old meaning to it. Woe to us if that word does not become important to us soon again, does not become important in our lives.

Yes, the word to which I am referring is 'Church,' the meaning of which we [Protestants] have forgotten and the nobility and greatness of which we propose to look at today.

Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's encounter with Catholicism did not strip him of his critical faculties. Amazingly, he gained an audience with the Pope, who proved to be a keen disappointment. Moreover, Bonhoeffer engaged in spirited theological debate with a Catholic Priest. Still, this brief stay in Rome stoked the fires of interest in things ecclesiastical which would account for a good part of Bonhoeffer's enduring contribution to all believers longing for rich fellowship within the Church.

### **Bonhoeffer and Barth**

Bonhoeffer never willingly surrendered to strong personalities. The only mentors to whom he granted real authority over him were Professor Karl Barth, and Dr. Bell, the bishop of Chichester. His discovery of Barth took place between the summers of 1924 and 1925 after his trip to Rome but before he commenced work on his thesis. Prior to his move to Münster in October 1925, Barth had been lecturing at Göttingen where Bonhoeffer's cousin Hans-Christoph von Hase became so smitten with him that he transferred to the school of theology. A bitter debate between Barth and Harnack had been carried on in the periodical *Christliche Welt* in 1923. In the end, Bonhoeffer would find himself increasingly alienated from the Liberalism represented not only in his supervisory professor, Reinhold Seeberg, but also in his neighbor, Harnack.

Barth's 1919 theological commentary on Romans, the so-called bomb dropped into the playground of theologians, marked the beginning of a major attack upon Protestant Liberalism and the attempt to recover Reformation theology for the modern world. While concern for the Church captivated Bonhoeffer's attention, the Barthian revolution centered on the recovery of the revelation of God and the Bible. Nevertheless, certain insights found in Barth emerge again and again in Bonhoeffer corpus. One was

dogmatism, that is, the rejection of felt relevance as the starting point of theology. Bonhoeffer's embrace of strong Reformation doctrine of sin led to suspicion of essentially apologetic approaches taken by, for example, Rudolf Bultmann and eventually by Paul Tillich. The God of the Bible not only prescribes medicine for sin-sick souls and congregations, but diagnoses as well. Another was the centrality of the Bible for the Church as its guide and authority both for preaching and for congregational life.

### **Ministry**

Bonhoeffer advanced along the path toward a teaching career with exceptional speed and yet, increasingly, he questioned whether his true calling centered upon academic life. From very early on, Bonhoeffer harbored deep interest in active ministry. At the tender age of 21, while yet under the extraordinary demands of his doctoral thesis, Bonhoeffer sought to satisfy the qualifications prerequisite to parish ministry. This process included not only theological examinations but proof of practical ministry experience. Accordingly Bonhoeffer accepted responsibility for the children's Sunday School at Grunewald. Bonhoeffer invested himself completely in the lives of these children, entertaining them frequently at his home, establishing many extra-curricular outings and Bible studies for them. Surprisingly, he became alarmed when the children became so quickly attached to him and the influence he had upon them. Not unlike the experience of Karl Barth during his pastorate at Safenwil fourteen years earlier, Bonhoeffer felt keenly the responsibility bourn by one received as a minister of the word of God.

Periodically, for the rest of his life, Bonhoeffer underwent similar experiences. Often, when some recognition or success came to him, he found himself confronted with

his black heart, the sin of pride he knew to be present just beneath the surface of consciousness, and he contemplated with horror the thought that others looked up to him. How like Luther! And how incompatible with the optimistic anthropology so prevalent among his teachers—with the notable exception of Barth. This disgust with himself that assaulted him throughout his life had much in common with the temptations (*Anfechtungen*) suffered by Martin Luther. No doubt, such tangible, experiential acquaintance with one's sinful heart and mind fueled Bonhoeffer's lifelong clinging to salvation by grace alone.

In order to fulfill the two year Parrish ministry requirement, Bonhoeffer made his way to Barcelona Spain to serve the expatriate German community there. Though the congregation consisted mainly of business people, Bonhoeffer's ministry also brought him into contact with, in his words "the strangest people, with whom one would not normally have exchanged a single word: bums, vagabonds, criminals fleeing from justice, many foreign legionaries, lion-tamers and animal-trainers who have absconded from the Krone circus on its Spanish tour . . . We are constantly arranging passages home for Germans, even though we know the situation is no better there." Bonhoeffer claims not to have had a theological conversation for an entire year.

Here lies a key to Bonhoeffer's emerging ministerial identity; these plunges into active ministry were not viewed as distractions but as the true testing ground for whatever one thought one knew from books. For Bonhoeffer, theory must prove itself in practice. And yet, such serious respect for lived-out Christianity never suggested an empty-headed ministerial ideal. After returning to Berlin to join the theological faculty there, Bonhoeffer continued to reflect on his future—"I feel that academic work will not hold

me for long. But I do think that as thorough an academic grounding as possible is all-important.”

In 1930 Bonhoeffer traveled to New York for a year as an exchange student. His experiences there left an indelible mark upon him. Once again Bonhoeffer found himself pulled in two directions at once—toward academics and toward the worshipping congregation. Germans tended to patronize American seminaries because of their neglect of historical theology in favor of ethics. Classmates at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan found Bonhoeffer’s reference to a passage on sin and forgiveness from Luther’s **Bondage of the Will** funny. Students seemed wholly ignorant of the theology running from the Apostle Paul through Luther, Kierkegaard, and Barth. Still, Bonhoeffer was favorably impressed with the this-worldly focus and particularly of the distinct brand of Christian pacifism and non-violence he encountered.

As to concrete engagement with the Church, Bonhoeffer found himself enthralled with the African-American congregations in Harlem and moved by the special struggle for racial equality he witnessed. Bonhoeffer left New York more politically alert and more interested in ecumenical concerns. He returned to a Germany just beginning to grapple with the landslide victory of the National Socialists in elections held during his absence. German politics would hold Bonhoeffer’s attention for the rest of his days.

Between 1931 and 1936 Bonhoeffer served as a University lecturer at the University of Berlin. But his teaching duties accounted for only a small portion of his labor. Bonhoeffer threw himself into ecumenical activity, preaching, and various conference work with amazing zeal and abandon. Bonhoeffer’s passion was more an

expression of loyalty to Christ and his followers above loyalty to Germany—it certainly did not arise from any latent doctrinal latitudinarianism or indifference.

Upon his return, Bonhoeffer finally initiated the first of many meetings with the most important theological teacher of his life, Karl Barth. After the first personal encounter in Bonn, Bonhoeffer wrote of his impressions to a Swiss friend:

It is important and, in the nicest way, astonishing to see that there is even more to Barth than his books. He has a frankness, a willingness to listen to criticism, providing that it is relevant, and at the same time such concentration and a violent insistence on the subject whether it is discussed with arrogance or modesty, dogmatically or quite tentatively . . . I am even more impressed by his conversation than by his writings and lectures. Here you really see the whole man.

The content of Bonhoeffer’s lectures during these years displayed an eclectic quality indicative of his youth, but also bore the stamp of his own distinctive combination of interests that had percolated in his mind from his teenage years. Political engagement, ecumenism and pacifism grew increasingly conspicuous over these years. Theologically, from Barth, one notices the prominence of the doctrine of revelation, the recovery of Bible, dogmatics verses apologetics, and the centrality of Jesus Christ. Against Barth, one detects a certain anti-calvinist bent, leaning more toward Luther, especially regarding discipleship and the broader issues bearing on the Christian life. As to piety and churchmanship, Bonhoeffer surprised his students by opening his classes with prayer and encouraging them to adopt a daily regime of personal prayer and meditation on passages from Holy Scripture. It was during this period that Bonhoeffer made his life changing “discovery of the Bible” which we will explore more fully below.

Increasingly, political events impinged upon Bonhoeffer’s ability to study, debate and engage in serious research as he would have liked. During the late 1920’s the desire

for an authoritarian order grew among the right wing bourgeoisie within Germany. Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933. Within two years, Bonhoeffer was already beginning to face the deadly seriousness of the situation: “We should not be surprised if the time comes for our church too, when the blood of martyrs will be called for.”

On the evening of February 27, while Chancellor Hitler enjoyed a dinner hosted by the soon to be named Propaganda Chief, Joseph Goebbels, news came that the *Reichstag* (German Parliament) was on fire. Hitler immediately blamed the Communists, insisting that an incipient revolution must be stamped out before it was too late. From late February through March, with this pretext of a developing emergency, fateful laws came streaming forth from the newly empowered Third Reich: the Treachery Law made opposition to the government tantamount to treason; the Enabling Act abrogated the power of the Parliament and the constitution; the Decree for the Reconstruction of Professional Civil Service, the so-called non-Aryan law, began the declassification of one group by race; the Edict for the Protection of the People and State the so-called “Reichstag Fire Edict” would be used to exert broad interference with the churches, including, eventually, the closing of Bonhoeffer’s Preachers Seminary. This same edict allowed the establishment of Concentration Camps, including the future site of Bonhoeffer’s execution.

Following the exclusion of Jews from Civil Service in April, Bonhoeffer delivered a paper for a meeting of ministers which gained publication in June. The following excerpt demonstrates how early Bonhoeffer was willing to put himself at risk with the new regime: “. . . when the Church sees the state exercising too little or too much law and order, it is its task not simply to bind the wounds of the victims beneath the

wheel, but also to put a spoke in the wheel itself.” Not without reason, some have located the source of the Bonhoeffer chutzpah, “in the genes” as it were. Dietrich’s 91 year old grandmother Julie (née Tafel) Bonhoeffer responded to the Reich initiated boycott of Jewish businesses by heading straight for the Jewish department store in Berlin where she marched calmly past Hitler’s S.A. guards and into the store to make her purchase.

By midsummer of 1933, Hitler was master of Germany. The Lutheran Church fell quickly under his spell. The socialist party within the church, soon known as the German Christians, won elections in July, and nominated Ludwig Müller, hand picked by Hitler, as Reich Bishop. Bonhoeffer made his way to Gestapo headquarters for the first time, already questioning compatibility of loyalty to Jesus Christ and membership in a Church which, to his mind, had lapsed into heresy.

The response of the opposition took the form of a new confession which would set in bold relief the responsibility of the Church in the present political crisis. The product of this effort was published at the Barmen Synod in May, 1934 with Karl Barth as its principle author at least of its final shape. The line in the sand drawn by the opponents of Hitler’s war policy and encroachments upon ecclesiastical authority is captured in the first article of the new confession: “Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” Did this statement compromise traditional Lutheran respect for the two realms, Church and State? The opposition adherents of the Barmen Declaration, known thereafter as the confessing Church, thought not. In fact, Article 5 of the Declaration seems designed to make clear the affirmation two realm teaching by opposition ministers. Hitler would later exploit a sentence in this Article to insist that

ministers keep their mouths shut regarding politics: “We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the church should and could take on the nature, tasks, and dignity which belong to the state and thus become itself an organ of the state.”

Bonhoeffer declined a ministry post in Prussia partly because of the adoption of the Aryan clause in September. Instead, with a bad conscience, he accepted an invitation to assume pastoral duties for two small German speaking congregations in London, where he remained until March 1935. In response to a letter from Bonhoeffer in which he tried to explain his removal to London, Barth, who is Swiss, replied from Berlin, the very center of the escalating crisis—“Stop playing either Elijah under the juniper tree or Jonah under the gourd. You ought to drop all these intellectual frills and special pleadings, however interesting, and concentrate on one thing alone, that you are a German and that your Church’s house is on fire, . . . you ought to return to your post on the next ship! Or, let us say, the ship after next.” Barth, under investigation for an extended time because of his refusal to give the Hitler salute, was finally expelled from Germany by the Minister of Cultural Affairs in June, 1935. Bonhoeffer would face another opportunity to wait out the storm, this time in America but, once again, would essentially come to share Barth’s view of the matter and return. For his part, Barth would be tormented by his own sharp advise to his young colleague, realizing that he had invited Bonhoeffer to his death.

### **Seeds of Conspiracy**

The public and international scope of Bonhoeffer’s opposition to Hitler increased steadily from 1935. In 1936 he is said to have claimed that anyone lacking a “red card”

(demonstrating membership in the Confessing Church) cannot go to heaven and “anyone who knowingly separates himself off from the confessing church in Germany, separates himself off from salvation.” Clearly, Bonhoeffer believed that the political crisis provided the testing ground for confessional authenticity—Ye shall know them by their fruit! That Bonhoeffer would be able, from such a dangerous position of public exposure, to duck under the Nazi radar for over six years, even joining the Reich’s intelligence service, is a great wonder.

Between 1935 and 1937 Bonhoeffer led the “underground” seminary for the Confessing Church—first at Zingst and then at Finkenwalde. This opportunity provided Bonhoeffer with something of a laboratory to experiment with his maturing ideas regarding Christian community as well as seminary education and the special needs of Christian ministers. It was at Finkenwalde that Bonhoeffer wrote perhaps his most widely appreciated works; **Life Together** and **The Cost of Discipleship**. We will give closer attention to Bonhoeffer’s experience at Finkenwalde below.

In 1936 the Minister of Education removed Bonhoeffer from his university teaching post. Hitler closed the Seminary at Finkenwalde in 1937. In 1938 Bonhoeffer was banned from entering the city of Berlin. His father later arranged permission for visits to the family home. On March 13, Hitler’s army annexed Austria.

Certainly one significant factor in Bonhoeffer’s eventual participation in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler was the Confessing Church’s gradual loss of prophetic nerve. While the Church maintained, at least for a time, an impressive resistance to Reich encroachments into ecclesiastical turf, Bonhoeffer grew increasingly disappointed with its feeble response to the Jewish question. In 1938 the Confessing Synod acceded to the

Reich Church's call for an oath of allegiance to the Fuehrer as a birthday present following the invasion of Austria. Confessing ministers never formally acknowledged the legitimacy of conscientious objection to military service. Even the heretofore periodic objections to Gestapo infringement of Church prerogatives ceased after November 9, 1938, the notorious "night of broken glass," *Kristallnacht*.

The father of seventeen year old Herschel Grynszpan had been among 10,000 Jews loaded onto boxcars and deported to Poland in September. On November 7 Grynszpan arrived armed at the German Embassy in Paris intending to assassinate the ambassador in response. Instead he inflicted a mortal wound upon Ernst von Rath, the third secretary at the Embassy, who ironically, never shared the anti-Semitic policies of the Third Reich and at the time was under Gestapo surveillance. Hitler's response, *Kristallnacht*, marked a turning point for Germany and for Bonhoeffer. The horror of that night was felt by Germany and the world. Jewish Synagogues, shops and homes burned to the ground. Many Jews, men women and children were simply shot while attempting to escape the flames. One accounting has 815 shops destroyed, 171 homes, 119 Synagogues set on fire, 20,000 Jews arrested, and 36 deaths. Later many put the numbers much higher in each category. The anti-Semitic impulse of Nazism seemed to come into its own after that night of horror—as though a pump had been primed—and approached something of a fever pitch that continued without abatement at least until Hitler shot himself seven years later.

The seeds of conspiracy began to spring up in several quarters independently by late 1937 and especially in 1938. Bonhoeffer's exposure to one of these groups came through his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi who served as personal assistant to the

Minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner. Dohnanyi, along with General Hans Oster belonged to the *Abwehr* (the Intelligence Service of the OKW or High Command of the Armed Forces) and had been assigned to investigate a political crisis in the military. General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, the natural successor to Blomberg as General Field Marshall, had been framed by Herrmann Goering, who coveted the position for himself. Goering, eventually named by Hitler as his successor, welcomed accusations that von Fritsch, a lifelong bachelor, was homosexual, and arranged for a known informer against homosexuals now imprisoned to be brought forth to accuse von Fritsch. The investigation drew together military and political figures opposed to Hitler and gave impetus to plans for his overthrow. Because von Fritsch had been popular as army commander, would-be conspirators sought to take advantage of the opportunity to encourage hesitant enemies of the Fuehrer.

Meanwhile momentous political and military events proceeded one after the other which would plunge the world into another global war. In September 1938 at Munich, Britain and France acceded to Hitler's demand—though put forward by Mussolini—to annex the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. By March of the next year, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. Also in 1938, the Godesberg Declaration legitimized the pro-Nazi "German Christians." Meanwhile Bonhoeffer agonized over an invitation by Professors Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Lehmann to come to New York, assume a teaching appointment at Union Seminary, and escape the dangerous political situation in his homeland. In June, 1939, with an unshakably uneasy conscience, Bonhoeffer, along with his brother Karl-Friedrich, boarded the *Bremen* and made the voyage across the Atlantic.

Cut off from news of events in Germany, Bonhoeffer found New York increasingly intolerable, as the following diary entries make plain:

June 13

The first lonely hours are difficult. I do not know why I am here, whether it is wise, whether the result will be worthwhile . . . Now almost a fortnight has gone without my knowing what is happening there. It is almost unbearable . . .

June 14

Prayers. The short prayer—the whole family kneels down—in which we remembered the German brethren, almost overwhelmed me.

June 15

My thoughts about Germany have not left me since yesterday evening. I should not have thought it possible for anyone of my age, after so many years abroad, to be so terribly homesick . . . This inactivity, or activity as the case may be, really becomes simply unbearable to us when we think of the brethren and the precious time. The whole weight of self-reproach because of a wrong decision comes back and almost chokes me.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June he wandered aimlessly in Times Square, giving free reign to his tortured thoughts until, at length, he decided to return. He tried to explain his decision to Niebuhr:

It was a mistake for me to come to America. . . . I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Germany after the war if I do not share the tribulations of this time with my people . . . Christians in Germany are faced with the fearful alternatives either of willing their country's defeat so that Christian civilization may survive, or of willing its victory and destroying our civilization. I know which of the two alternatives I have to choose but I cannot make the choice from a position of safety.

No doubt Bonhoeffer could have both served the Church and spoken out politically in remarkable and useful ways from the safety open to him outside Germany. That he chose not to do so exposes something essential for any accurate understanding and assessment of Bonhoeffer's life and work. Interpretation of famously enigmatic

concepts which would surface in Bonhoeffer's writings such as "religionless Christianity" or "worldly Christianity" would profit from beginning here, with this fateful decision. Risky, self-sacrificing service, to the Church **and to the world**, in the name of Jesus Christ, belongs organically to Christian obedience. In his own words from **The Cost of Discipleship**—when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. Not in pursuit of something for oneself. All things are ours already in Jesus. Not in order to make something of oneself. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Rather, in order to serve, in order to help others, in the name of Jesus Christ. Followers of Jesus are free for such service and such service belongs to and authenticates genuine witness to their crucified and risen Savior. Why did Bonhoeffer return to Germany? At the most basic level, his answer was, "because I am a German and a Christian."

Bonhoeffer took up his previous work among the congregations first in Pomerania—the sandy, lake-strewn hinterland of present day northwestern Poland—and later among the parishes of East Prussia. In January 1940, the Gestapo closed the collective pastorates in Gross-Schlönwitz and Köslin which were actually disguised seminaries. After Dunkirk fell on June 5, 1940, German divisions swarmed across France like a tidal wave. The swastika was hoisted on the Eiffel tower on June 14. France surrendered three days later. On that day, Bonhoeffer and his close friend and eventual biographer, Eberhard Bethge, were enjoying the sun at Memel on the Baltic Sea at an open air café when the news came over a loudspeaker. German patrons stood on their chairs and sang "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles,*" (Germany! Germany! over all!). Bonhoeffer stood and raised his arm in the standard Hitler salute while Eberhard sat and

stared. Bonhoeffer insisted, “Raise your arm! Are you crazy?” Later he whispered “We shall have to run risks for very different things now, but not for that salute!”

Soon afterwards the Gestapo raided a Bible study Bonhoeffer was leading near Königsberg after which Bonhoeffer was labeled a subversive and banned from public speaking. The Pomeranian police put him under immediate and smothering surveillance, requiring Bonhoeffer to report frequently on his movements. On September 4, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris head of the Intelligence Service (*Abwehr*), at the urging of Oster and Dohnanyi, declared Bonhoeffer indispensable to its work owing to his frequent travels along the eastern front. He was stationed at Munich, far from the Pomeranian police. Bonhoeffer took refuge in the Benedictine monastery at Ettal, began work on his **Ethics**, and awaited his first assignment as an Intelligence officer. Bonhoeffer now burned the candle at both ends as the saying goes, living a double life as pastor and underground political operative.

By July, Germany had invaded Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. In August the Luftwaffe began relentless bombing of London. Hitler had been right and the key figures of the resistance movement had been wrong in their estimate of the enemies of the Third Reich; at least until The American and British forces landed at Normandy on D-Day. Until then, Hitler’s defeat appeared, at ante, in the West, increasingly difficult to imagine. From 1940 to 1943 Bonhoeffer alternated between a life of extreme tension and surreal luxury as he embraced the life of the pastor and of the counter espionage agent—traveling widely and in high style as a member of the *Abwehr*, leading Bible studies in remote villages, and, eventually, plotting the assassination of Adolf Hitler.

Between the fall of France in 1940 and the German offensive against Russia in June, 1941, Bonhoeffer worked to restore relationships between the German resistance and contacts among the Allies. The chief objective was to secure commitments by the Allies to treat a non-Nazi Germany on honorable terms in a post-war era should the conspirators succeed in deposing Hitler, whether by arrest or by assassination. His trip to Switzerland in February seemed fruitful at the time, not least because it afforded the opportunity to assure former friends in the ecumenical community that the resistance still existed and if anything had stiffened in resolve. Erwin Sutz, who entertained Bonhoeffer in Raperswil, reported Bonhoeffer insisting “You can rely on it, we shall overthrow Hitler!” W.A. Visser 'Hooft, Provisional Secretary of the World Council of Churches was likewise reassured by Bonhoeffer’s visit. In a letter to Bishop Bell he writes—“Many of [the Germans] have really the same reaction to all that has happened and is happening as you or as I have.”

Two communications from the National Office for Literature (*Reichsschrifttumskammer*) awaited his return from Switzerland. Dated March 17 and 19 respectively, the first levied a fine for not applying for certification as a writer. The second letter forbade Bonhoeffer’s supposed application on the grounds that he had already suffered the ban against public speaking for “subversive activity.” The *Abwehr* viewed one administrative department of the Reich acting against another as too common to merit response. Later this nonchalance would be cited against Bonhoeffer by Gestapo interrogators.

Between March and June optimism grew among the conspirators in the wake of Hitler’s March 30 “Commissar Order.” Soviet military units included commissars

charged with nurturing, monitoring, and enforcing Communist party loyalty. Hitler's order required the immediate liquidation of commissars falling into the hands of German units. Such indefensibly criminal lunacy threatened to drag the German military down into the muck of the murderous SS. Even Rudolf Hess, "the Fuehrer's representative" flew to Great Britain in an abortive attempt to initiate talks to end the war. The ranks of the conspirators grew and old timers took heart. Such hopefulness proved to be short lived. Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22 and initial victories solidified his position.

In hindsight, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union actually proved to mark the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. Stalin, taken by surprise, had continued to ship raw materials to the Nazi regime up to the last moment. Would Hitler succeed where Napoleon had failed? In spite of popular abhorrence for Stalin in the United States, they preferred temporary embrace of the Soviets to defeat at hands of Hitler. Even Churchill, with his fierce anticommunism unabated, was prepared to acknowledge any foe of Hitler as his ally and said as much with characteristic flair—"If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons." On August 14, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter off the coast of Newfoundland, renouncing desire for new territories, affirming the rights of peoples to choose their own governments and calling for the disarmament of aggressor nations after the destruction of the Nazis. Hitler and his pumped-up war machine barely took note of the Charter but around the world hope was kindled at the renewed resolve of the two great Western powers.

During the spring and summer of 1941, the conspiring segment of the opposition met frequently, sometimes at the home of Rüdiger Schleicher, other times at the home of

Dietrich's brother Klaus. Time after time they bolstered themselves with the conviction that by some certain date Hitler's risky self-destructive insanity would precipitate his demise only to be disappointed. Still, the group repeatedly stirred itself to renewed hope, often with Bonhoeffer's help, who later wrote of the crucial role of optimism under such trying circumstances:

The essence of optimism is not its view of the present, but the fact that it is the inspiration of life and hope when others give in; it enables a man to hold his head high when everything seems to be going wrong; it gives him strength to sustain reverses and yet to claim the future for himself instead of abandoning it to his opponent . . . the optimism that is will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong a hundred times.

Opposition efforts continued along two tracts; first and, with each passing month, more predominant, was the conspiracy to depose Hitler by whatever means. Still, efforts to shape peace terms favorable to Germany in a post-war context also claimed their attention. Bonhoeffer once again traveled to Switzerland in autumn; this time not only to gather information from friends among the Allies but also to press for consideration of the post war peace and argue against the wisdom of a too simple identification of Germany with Hitler and the Third Reich even from the Allied standpoint. The prevailing attitude toward such ideas in London seemed to be utter disinterest. Understandably, victory and disarmament animated Churchill's thinking and tended to edge out other concerns. The formal announcement of the Allied demand for "unconditional surrender" would not come until January 1943 when Roosevelt and Churchill met at Casablanca, but the policy itself had taken root at least as early as the fall of France.

True to his "doctrine of optimism" Bonhoeffer returned home in late September brimming with hope only to confront the newly decreed requirement that all Jews display

the pernicious “Yellow Star,” which would soon facilitate their massive deportation to the concentration camps and death chambers. Under interrogation in 1944, Bonhoeffer would be reminded that people donning the Star had been seen entering the two family homes in Berlin during those early days. In the succeeding months, what one previously heard of from Poland and other occupied areas now occurred right before ones eyes in Munich, Hamburg and Berlin itself. Families snatched away in the night. Whole Jewish communities marched into the neighborhood synagogue on false pretenses only to be dispatched to Auschwitz and Auschwitz II (Birkenau). Soon after his homecoming, Dietrich and his family helped their sixty-eight year old Jewish friend and neighbor pack for her “resettlement.

By fall of 1941 the word spread concerning the so-called “final Solution” of the Jewish problem, which meant simply, their liquidation. Admiral Canaris along with Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth and others launched “Operation 7” by which the machinery of the *Abwehr* facilitated the smuggling of Jews to the West. In October the conspiracy gained unexpected impetus when long time Hitler adversary Dr. Fabian von Schlabrendorff appeared from the eastern front with news that interference by Hitler and the S.S. with the Army had inclined some to entertain a *Putsch* against the regime. Even army Commander Brauchitsch left the door open for such considerations. This was the vital link missing between the Berlin conspirators and forces capable of deploying military units should Hitler be overthrown. Intense preparations proceeded apace until the bombshell came on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December—Hitler forced Brauchitsch’s retirement and named himself commander-in-chief of the Army.

During the following weeks the conspirators accepted for the first time that the *sine qua non* of the *Putsch* must include, and indeed begin, with Hitler's assassination. Once this realization became clear, Bonhoeffer, knowing nothing about the handling of guns or explosives, let it be known that, if, in the end, the deed fell to him, he was ready to carry it out. Urgency settled upon the conspirators and their lives became a self-conscious race between assassination and their own arrest. Bonhoeffer responded to the new realities with both realism and hope as he prepared his will and announced his engagement to marry.

Bonhoeffer had first become acquainted with Maria von Wedemeyer, eighteen years his junior, while leading the seminary at Finkenwalde. Maria's parents and her grandmother, Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, had been among the many patrons supporting the work in Pomerania and had arranged for some their young ones to attend services at the seminary. Bonhoeffer had even been asked to prepare a select group of children for confirmation, including Maria's brother Max. The von Wedemeyers and von Kleist-Retzows belonged to the landed aristocracy of Pomerania and exposed Bonhoeffer to, among other things, the special difference a believing father can make within the family clan. Hans, Maria's father, who had taken special interest in his son's confirmation, fell on the eastern front in August 1942, affecting Bonhoeffer deeply.

In November Bonhoeffer visited Frau von Wedemeyer to ask for permission to marry her daughter Maria, the third of seven children. Still adjusting to the tragic loss of her husband, she received the request with not a little hesitance and some anxiety, not only because of the age difference involved but also because of the mysterious and seemingly dangerous nature of Bonhoeffer's work. Much to his dismay, Frau von Wedemeyer

suggested that Dietrich and Maria stay apart for one year and revisit the matter after the separation. But, alas, she relented and the engagement took place on January 17, 1943 with an agreement to delay its public announcement for some time. At length, the announcement was precipitated not according to the original arrangements but by Bonhoeffer's arrest and imprisonment in April of the same year.

By early summer of 1942, both Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer had been warned that they were under Gestapo surveillance involving wiretaps and the interception of mail. Ironically this invasion had not been prompted by their conspiratorial activities but by a wholly unrelated Reich push for efficiency between the military and *Abwehr*.

The most reliable and hopeful contact in the west, Bishop Bell, was to be in Sweden for a time in the spring of 1942. Bonhoeffer boarded a plane for Stockholm in last desperate attempt secure assurances from the Allies, particularly Britain, to give a provisional German government time to prove its good intentions should Hitler's overthrow be achieved. In the weeks and months following his meetings with Bonhoeffer, Bell expended himself heroically in meetings, conferences, speeches and publications in an attempt to advance the aims of the conspirators. The crucial assurance sought by Bell and the resistance was an unambiguous Allied distinction between Hitler and Germany. Just this distinction had been broadcast into Germany by the BBC in July. Bell pressed. Remarkably, the question of the distinction was put on the schedule for the Upper House of Parliament for the December 9 session. Just before this session the matter was postponed to give Foreign Minister Anthony Eden an opportunity to meet with Bell and explain why the BBC broadcast, meant only for the German ears, must be left out of any Parliamentary discussion. Instead, Eden suggested a link between the

policy and a November 6 speech by Stalin in which the proposed distinction was sharply drawn. After considerable struggle and further scheduling and postponement, Bell raised his question on March 10, 1943. The government spokesman's response seemed to confirm the distinction between Hitler and the Germany as official policy of Britain:

I now say in plain terms, on behalf of His Majesty's government that we agree with Premier Stalin, first that the Hitlerite State should be destroyed and secondly, that the whole German people is not, as Dr. Goebbels has been trying to persuade them, thereby doomed to destruction.

Schlabrendorff planted his British made, non-hissing bomb on March 13. Fellow conspirator Major General Henning von Tresckow had preferred to have Hitler "mowed down" upon arrival at headquarters on that day, but the needed order from the Field Marshall was not obtained. Never mind, "the semblance of an accident," Schlabrendorff reasoned, "would avoid the political disadvantages of a murder." Schlabrendorff combined two explosive packets in on parcel, resembling a couple of brandy bottles. Tresckow had asked Army General Staff Colonel Heinz Brandt if would be so kind as to deliver "the brandy" to his friend General Stieff who would accompany Hitler on a flight from Smolensk to East Prussia. Schlabrendorff stood holding the parcel that day at the airfield, reached inside to trigger the timing mechanism and handed Brandt the brandy bomb.

The bomb was set to explode over Minsk. Bonhoeffer along with Dohnanyi and their conspirator friends listened anxiously in Berlin for news of the plane crash. It never came. Instead, two hours after the expected explosion, a routine announcement that Hitler had landed at Rastenburg near Smolensk came across the wire. Miraculously the bomb went undiscovered. Questioned by Tresckow about the package, Brandt responded that he had forgotten to deliver the package! Tresckow insisted that the original parcel not be

delivered. Alas, a mistake had been made. Schlabrendorff, with extraordinary courage, made his way to Hitler's headquarters and exchanged the bomb for real brandy this time.

Schlabrendorff remembered the event:

I can still recall my horror when Brandt handed me the bomb and gave it a jerk that made me fear a belated explosion. Feigning a composure I did not feel I took the bomb, immediately got into a car, and drove to the neighboring railway junction of Korschen.

The disappointment failed to weaken the conspirators' determination. Hitler was to attend the Heroes' Memorial Day Ceremonies, accompanied by Goering, Himmler, and Keitel on March 21. Hitler and his entourage were set to spend a half hour viewing and exhibit of Russian war trophies arranged by Major von Gersdorff, a fellow conspirator. This meant that a bomb could take out top leaders of the Third Reich along with Hitler, but the attempt would have to be a suicide mission. Gersdorff volunteered to blow himself to bits for the cause. But it was not to be. Frigid weather meant that the normally ten minute fuses might require as much as twelve minutes or more to detonate the bomb. In keeping with his vigilant security precautions, Hitler made a last minute change, allowing only eight minutes, not thirty, for the exhibition. The assassination attempt was scrapped.

On the Sunday afternoon, Rüdiger Schleicher hosted a rehearsal for the upcoming 75<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration cantata for Dietrich's father Karl. The concentration of accomplished musicians and grandchildren resulted in a veritable concert with Klaus on the cello, Schleicher on the violin and Dietrich at the piano. Once again news of Hitler's death never came. Two weeks later Bonhoeffer and Dohnanyi were arrested and Oster was banned from the *Abwehr*.

## **Arrest**

Ironically, the arrests had nothing to do with the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler but with a longstanding internal Reich struggle to curtail the relative independence of the *Abwehr* under the guise of reforms designed to improve efficiency. Consul Schmidhuber, once active among the resistance, had been arrested in October 1942 in connection with the Gestapo investigation of the *Abwehr*. Schmidhuber had been one of Bonhoeffer's superiors at the Munich office and knew of the "Operation 7" efforts to smuggle Jews into Switzerland. Under interrogation, Bonhoeffer's name had surfaced and led to the wiretapping and monitoring initiated as early as late spring of 1942.

An unknown male voice answered Bonhoeffer's call to his sister Christine von Dohnanyi on April 5, 1943. Convinced a search of the Dohnanyi house was underway, and that his own arrest was imminent, he crossed to the house of his sister Ursula Schleicher and had a robust meal prepared in anticipation of a Gestapo imposed fast to come. At midday a black Mercedes stopped in front of the Bonhoeffer residence in the cul-de-sac in Marienburger Alle. Soon Karl brought the news to his son Dietrich at the Schleicher home that two men wished to speak with him. Gestapo operatives Judge Advocate Dr Manfred Roeder and Detective Sondregger drove Bonhoeffer away. He never saw Marienburger Alle again.

## **Prison**

Courage is not the absence of fear but the will to act in the face of fear. Such was the character of Bonhoeffer's courage. Strong as he was mentally, emotionally and physically, he cringed at the prospect of deprivation, interrogation or, God forbid, torture. He was sure he would not hold up well. On a scrap of paper salvaged from his early days

of solitary confinement in Tegel prison we find these words: “Suicide, not because of consciousness of guilt but because basically I am already dead, draw a line, summing up.” Could suicide become a duty where the danger of betraying others threatened? Bonhoeffer wondered. In fact, he did hold up under interrogation, faithfully repeating all that he and Dohnanyi had rehearsed for just such circumstances.

Bonhoeffer’s extensive notes along with some official minutes from the hearings survive. Enquiries included Bonhoeffer’s exemption from military service, “Operation 7,” his international travel and his employment of the *Abwehr* in the aid of the Confessing Church. Yet there seemed to be little of substance to be found. Nothing emerged to tie Bonhoeffer to conspiracy. Bonhoeffer even referred his interrogators to his own published writings:

If anyone wants to learn something of my conception of the duty of Christian obedience towards the authorities, he should read my exposition of Romans 13 in my book **The Cost of Discipleship**. The appeal to subjection to the will and the demands of authority for the sake of Christian conscience has probably seldom been expressed more strongly than there.

Once the period of interrogation ended in July, he set up his cell as a study and began to reacquaint himself with the old pursuits of his ministry days, though he would not settle down to study and writing in earnest for another year. Equally costly to Bonhoeffer upon entering the conspiracy was the conviction that he would no longer be qualified to preach and teach as the clergyman he once hoped to become. That he continued to wrestle with such notions, not only as far as the church was concerned, but generally, is confirmed in a collection of essays found hidden in his attic, dedicated to his fellow conspirators for Christmas 1942:

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds. We have been drenched by many storms. We have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretense. Experience has made us suspicious of others, and kept us from being truthful and open. Intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?

Bound hand and foot, Bonhoeffer was eventually settled into Cell No. 92 on the first floor rather than the third to shield the potentially valuable witness from the danger of bomb attacks. The solitary confinement was exacerbated by an order forbidding the guards from conversing with the new prisoner. Eventually though, these restrictions would be lifted and Bonhoeffer would receive comparatively soft treatment once word spread that he was indeed of the famous Berlin Bonhoeffer family.

Soon it became clear that Bonhoeffer's hopes for trial and acquittal were almost entirely bound up with the fate of his lawyer, brother-in-law, and co-conspirator, Hans von Dohnanyi. Through frequent visits from family, friends, and his fiancée, and use of code language, Bonhoeffer was able to follow the developments in Dohnanyi's trial closely. Both Bonhoeffer and Dohnanyi were interrogated by the Nazi Judge Advocate, Manfred Roeder, who had driven the Mercedes to Marienburger Alle on that fateful April afternoon. An ambitious lawyer belonging to the *Luftwaffe*, Roeder was famous for securing three death sentences in the sensational '*Rote Kapelle*' trials of 1942. A titanic mental battle ensued between the two lawyers, with Roeder bent on securing a conviction for high treason. Bonhoeffer's trial could not go forward apart from the resolution of Dohnanyi's case. Dohnanyi got the better of Roeder and on July 23, 1943 the pursuit of the high treason charge was abandoned in favor of lesser infractions. Roeder was eventually removed from the case by "promotion," and was replaced in February of 1944. Still Dohnanyi's trial continued, leaving Bonhoeffer to watch and wait. Dohnanyi became

gravely ill. The Gestapo took full control of his case in July, 1944 and Dohnanyi was transferred to the concentration camp Sachsenhausen where he was able for a time to use his illness as a tactic of delay in his trial.

Bonhoeffer's own trial suffered from a repeated setting of dates and postponements. From April of 1944, Bonhoeffer settled down with his books and his writing, producing significant portions of his posthumous **Ethics** and the whole of *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Resistance and Submission), published in English as **Letters and Papers from Prison**. These writings offer extraordinary insights into the struggle for a good conscience by a committed follower of Christ caught up in the whirlwind that was the rise and fall of the Third Reich.

### **Hopes Dashed**

After eight months of incarceration Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend Eberhard Bethge:

I want to assure you that I haven't for a moment regretted coming back in 1939—nor any of the consequences either. I knew quite well what I was doing, and I acted with a clear conscience. I have no wish to cross out of my life anything that has happened since, either to me personally (would I have got engaged otherwise?) . . . I regard my being kept here (do you remember that I prophesied to you last March about what the year would bring?) as being involved in the fate of Germany in which I was determined to share.

Fourteen months had passed since Bonhoeffer's arrest when, on June 6, 1944, British and American troops, carried by 1000 ships, landed at Omaha Beach on the Normandy coast between the rivers Vire and Orne. Idiotic orders from Hitler prevented the swift deployment of Panzer (tank) divisions needed to repel the invading Allies. German defenses collapsed on the Western front in the face of superior air and naval bombardment. Hitler slept while his Generals begged in vain for permission to release

their tanks. On June 20 the long delayed Russian offensive from the East commenced, essentially sealing the fate of Nazi Germany.

These developments fatally undermined the hopes of the conspirators against Hitler. General Field Marshal Rommel, though opposed to the assassination plot, remained crucial to the conspirators' post-assassination plans, both because of his high rank and his daring personality. In a July 15 letter to the Fuehrer, Rommel all but insisted upon German surrender, telling General Spiedel, "I have given him his last chance . . . if he does not take it, we will act." Two days later, while making his way from the Western front to headquarters, low-flying Allied fighter planes shot up Rommel's car near Livarot, leaving the Field Marshal critically wounded and useless to the conspiracy. Only the rapid replacement of the Nazi regime following Hitler's assassination but, also, prior to the simultaneous Allied assaults from East and West, could possibly secure favorable terms for a post-war Germany. An imploding German army, retreating from both fronts, could expect little mercy from the freshly exultant enemy hungry for victory.

The lynchpin of the final assassination attempt was the selection of the assassin himself—Lt. Col. Klaus Philip Schenk, Count von Stauffenberg. In April of 1943 had Stauffenberg suffered what, for most men, would have been career ending injuries when his car drove into a mine field. Despite losing his left eye, right hand, two fingers of the other hand and suffering injuries to his left ear and knee, by midsummer he was demanding reinstatement to active duty. The long convalescence had only strengthened his conviction that the assassination of Adolf Hitler was a sacred mission.

At the end of June the conspirators celebrated unexpected good news when Stauffenberg was promoted to full colonel and appointed chief of staff to General

Fromm, commander of the Home army. Now subject to frequent summons to Hitler's office, Stauffenberg laid plans for the planting of yet another bomb. And, since Fromm could not be definitely counted on, Stauffenberg would have to direct the army to secure Berlin immediately following the assassination. The first opportunity came on July 11 at Obersalzberg at a meeting set to include Himmler and Goering as well as Hitler. When Himmler did not show, Stauffenberg rang General Olbricht in Berlin who urged him to wait for another attempt on the triumvirate. On July the fifteenth, Stauffenberg left the bomb bearing briefcase with Hitler to phone Olbricht and declare his intention to detonate the explosive, only to return and find Hitler gone.

On July 20, Stauffenberg, summoned to meet with Hitler at the so-called "Wolf's Lair" at Rastenburg in East Prussia, made his way past the guards once again toward the Fuehrer with a time bomb in tow. At around 12:30, having broken the capsule of the timing device, leaving ten minutes before detonation, Stauffenberg was invited into Hitler's conference room occupied by about twenty persons with Hitler seated at the table. Goering and Himmler were not present. Having taken his chair, Stauffenberg slid the bomb-bearing briefcase toward Hitler but still it bulged outward from the table. Still it was clearly close enough to kill him especially since it leaned against the inside of a stout oak support of the table facing Hitler. When Stauffenberg managed to absent himself briefly under the ruse of a telephone call, Colonel Brandt move the briefcase to the other side of the support in order gain a closer view of map laid out on the table.

Keitel, annoyed that Stauffenberg was not poised to give his report, stepped outside the conference room only to be told that the newly promoted chief of staff had hurriedly left the building upon exiting the meeting. Keitel reentered the conference at

12:42. The bomb exploded. Stauffenberg, stationed a couple hundred yards away, eyes fixed on the buildings saw the bodies hurtle through the windows at the blast. He had no doubt that none had survived. Keitel escaped uninjured and Hitler, only shaken, was probably saved by the innocent and unwitting Brandt who had shifted the briefcase a few inches.

For an entire year Bonhoeffer believed in the likelihood of his acquittal at trial followed by release from prison. Such hope ended abruptly on July 20, 1944 with Stauffenberg's failed attempt on Hitler. Bonhoeffer also knew that his own fate was now sealed.

Bonhoeffer devised but then abandoned a plan for escape in fear that success would provoke Gestapo action against his family and friends. On Sunday October 8, Bonhoeffer was transferred to the underground prison at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. By February 1945, five members of Bonhoeffer's family were in Gestapo custody. Death sentences were handed down for his brother Klaus and Rüdiger Schleicher. Bonhoeffer was secretly moved to Berlin where he withstood four months of interrogation. After this he spent seven weeks at an air raid shelter in the concentration camp at Buchenwald before being moved again, this time to Flossenbürg. At Hitler's midday conference on April 5, it was decided that members of the so-called "Zossen group" in which Bonhoeffer was included, would be executed. Bonhoeffer had inadvertently been placed on a transport and had to be brought back to Flossenbürg. He arrived late on the evening of April 8. Early the next morning Bonhoeffer and his friends were hanged.

The camp doctor recalled seeing Bonhoeffer that day:

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.

The bombs of the approaching Allied forces could be heard at Flossenbürg in the days preceding the executions. Two weeks later the American army liberated Flossenbürg, finding only 2000 prisoners left alive. One week later, at the age of fifty-six, Hitler shot himself in the mouth with a revolver.

Does Dietrich Bonhoeffer belong to the ranks of Christian martyrs? Does he have something to say to our generation? Bonhoeffer not only faced the complexities and horrors at the heart of the modern world, he was a preacher and a pastor who continued to write down his thoughts. Bonhoeffer has much to say to Bible-believing Christians in the 21st century. In the chapters that follow we will let Bonhoeffer speak to us of the costly discipleship he pursued. We look first for help with knowing and doing the will of God.