Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Legacy: Sixty Years On

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Remembering

Sixty years ago, on 9 April 1945, the German Lutheran pastor, ecumenical worker and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, went calmly to his death. As he was led out of his cell in the concentration camp Flossenbürg (in Bavaria near Bayreuth) in the early hours of the morning, the prison doctor through a crack in the door observed him, without knowing then who he was. Later he recalled:

Through the half-open door ... 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 ... 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 prisoner was ordered to strip. Naked under the scaffold, Bonhoeffer knelt for one last time to pray. Seconds later, he was dead. His corpse then was burned.

The immediate legal charge was that Bonhoeffer was part of an organisation—Operation 7—that helped a small group of Jews to escape to Switzerland. But, as is well known, the 39-year-old theologian, who had written a book on the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and who had a strong leaning toward pacifism, was also part of a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. His participation in the plot to remove Hitler obviously conflicted with Bonhoeffer’s pacifism. He reportedly explained his reasoning to his sister-in-law, Emmi Bonhoeffer: ‘If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can’t, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe to happen and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver’.

In fact, a good theologian cannot ignore the interplay of the word of God with each respective situation. Whatever moral presumption or ethical pre-decision he may bring to the situation—e.g. Bonhoeffer’s pacifist leanings—the call of the word of God in the situation may overturn such presumption or pre-decision. Thus, without denying his pacifism, in that par-ticular situation, given the violence, expansionism, idolatry and ethnic cleansing of Hitler’s National Socialist Germany, he saw no possibility of refusing the invitation to join the group that attempted to remove Hitler.

Three weeks after Bonhoeffer’s execution, on 30 April 1945, Adolf Hitler committed suicide. A week after that, Germany surrendered, and World War II came to its end. The Flossenbürg Camp was liberated on April 23, two weeks after Bonhoeffer’s execution.

The day before his execution Bonhoeffer had drawn the British Captain, Payne Best, aside and given him a message for his friend and collaborator.
George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester. The message contained his last recorded words: This is the end—for me the beginning of life.²

The setting
It is appropriate that we remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer today in an Anglican and ecumenical context.

When in the early 1930s (1933–35) Bonhoeffer became totally disillusioned and frustrated with the church’s attitude towards the Jews; yes, when he even considered leaving his church and joining a so-called Freikirche (a church not aligned with the state), he accepted a call to his first pastorate—in London. There he came in touch with Anglican spirituality that became important to Bonhoeffer and his later role as a seminary principal.

One of his closest friends and ecumenical collaborators was George Bell, the Anglican Bishop of Chichester. It was George Bell, rather than Bonhoeffer’s own Bishop Dibelius, who encouraged the publication of Bonhoeffer’s works.³ And it was another Anglican Bishop, John A. T. Robinson, whose little book Honest to God (1963) made Bonhoeffer and his works world famous.

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Bonhoeffer himself came to the ever growing opinion that denominationalism was a thing of the past. He was an ecumenical worker, spoke at ecumenical conferences and was friends with Willem A. Visser’t Hooft who became the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.⁴

Context
In the wake of World War II, in 1945, the United Nations was founded and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948. The Preamble to the United Nations Charter contains the promise:

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small . . . ⁵

We want to remember today, and indeed, it must not be forgotten, that during the barbarism of World War II there were women and men who were prepared to die for what is right. Irrespective of their national or religious identity, their consciences were focussed on something universal, on something ultimate. Their commitment to life; indeed the intense desire to cele-brate life, included the possibility to die for what they saw as the essence of life. Among them was Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁶

Bonhoeffer was passionate about life. And life for him was Jesus Christ: Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life.⁷ I would like to explore some dimensions of that passion tonight. It may prove important for our own journey of faith.

The credibility and relevance of the church
Bonhoeffer was a man of the church. This was somewhat surprising because his family tradition had predisposed him for a more academic career. But all his life he remained committed to the church. He was a youth worker, chaplain to students, pastor, ecumenical worker and principal of the seminary of the Confessing Evangelical Church in Germany. His commitment to the Confessing Church was the consequence of his break with the official, established church, which, he believed, had failed its members by not resisting an evil government. He was deeply disturbed and indeed disillusioned that in that critical time for the German people and the German nation the ‘official’ church had failed to hear and speak the word of God.

In 1939, as the clouds of war gathered, Bonhoeffer found himself in an existential crisis. Compulsory military service and with it the swearing of the military oath of total allegiance to the Führer were imminent. Conscientious objection seemed to be the only option. But then, his friends considered that to be self-indulgent, and it would certainly have brought further difficulties for the Confessing Church. In that situation he took up an invitation for a theological career in America. Friends (Paul Lehmann, Reinhold Niebuhr) wanted to offer him an alternative to the difficult situation in Germany, and Bonhoeffer himself had come to appreciate America on an earlier visit in 1930–31. He went. But he stayed only a month and then decided to return to Germany. He expressed his thoughts to Reinhold Niebuhr:

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people . . . Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose, but I cannot make that choice in security.⁸

His passion for the credibility and relevance of the church included a concern for the credibility of preaching. How can we speak of God today so that it is God’s word and not our own that is proclaimed? And how can we speak in such a way that our proclamation helps people not to withdraw from life, but in and with all its challenges, to celebrate life?

Tonight I want to address two theological concerns that were important to Bonhoeffer—and that have retained their inherent challenge for every intention-
al Christian. One relates to the church’s credibility. It is mainly associated with Bonhoeffer’s life as a pastor, ecumenical worker and theologian, training people for the ministry of the church in difficult times. How could the church regain and maintain its space in society when established Christian denominations had failed and when a country desperately needed an alternative vision? The other is concerned with the church’s relevance. It exercised Bonhoeffer’s theological thinking during his days in prison. How can the word ‘God’ become meaningful in situations that are not overtly religious?

Nachfolge/Discipleship

In his concern to provide a theological foundation for the renewal of the church, for the training of pastors, and for a credible and relevant content of preaching, Bonhoeffer turned to Jesus Christ, and the essence of Jesus Christ he found in the Sermon on the Mount.

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The Sermon on the Mount

In the late 1920s and early 1930s Bonhoeffer was looking for a new way of being a Christian, a new foundation for being church, a new way of preaching.

He came out of the German Lutheran tradition that emphasises sola gratia (by grace alone) and sees response and obedience as secondary. Doctrinal and liturgical accuracy tended to be more important than personal commitment and communion with fellow Christians. The possibility of pacifism and conscientious objection had no standing in Lutheran theology. The result was his world famous book Nachfolge, which in English became known and famous under the title, The cost of discipleship.

Faith as discipleship

In his little book Dynamics of Faith Paul Tillich describes the problem associated with the word ‘faith’.

There is hardly a word in the religious language ... which is subject to more misunderstandings, distortions and questionable definitions than the word ‘faith’. It belongs to those terms which need healing before they can be used for the healing of men. Today the term ‘faith’ is more productive of disease than of health. It confuses, misleads, creates alternately scepticism and fanaticism, intellectual resistance and emotional surrender, rejection of genuine religion and subjection to substitutes.

Bonhoeffer wanted to understand faith as faith ‘in Jesus Christ’. That is significant. It is as significant now as it was then. While Christologies and ecumenical creeds often focus on cross, crown and cradle (if you are a Lutheran) or on cradle, cross and crown (if you are an Anglican), Bonhoeffer sought and found the being of Jesus Christ expressed in Jesus’ teachings. Not Good Friday, Easter, Christmas and
Pentecost in virtual isolation from Jesus’ life, but Jesus’ life, Jesus’ call to discipleship, was interpreted as the content of Good Friday, Easter, Christmas and Pentecost. We must not forget that there are Christian circles and Christian theologians today who understand Christology virtually in terms of a birth by a vir-gin, an atoning death on the cross and a bodily/fleshy resurrection. As if it makes no differ-ence who Jesus was, why he was opposed, betrayed, sentenced, tortured and executed, and what revolution of peace and justice the resurrection set in motion. The call to follow Jesus in radical discipleship became for Bonhoeffer the well spring where renewal of the church, the content of preaching and the formation for ministry was sought.13 ‘Following Jesus’ in the obedience of faith was to give new and urgent content to the traditional theological topics of ‘conversion’, ‘justification’; and ‘sanctification’.

Of ‘cheap’ and ‘costly’ grace
Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on faith as discipleship was helpfully elaborated by his distinction between ‘cheap’ and ‘costly’ grace. Both his emphasis on faith as discipleship and his distinction between cheap and costly grace echo the 16th century Anabaptist understand-ing of faith, and their distinction between a ‘sweet’ and a ‘bitter’ Jesus. In his discussion of Luther and grace, Bonhoeffer laments that Lutherans have taken Luther’s sola gratia but have forgotten the life from which it arose, the price that God paid, and the obedience that is needed to appreciate the gift.14 In modern times this theological emphasis has fallen on fertile soil in the theologies of Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and in the various branches of liberation theology. Here is a brief citation from Bonhoeffer’s Nachfolge/Discipleship:

Cheap Grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace.

Cheap grace means ... grace without a price, without costs ...

Cheap grace means grace as doctrine, as principle, as system. It means forgiveness of sins as a general truth; it means God’s love as merely a Christian idea of God. ... Cheap grace is, thus, denial of God’s living word, denial of the incarnation of the word of God ...

Cheap grace is that grace which we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is preaching of forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absoluition without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ ...

The word of cheap grace has ruined more Christians than any commandment about works.15

Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field; for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything they have ... It is the call of Jesus Christ which causes a disciple to leave his nets and follows him ... Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which has to be asked for, the door at which one has to knock.

It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live.16

And then the challenging words which all, for whom the Reformation is important, need to hear and digest over and over again: ‘... what emerged victorious from Reformation history was not Luther’s recognition of pure, costly grace, but the alert religious instinct of human beings for the place where grace could be had the cheapest’.17

When Christ calls people, so Bonhoeffer insists in ever-new variations, he frees them ‘from all human rules, from everything which pressures, burdens, or causes worry and torment of conscience’.18 But this is only possible when the person hears the call and obeys it by following him in radical discipleship. Not the spoken confession of faith, not the carefully craft-ed liturgy, not theological doctrines, but the acts of obedience in one’s everyday life are the appropriate response to Jesus Christ.19

Bonhoeffer’s The Cost of Discipleship has encircled the world and has provided inspiration and guidance to many Christians. It has become a modern Christian classic.

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This then is the first legacy of the modern martyr and saint, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that I would like to give you for your consideration. Beyond our theolo­gies, our liturgies, our denominational politics, will we follow God’s invitation to focus our lives solely on Jesus? We recall the words of the Barmen Theological Declaration in 1934, written at the same time and in the same situation: ‘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.’20 Bonhoeffer interprets:

Those who follow Jesus’ commandments entirely, who let Jesus’ yoke rest on them without resistance, will find the burdens they must bear to be light ... Jesus demands nothing from us without giving us the strength to comply. Jesus’ commandment never wishes to destroy life, but rather to preserve, strengthen, and heal life.21
It was not long until that theology was to be put to an intensive existential test.

How can we responsibly talk of God today?
In 1943, less than ten years after writing Nachfolge / Discipleship, Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in Berlin Tegel. While in prison he wrote letters, poems, prayers and book proposals, later published in English under the title Letters and Papers from Prison.22 These are not theological treatises. They are personal thoughts which he wanted to share with friends in order to gain clarity for himself.23 One of the great theological issues that exercised Bonhoeffer in prison was what theologians call 'hermeneutics'. What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today.24 How can we talk of the biblical God in terms that the world can understand and that the people of the world find meaningful and helpful. Since we are living in a secular society, must we not learn to talk of God in non-religious, in worldly terms?25 That entails the other important issue as to how God and the world are inter-related. Is God necessary for the world to be world?

Since we are living in a secular society, must we not learn to talk of God in non-religious, in worldly terms?

Continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology?
Some people have proposed that there is a break in Bonhoeffer's theology. That there are two Bonhoeffers, two different theologies. One, the Bonhoeffer of the Nachfolge who has inspired and continues to inspire the world wide discipleship movement. The other, the quest for a non-religious, worldly interpretation of the biblical message, which has become a major focus for professional theologians.

Such an interpretation does not sufficiently recognise the situational and existential nature of theology. That there are not two, but that there is one Bonhoeffer. There is continuity in his theology. Realising, of course, that a different situation calls for a different expression of one's theology. Let us therefore relate the Bonhoeffer of Discipleship to the Bonhoeffer of the Letters and Papers from Prison.26

Continuity in Jesus Christ
The reason for the continuity in his theology is its continuing focus on Jesus Christ and on him alone.27 God can only be talked about on the basis of revelation, and God has revealed who God is and what God does in Jesus Christ.

Two things are important: his personal faith and his Christology. Both underline the continuity in his theology.

Personal faith
Bonhoeffer was a believer, and faith for him is not in the first place right doctrine or church practice, but a personal relationship to Jesus. As Bonhoeffer’s student and later himself a world famous theologian, Gerhard Ebeling, said:

The simple fact is: Jesus Christ has met him, he knows himself called and claimed by Jesus Christ, he too has allowed himself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, he has become sure of Jesus Christ the Lord. He has experienced him as the hope and driving force of his life.28

This assurance never left him. He conducted worship services in prison, he wrote prayers for his fellow prisoners. But it is the poems that allow us a rare glimpse into his soul. The famous poem ‘Who am I’, written in June 1944, speaks in moving tones of the ambiguity of Christian existence, deeply felt and, indeed, accentuated in prison. It issues in the confession: ‘Whoever I am, you know, O God, I am yours!’29

A little later, at the end of 1944, a few months before he was killed, he wrote of gracious powers that surround him and help him to greet each new day.

By gracious powers wonderfully sheltered, and confidently waiting, come what may, we know that God is with us night and morning, and never fails to greet us each new day.30

There can be no doubt that Bonhoeffer's personal faith, his commitment to follow Jesus, sustained him in difficult days. His understanding of God changed under the pressure of life, but it changed in correspondence, not with human hopes and needs and desires, but with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Christology
The theological reason for Bonhoeffer's continuity in theory and practice, is his insistence that in our search for whatever is real and true, we must look to Jesus Christ—to him alone. And in Christ, his divinity and humanity, reality is one. The world should not be divided into holy and profane. Christians should not flee into the safe harbour of the church, nor should they seek an easy and comfortable compromise with the world.

While 'religion'31 tends to separate reality into holy and profane, sacred and secular, Bonhoeffer affirms that reality cannot be divided into two spheres, into 'the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian; the other worldly, profane, natural and unchristian'.32 In Jesus Christ these two spheres have become fused to constitute one reality.33 'In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of the world.'34 There are not two realities, God and world, but one. Therefore any attempt to either absolutise one or the other—'wanting Christ without the world or the world without Christ'35—should be resisted.

Consequently, Bonhoeffer rejects two alternatives, we may call them the sectarian and the liberal alternatives. The sectarian alternative argues that Christ is the fulfilment and end of the world; that there is a radical break between faith and the world; that the world is damned and that the Christian will therefore not need to accept responsibility for the world. The world must be 'hated' and the church must withdraw from the world. The other, the liberal alternative, which has been the great temptation of all
established churches, assigns theological dignity to culture as such. By implication, this means, that the world does not really need the gospel. The only function of the gospel would be to bring to light what is already there.

In contrast to the sectarian and the liberal alternatives, we must see life as a unity.

Partaking in Christ, we stand at the same time in the reality of God and in the reality of the world. It is a denial of God's revelation in Jesus Christ to wish to be 'Christian' without being 'worldly', or (to) wish to be worldly without seeing and recognizing the world in Christ. Hence there are not two realms, but only the one realm of Christ-reality (Christuswirklichkeit), in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united.37

Bonhoeffer therefore does not counsel us to flee the world in order to find God. Neither do we need to use God for filling the gaps in our knowledge and ability. For Bonhoeffer, 'Gott ist mitten in unserem Leben jenseitig' (God is beyond in the midst of our life).38

New thoughts

Having said all that about the continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology, it cannot and must not be overlooked that in his letters from prison the theological language and the theological tone change.

Let us tune into a few selective quotations from his letters from prison:

While we can't 'separate God and miracle', we must learn 'to interpret and proclaim both in a 'non-religious' sense.

Bonhoeffer speaks of the 'Mündigkeit der Welt' (the maturity, the adulthood, the having-come-of-age of the world). He submits that we have failed to take seriously the historical process that culminated in the autonomy of humanity. 'Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God'. The consequence is, Bonhoeffer rightly fears, that 'God is being increasingly pushed out of a world that has come of age, out of the spheres of our knowledge and life'. What is the alternative? The alternative is to claim the 'world that has come of age by Jesus Christ'.40

Bonhoeffer thinks christologically. We must live in the world and before God as if there were no God.

The God who is with us, is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and his suffering ... This will probably be the starting-point for our 'secular interpretation'.41

This vulnerability of God and Christ is distinctive to the Christian vision of reality. He says:

Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the deus ex machina. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.42

Naming this new understanding of God may aid us to seek, find and experience God in different ways and in strange situations. We may pause here for a moment and turn to a poem in which Bonhoeffer summarises these new insights.

Christians and pagans

(I am not trying to create a poetic rhythm in English, but rather focus on the meaning of the text)

People go to God in their time of need, pray for help, ask for fortune and bread, for being delivered from sickness, guilt and death. All of them do so, Christians and pagans.

People go to God in God's time of need, they find him poor, scorned, without shelter and bread, they see him involved with sin, weakness and death, Christians stand by God in God's suffering.

God goes to all people in their time of need, satisfies body and soul with his bread, God dies for Christians and pagans alike on the cross, and forgives them both.

It is certain that our joy is hidden in suffering, and our life in death.

The first stanza speaks of the religious aspiration of all people. People want God to supply their needs. We have needs and desires and problems—God is there to meet them. God is there to make up for our inadequacies. God fills the gaps. And if God does not deliver, then we blame God or turn away from God. That is the way of religion. Bonhoeffer began to question this way during his time in prison. He says in the famous letter of 16 July 1944:

God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science, has been surmounted and abolished; and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion (Feuerbach!).44

In the second stanza he brings out what he sees as 'the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions'. Not a god of power, but 'only the suffering God can help'.45

What he learned had from the Sermon on the Mount, what he practised in his commitment to non-violence, what he experienced in prison, finds a deeper foundation in this theologia crucifixis. Can you not stay awake with me and for me for one hour, Jesus had asked his disciples in Gethsemane.46 Christians stay with God in God's time of need.
And yet, so the third stanza, we can only go to God and stay with God, because on the cross, God has come to all people and forgiven them.

And so we find ourselves being led back to Nachfolge. By following Jesus in the midst of the challenges and ambiguities of life, Jesus had become Bonhoeffer's ultimate concern. He was the ground and content of his life. This foundation stood firm in difficult days. By meditating that God in Christ had shown a solidarity of being with humans and their fate, Bonhoeffer was introduced to the secret which the apostle Paul heard when he appealed to God to ease his burden: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' On the basis of that divine promise Paul confessed: 'So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Cor. 12:8–10).

The Jesus who calls to discipleship is the Crucified One:

It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is metanoia: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53 ... This being caught up into the messianic sufferings of God in Jesus Christ takes a variety of forms in the New Testament. It appears in the call to discipleship, in Jesus' table fellowship with sinners ... 47

Bonhoeffer therefore does not counsel us to flee the world in order to find God. Neither do we need to use God for filling the gaps in our knowledge and ability.

Conclusion

Where are we? I have tried to suggest that Bonhoeffer was passionately concerned about the credibility and relevance of faith and of the community of faith, the church. They are to be servants of life, not death. They are to be instruments of hope, not despair. They are to reconcile and heal, not divide and destroy. The German churches had failed the German people by being concerned for their own comfort and survival, rather than confessing that 'Jesus Christ ... is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death'. 48 Bonhoeffer found resources for renewal in Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus Christ liberates the human conscience from false religious and other claims and frees the believer to tune into God's passion for the world.

Who is God? Not in the first place an abstract belief in God, in his omnipotence etc. That is not a genuine experience of God, but a partial extension of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus ... 49

In being for others we participate in the being of Christ.

While Bonhoeffer was in prison, the son of his friend Eberhard Bethge, to whom many of the prison letters were addressed, was being baptised. On that occasion Bonhoeffer wrote a long letter. He concludes that the church was so occupied with its self-survival that it had lost the credibility of being bearer of the gospel. He writes that our being Christian today will consist of two things: praying and the working for justice. 'All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action.' And then we can only patiently wait for the day 'when once again people will be called, to speak the Word of God in such a way, that the world will be transformed and renewed'. 50

Following Jesus was the content of his life—it sustained him to the end. In the days of his most rigorous theological questioning he affirmed:

It is certain that we can claim nothing for ourselves, and may yet pray for everything; it is certain that our joy is hidden in suffering, and our life in death; it is certain that in all this we are in a fellowship that sustains us. In Jesus God has said Yes and Amen to it all, and that Yes and Amen is the firm ground on which we stand. 51

May God in his mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may he lead us to himself. 52

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6. Willem A. Visser't Hooft comments that Bonhoeffer's willingness to give his life and accept death for a worthy cause makes him a 'true martyr'. 'Gespräch mit Willem A. Visser't Hooft', art.cit., p.31.
9. Ibid., p.155.
13. Eberhard Bethge comments that Discipleship is Bonhoeffer's answer to the quest for the renewal of evangelical pastors in Germany. Indeed, Discipleship 'is an answer to the issue of the nature of an ecclesiastical office (die Amtsfrage}'. 'Gesprach mit Eberhard Bethge', art.cit., p.57.
15. Ibid., pp.43f., 55.
16. Ibid., p.44f.
17. Ibid., p.49. See further, for instance, the 'Introduction' and ch. 1 on 'Costly Grace'.
18. Ibid., p.39.
19. Ibid., p.59.
23. '... I can't help sharing my thoughts with you, simply because that is the best way to make them clear to myself.' 5.5.1944; ibid., p.287.
24. Ibid., p.279. 30.4.1944.
29. The poem can be found in various places, e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, op.cit., pp.347f.
30. The whole poem can be found in various places, e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, op.cit., p.400f. I have followed a different translation.
31. For Bonhoeffer, as it was for Barth 'religion' was a negative term. It suggested a faraway-deity, individualistic longing for salvation, a deus ex machina who would deal with matters that humans cannot handle or cannot explain, and a denominationalism that divides rather than reconciles. All of that Bonhoeffer found to be relativised by faith in Jesus Christ. For this trajectory in his thinking, see especially his letters of 30.4.1944 (ibid., pp.278, 282), 5.5.1944 (ibid., pp.285-7), 29.5.1944 (ibid., pp.310f.), 8.6.1944 (ibid., pp.324-9), 27.6.1944 (ibid., pp.335-7), 30.6.1944 (ibid., pp.339-42), 8.7.1944 (ibid., pp.343-7), 18.7.1944 and 18.7.1944 (ibid., pp.357-63), 21.7.1944 (ibid., p.369f.), and his 'Outline for a book' (ibid., pp.380-3), in Letters and Papers from Prison, op.cit.
33. Ibid., pp.47-75.
34. Ibid., p.54 (emphasised by Bonhoeffer).
35. Ibid., p.58.
36. Bonhoeffer calls them the 'radical' and the 'compromise' alternatives, ibid., pp.153-7.
37. Ibid., p.58.
41. Ibid., p.360f. Letter 16.7.1944. Matthew 8:16f.: 'That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'
42. Ibid., p.361.
45. Ibid., p.361.
47. Ibid., p.361f. 18.7.1944.
51. Ibid., p.301. 21.8.1944.
52. Ibid., p.370. 21.7.1944.