

Bonhoeffer Down Under



**edited by
Gordon Preece and Ian Packer**

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AUSTRALIAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN ESSAYS CELEBRATING
THE CENTENARY OF
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S BIRTH

Edited by
Gordon Preece and Ian Packer



ADELAIDE
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In mentioning suffering it is appropriate to dedicate this book in memory of two people who have died since that conference. First, to my brother in law and in the Lord, Rob Kable who died on March 5th after a patient, difficult battle with lymphoma cancer, a man of faith who loved a good theological argument and walked the talk. Second, to our keynote speaker John (and wife Isobel) de Gruchny's son Reverend Professor Steve de Gruchy. On 21 February, 2010 he drowned while river tubing on the Mooi River in South Africa with his son David. Steve, his contributions and his work for sustainable and ethical development were, and remain, much loved and appreciated by his family, colleagues and friends around the world.

In Memoriam

Steve de Gruchy, 16 November 1961–25 February 2010

Rob Kable, 13 August 1945–5 March 2012

Foreword

Rabbi Aviva Kipen

Entering the Bonhoeffer Conversation through the Medium of Film

In 2003 I accepted an invitation to attend a complimentary preview screening of Martin Doblmeier's Bonhoeffer film documentary at Carlton's Cinema Nova. I was one of a handful of people in the auditorium for the preview and the marketing person was trying to get feedback. As I talked she became animated. There was to be a launch screening followed by a panel discussion and audience questions, but they still hadn't identified a Jewish participant. Would I be prepared to take on the challenge? What followed undoubtedly led to my invitation to write for this volume.

In 1971, Theodore A Gill¹ acknowledged that 'a memo for a movie is not a scientific biography'. He described the outline he was creating for a hypothetical movie as a 'factual work of the imagination' relying, in Gill's case, on the verified facts about Dietrich Bonhoeffer as assembled firstly by Eberhard Bethge. Yet, to enable brevity, simplicity and artistry, a film 'is a selection and arrangement of facts which the arranger believes *tell* an interesting and important *story*, which the story writer's information, intuitions and imagination tell him is the *true story*.'² [My emphases] Gill's 'cut-and-paste' intuitive approach to film creation captures a well-known dilemma: how to convey in docu-drama correct and comprehensive information but still entertain? Within the cinema form, how to *tell the story* with integrity such that the cinematic *telling* does not take priority over the actual events which inspired the moviemaker to tell that story in the first place? The process of 'adapting for the screen' frequently receives the peremptory gloss 'adapted from' or 'based upon real events' as the *caveat emptor* for filmgoers. However in Gill's case, he scrupulously identifies

1. Theodore A Gill, *Memo for a Movie* (London: SCM Press Ltd 1971), 1.

2. *Ibid.*

proposed 'liberties' which his knowledge of Bonhoeffer's life enable him to disclose and commentate. Gill did not make a film from his own memo. But decades later, Doblmeier made his own, which itself required him to 'select and discard . . . emphasise . . . and pass[ing] by . . . fill[ing] out . . . and skimp . . . To make conceptual points in narrative ways . . .'³ as enunciated by Gill a generation before.

Much of what appeared on Doblmeier's movie screen as documentary oral history were views of the man whose influence escalated rather than declined with the years following his hanging at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp, near Nuremberg, on 9 April, just before the Nazi surrender on 7 May 1945. So much material is available about and such is the respect for the Bonhoeffer, that no slight of hand in movie technique could be either necessary or tolerated. We have detailed documentation of Bonhoeffer's life, personal and professional decisions, moral choices and his written legacy in print. Yet, even when attempting to film or write about Bonhoeffer's 'truth . . . and nothing but the truth' it is still impossible to tell 'the whole truth'. When attempting any entire treatment of a subject, bias, context and historic moment have been amply demonstrated to mitigate against an enduring, definitive treatment. Readers necessarily critique new material and the skews achieved when particular contributions are juxtaposed (whether deliberately or unconsciously) to present one proposition, interpretation or theology and prevent counterweighted rebuttal. Similarly with movies, everyone's a critic! We leave the cinema and have a view of what we have just watched, whether sci-fi or period drama, thriller or action fantasy. We not only see, hear, follow and identify (or not) with the characters, but also feel a response to them and their screen experience. To the extent that we do, the movie is a success.

We all have our favourite movie actors and can sometimes quote large chunks of their repertoire. We can identify with their screen personas, but we are supposed to know the boundary between the character identities and the private lives of those who enact our movies for the screen. A screen actor may be superb in a part despite our being aware of their shortcomings or tribulations in tragic, drug addicted or physically abused lives off screen. We don't have to be transferred into a blue body and assume an avatar, in order for someone else's story to 'get under our skin'. Yet, crucially, it remains *their story*, a construction for us to observe.

3. *Ibid.*

Similarly, we revisit the work of those writers whose texts captured us in print, just as we revisit the characters of films which have marked us over time. Film functions as visual text, just as inscriptions, styli, scrolls and books did, imprinting themselves on generations for thousands of years before moving picture technology existed. The written works, which endure, provide a legacy in the chain of written tradition which has stood the tests of time, culture, language and the succession of civilizations. Contributors in this volume may or may not be remembered. We may end up as mere footnotes in the works of others down the track. But this volume joins Doblmeier's screen text in the emerging layers of accumulating responses to the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the early years of the 21st century.

Black, White and Grey Positions

Because there was no significant house lighting in the Nova cinema, the 2003 panel session was conducted in the traditional grey ambiance of the movie house. Panelists were seated at ground level. The audience was elevated in the theatre's rake and owing to the gloom, was only dimly visible to the panelists. I recognized some faces in the front rows; there were several of the 'usual suspects' in the house. But those familiar faces from the interfaith and ecumenical religious scenes were the smaller group, in a much larger audience of people who were not visible to us at all.

Perhaps the lack of illumination was (and remains, wherever the darkness of evil is allowed to linger) a metaphor for the threatening gloom within which Bonhoeffer grappled with the meta-questions as an active, committed, brilliant, young and charismatic Christian pastor and leader. He tried from abroad and also on home soil, to come to grips with the slide of his own country into moral darkness and despite the economic and political gloom settling over Europe in the 1930's, still hoped to prevent yet another 'war to end all wars'. As his resolution drafts for the August 1934 Ecumenical Youth Conference show, he was determined that around the world 'the church of Christ in the name of Christ' would prevail against forces for war. Bonhoeffer was struggling with a Christian position on peace, which was far from universally supported by his own peers.

His contact with Gandhi, who was clearly a role model in this period, invites us to note an irony in the position of the British. The UK had no difficulty in using force where its own dominions were concerned, yet (like France) was all for avoiding it in the European theatre, following the

vast losses of WWI. Bonhoeffer was learning that principles and values extracted their price, as did compromise. As a youthful and energetic advocate for the Christian life, he was testing his passions as he served a succession of ministries, which gave him the chance to leave Europe and take physical distance from unfolding events within Germany. But the non-violent protest movement developed by Gandhi, which would ultimately capture enough support to result in the post-war negotiations which granted India its independence, though much admired by Bonhoeffer and others, was regrettably not adequate or applicable to the German context.

A man of prayer and deed, as an exemplar of decision making in complex times, he is looked upon in retrospect as significant not least because of his relative youth. Bonhoeffer would soon answer the call to enact his theological position through personal choices as they inextricably reflected his beliefs and Christian commitment, once this became clear. However, he was far from the only Christian theologian whose faith was not compromised either by political events or personal circumstance. Many distinguished themselves, often in quiet ways, which were known only to a trusted circle at the time. However, Bonhoeffer's legacy of publications fuels examination of his life and the theology that informed it. Further, we must also ask how his death influenced what was later to fascinate so many. The classification of that death, by some, as martyrdom beyond that of fellow prisoners whose passing left no similar intellectual or faith legacy behind, has also left some unanswered questions which can be hinted at, if not answered here.

Inasmuch as all texts are subject to the dispositions, ideologies, times and emotional projections of their commentators, the task of prefacing the essays that follow poses not insubstantial difficulty for me. Why use a Jewish voice to introduce the contributions? Why invite into the theologically conservative Lutheran terrain of Bonhoeffer a woman rabbi who must, axiomatically, be someone who believes—alongside many other tenets - in equal gender access, the entitlement of individuals to exercise their sexuality and to shape their lives according to their understanding of its sanctity within her own religion and therefore also beyond it? The context of Bonhoeffer's moment and his legacy are being commentated in this 21st century and postmodern considerations require that the position of any author be sufficiently disclosed, as to be interrogated by her readers.

Every generation of writers is judged just as they judged the earlier contributors whose material engaged them. At least to the extent that we develop our self-critical academic lens and can anticipate our potential

to be targets of the critiques of others, we remind ourselves (and are reminded by our peers) to acknowledge ourselves as filters through which we cannot but experience what has been provided for us. Thus this Australian born, female, late middle aged mother, whose family was shaped by the Russian Revolutions and the Holocaust, who has lived and worked across the world, who has contributed thirty years of interfaith work from her standpoint of Progressive Judaism, happily observes that her 2011 responses reflect all of that. Even so, it is a less comfortable acknowledgement that my disclosures may make me unpopular both with those who, Jewish or otherwise, either disapprove of my theological position and/or assume that this contribution must be entirely approving and enthusiastic.

For some, these paragraphs will be sufficiently anathema to be discarded in favour of the actual material within the volume, much of which stands staunchly at odds with my own understanding of what God requires of us. As to whether or not I might have enjoyed the approbation or disapproval of Bonhoeffer himself, some will have already come to their conclusion on Bonhoeffer's behalf. Others will appreciate that my having accepted the invitation to contribute indicates a secure degree of comfort with ranges of views and multiple expressions of belief, despite my sometimes earning disapproval for standing in that plural company in which I am clearly at odds with some with whom I share the faith conversation. It is clear that no preface is required to explicitly endorse the content that follows. But unless I indicate what it is to which I do not align, some will criticize me for not having the courage of my conviction to articulate my separation from it. Having done so makes for a slightly uncomfortable fit within the covers of this volume yet, one, which seems necessary. For scholars of Bonhoeffer, the paradox will be instantly recognisable.

For Australians of the 21st Century, the freedom to practice our various religions is axiomatic. Our diversity demands that we see clearly the neighbours from whom we separate ourselves but whose views are theirs and, providing they do us no actual harm, ought to be seen, known and honoured for what they are. Similarly, it is clear that the many theologies of Jews and Christians cannot be aligned. But they can be respectfully identified for their coincidence with and divergence from each other. As colleagues across the faith divides conduct that process of observation and sharing, they prove that the ground of diversity can be made sufficiently spacious to accommodate all who share it with respect, particularly among those whose beliefs, practices and ideologies are vastly different from their own. That is the 'grey area' of risk in conversations about difference. The

'black and white' absolutism of extreme regimes allows for no such middle grounds or variegation of shade in the area between poles of opinion. Having accepted the invitation into this Bonhoeffer conversation, I stand in the middle ground which is not a theoretical mid-point of personal or theological neutrality. But neither is my position between black and white extremes attempting to be a grey which is bland or a shadow hard to define.

Jewish Starting Points

I cast a rearward glance at the man whose final written work was a theology of captivity and whose lived experience ended in untimely death. I read and re-read his work and the responses to it by Jewish and Christian scholars. None of us can know whether or not Bonhoeffer's position on matters referred to in this volume would have changed over time, had he lived into the later twentieth century. Bonhoeffer was denied the chance to mature and develop his early work, respond to the demands of marriage and his own children, grapple with the vast change to the world post-WWII and of theology at large to come to terms with the events perpetrated by his own nation, including the Holocaust. We cannot confirm from his writings what he knew about the Final Solution by the time of his imprisonment in 1943 or how he felt about any of the German atrocities being perpetrated. He could not have referred to them in any of his writings explicitly even before he was sent to prison, given that censors were reading every piece of mail traversing the Reich. Like all service personnel and civilians, and particularly because of his role with the Abwehr, he knew his letters were scrutinised. We may only speculate as to what Bonhoeffer's eventual post-prison voice might have become.

Many have since captured his writings to prop up their own approaches to the issues of life as Christians. The tragic irony is that these scholars can only make use of Bonhoeffer's work without its author's rebuttals because Bonhoeffer's opportunities for development were cruelly terminated. Had he survived, he would have been more than able both to affirm and also dismiss the manner in which his work has been utilized by theologians and laity alike. Detained not for his religious or racial 'genetics' (read 'not Jew or Roma, gay or other deviant') but for his role in a treasonous plot, Bonhoeffer was not obliged to write anything and had the choice of what to write and to whom, if he chose to do so. In this, whilst initially being limited to one letter a week from Tegel Prison, but having access to writing

materials and time, a desk and the solitude which allowed for thought and application, he was in the exceptional class of prisoners of the Reich. We know that he received books to keep his mind engaged and care packages from the family.

His situation was quite unlike that of Jews who (whilst held in concentration camps before wholesale slaughter abolished the need for such stage-managed niceties) were forced to write reassuring but false 'we are fine and our needs are being taken care of' post cards to their relatives, for the purpose of putting a smoke screen around the events of their impending destruction. There are many such post cards extant in museums and also treasured by the families who received them throughout the Jewish world. Those who have lost loved ones to regimes of all kinds can have a kindred feeling for Bonhoeffer's incarceration and execution. But does the inclusion of my Jewish voice in this book project an expectation that Jews and Jewish leaders in particular ought to be at the very least appreciative of the Bonhoeffer theological legacy because of his murder?

In some measure, alongside gratitude for his documented legacy, is also a gently implied suggestion that Bonhoeffer's personal courage and his ultimately becoming a victim of the Reich, link him to the Jewish victims of the Final Solution and thus create a particular Jewish connection to his situation. Bonhoeffer became a victim of the appalling Third Reich, but walked a narrow tightrope as a conscientious objector to the alleged-theology of the Reichskirche whilst being a convinced conservative Lutheran and thus inheriting its historic anti-Semitism. Just as we cannot know precisely what he knew of the methods or scale of the Final Solution, we equally cannot know how his theology of Jews and Judaism was responding, because he was not free to write on the subject in his final years.

Clearly he considered the religion of the Jewish people and those if its adherents who both remained inside the Jewish fold or converted 'out' and into Christianity, worthy of detailed review. Undoubtedly he was moved as a Christian to be appalled at their treatment. Yet, his mission was one of bringing all-comers to the good news of Christ. There is no doubt that everything written from Tegel and beyond places his task as a Christian at the forefront of his consolation during imprisonment, at his disappointment that the justice system of his native land had been hi-jacked and the increasing appreciation that he was powerless to fix the trouble he was in. He shared, to some degree, what others were suffering there in similar conditions of incarceration and privation. He ministered to fellow Chris-

tian prisoners and was recognised for his family, academic and ecclesiastic status by many of his guards. The affronts of prison life were clear in *Letters and Papers from Prison*⁴, which depicts privations, cold, hunger and the company he was forced to keep there.

But these were minor discomforts relative to the narratives I have absorbed since childhood, of the experiences of Jewish prisoners of the Reich who survived and whose testimonies have been captured in the past 20 years by Holocaust foundations and museums as well as through living history programs funded by Australian grants. Whilst I read his experiences, not far from Bonhoeffer's texts in translation are the voices of Jewish friends and relatives whose stories have rung in my ears from childhood and whose concentration camp tattoos became visible in the Australian summer months of short sleeves and swim suits. Bonhoeffer never experienced what it was to have been considered, as they were, vermin, less than human, unworthy of sufficient caloric intake to sustain life other than as a human slave with calculable life span or the source of body hair which would end up as upholstery stuffing in German living room sofas or body fat for bars of washing soap. In this, it is appropriate to pause and reflect on the extent to which Bonhoeffer could have known the existential value of the Jewish Other from the Reich's and its supporters' perspective. Whilst that is not the purpose of this volume, any Australian publication that tackles the topic cannot ignore the standpoint of the immigrant Jewish Survivors and their children and grandchildren of our nation. My contribution represents their continuum, in some small measure.

Further, whilst every death at the hand of evil regimes is a calamity, only when the millions of deaths are sifted can individuals be confirmed among those victims whose memory *cannot* be captured because they leave neither legacy nor legatees. I pay full tribute to the Bonhoeffer family's recorded courage, but it does not assuage my discomfort with the notion that his Christian Martyrdom, attributed to religiously motivated civil disobedience, atones in any way for the deaths of others who had no means of such civic resistance on the scale that his class and access to the German hierarchy permitted. That Bonhoeffer embraced the opportunity that his access provided is fully honoured. Yet running in parallel to his story are millions of others of a range of religious persuasions, which were

4. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Ed Eberhard Bethge translated Reginald H Fuller, (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

not touched by his life, writing, experience or theology, despite his charisma or popularity then, nor now.

Jewish Experiences and Beyond: Emotions Owned and Declared

It is certain that the contribution Bonhoeffer made to the ecumenical discussion between Christian denominations was significant and that those who aligned with his courageous application of faith in troubled times stand in sharp contrast to others, whose pragmatism or cowardice resulted in collaboration with evil regimes. However, it is not at all proven that this entitles us to draw a direct line between his input to Christian ecumenism and the developing understanding of 21st century interfaith conversation, of which there are many strands, styles, purposes and outcomes. Though some may wish to imagine him as having been a force for international interfaith dialogue, it is a contemporary projection to presume that he would have chosen to extend his *ecumenical* track record to what we now recognize as *interfaith* work, post war.

Even so, drawing on a Jewish voice for this volume implies an interfaith strand to the Bonhoeffer legacy. Very few theologians of any faith in the 1930s and 40s were articulating the now-familiar notion that there are many paths to the One God, who is perceived and worshipped in many ways by the faithful of all kinds. Significantly, Gandhi began referring to God rather than Gods, which demonstrates the emerging awareness of a shared vocabulary with which religions across the divides could converse, even though they did not yet share the same terrain. But it took John XXIII to dismantle the culpability of the Jews as a collective, before there could be any official toleration of the Jewish identity, let alone a meaningful acceptance of it, by the majority of Christians, whether Catholic or not. Until then, virtually all Christian theologies viewed Jews and their tradition as having been ‘superseded’ by Christianity; we remained ‘obstinately stuck’ on our original, Jewish position, ‘depriving’ ourselves of the salvation of the immediate successor, Christianity. Regardless of outright prejudice at worst or denominational ambivalence at best towards the Jews, many heroic Christians distinguished themselves by living lives dedicated, in part, to feeding, hiding, smuggling and saving Jews long before their leaderships had a policy platform in place to explain their institutionalised persecution of thousands of years. We know that whilst not *all* Christians subscribed or subscribe to that supersessionist approach, many still do.

Critically, however, we must ask whether Bonhoeffer believed in it. Whilst his sense of outrage at the behaviour of the Reich is uncontested and all applaud his preparedness to actively work against its activities through covert intelligence operations and overtly through publishing preaching and the establishment of his seminary, it is also clear that his understanding of Christian mission was conservative and thus our speculation about how he would have resolved his theology of Jewish distinctiveness must remain unclear. This is the conundrum of any Jewish outsider's view of the Christianity at the core of Bonhoeffer's identity. The actions of the individual who preferred non-aggression, but ultimately did not flinch from attempting to stop his own government's excesses and ultimately paid the price for it, were a complex weave of conviction, faith, disapproval and example.

Perhaps it is the absence of unanimous Jewish praise for that complex weave that has caused Stephen R Haynes unease. Undoubtedly Christians of a range of persuasions would prefer Jewish responses to Bonhoeffer be unqualified and appreciative (albeit that they must also be diverse in the breadth of their origins and theological positions). But if Bonhoeffer was himself a complex character, then it is unsurprising that the Jewish responses to his work are not uni-dimensional. Haynes (2006⁵) lists an overview of Jewish responses to Bonhoeffer's legacy, by decade. European Jews experienced the evils of the Reich and lost loved ones to its killing machine. Survival was the first imperative. For those few who did survive, rebuilding life, finding relationships, having children, earning a livelihood and coping with new successions of political regimes were the immediate challenge. Few were interested to engage in a post war deconstruction of Christian theologies, not even those that were contemporary and written by individuals as courageous as Bonhoeffer. Few of those who survived had enjoyed the privilege of education and could have done so, even if they had wished.

It is extremely difficult to speculate about how the Jewish Holocaust Survivors might have disentangled their personal affect in considering anything German, had they been moved to try to consider the efforts of someone who was himself a dissenter from that evil to which they and many others of different minority status were also subjected. Haynes's review of Jewish responses to Bonhoeffer begins in the 1960s, because until the survivor generation entered professional age, almost anything Ger-

5. Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: post-Holocaust Perspectives*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

man was tainted with the sharpness of Holocaust association. That tended to be less the case in the Second (born 1945 to 1965, of whom I am one) and Third (1966 to 1990) Generation Survivors—the distinction of this title is a badge of honour ‘worn’ by the children and grandchildren of actual Survivors—born to parents who had survived the Holocaust destruction of Europe. Still, it is unsurprising that most Jewish scholars of the years immediately following the Holocaust found it difficult or even unnecessary to treat the content of Bonhoeffer’s material. Not least, because of the emotions aroused by the catastrophic landscape of 1930s – 1940s Germany and its policies, which rested upon the institutionalised anti-Semitism that had been the endemic precondition which enabled systematic Jewish numeric and social destruction on a vast scale. Considering Bonhoeffer’s work or experience simply wasn’t a Jewish occupation of any quantity till the first post-war generation went to college.

The freedom to use Bonhoeffer’s original writings to assert current propositions is, itself, the resulting legacy of our present freedoms, of which freedom to think, speak, publish and ravage the opinions of others within the academy are expressions. Where political platforms exist which are abhorrent, whose consequences would result in mass destruction, which have the capacity to remove whole nations, ethnic or faith groups, there needs to be staunch and active opposition for them to be successfully overthrown. The price is high for such opposition. Bonhoeffer went to his execution with calm confidence that he was destined for something better beyond this world, secure in his belief, having made extraordinary choices, flagrantly repudiating the invitations to collude with the ‘state church,’ preferring the persecution of the Confessing Church and its independence. He made heroic decisions as a German national and within the web of family relationships which connected him to his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi’s role in the failed assassination attempts to depose Hitler. Having refused to collude with the Reichskirche and having contributed to the failed plot were Bonhoeffer’s choices; he knew the risks and took them, to his credit.

Had the assassination plot succeeded and among the consequences the Final Solution been prevented, or at the very least hindered and interrupted, then perhaps there would have been greater awareness within the general Jewish community of the man and his works. But I venture to suggest that the vast majority of Australian Jews would never have heard of Dietrich Bonhoeffer until the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd invoked his memory in the article which appeared in newspapers across the na-

tion in 2009 and is included as a paper in this collection. Despite its internationally significant number of Holocaust survivor refugee immigrants having contributed to Australian society in the past 60 years, it may startle many Christians to know that the name of Bonhoeffer would not have been anywhere on the radar of Jewish people here unless they had specific academic or recent inter-faith connections which brought them into contact with it, or perhaps having been advised by the Jewish community newspapers that there was an issue of recognition relating to him.

One such cue would have been the second of the decisions by the world's preeminent Holocaust memorial institution in Jerusalem *Yad Vashem's* decision not to admit him to the honour roll of the Righteous Among the Nations. That is the designation extended to those non-Jews whose individual courage resulted in the saving of Jews despite the mortal risk attached to their actions. Despite repeated reviews, there is no evidence that Bonhoeffer's primary motive was to save individual Jews and this has resulted in no individual testimony being available in the archives of Yad Vashem by which to affirm him as one of the Righteous, a title which many continue to assert would be appropriate. Whilst Haynes imputes to that decision 'the murky politics of the Jewish community'⁶ in order to review Haynes's conclusion, I wrote to Yad Vashem myself. The 2010 response includes the following from the Director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department:

'The Righteous were defined by the law establishing Yad Vashem in 1953 as those 'who risked their lives to save Jews'. This definition has been underpinning the Commission's work from the very beginning. We are perfectly aware that resistance to the Nazis took many forms, and that there are many heroic and deserving persons. But our mandate is restricted to those whose purpose it was to save Jews and who were willing to pay a price for this. This delineates a limited group within larger circles of people who helped Jews, but whose activity didn't involve risks, or of another group of people who resisted the Nazis in other ways.'

Whilst several American Jewish figures have repeatedly agitated for the honorific title to be conferred on Bonhoeffer, Haynes doesn't detail what

6. *Ibid*, 18.

he thinks is 'murky' about the repeated reviews in Jerusalem that kept coming to the same conclusions. But undoubtedly the adjective is designed to be a negative judgment upon the process of whose outcome he clearly disapproves. Perhaps, as the Yad Vashem response above indicates, Haynes is trying to coax a unique status for Bonhoeffer on the grounds of his achievements that—from the point of view of many—place him in a uniquely praiseworthy position. Another thing we cannot know for certain is whether the punctilious Bonhoeffer would have considered stretching the criteria to enable his own award either necessary or desirable. But we can suspect, on the basis of his writing and personal style, that he might not have thought it appropriate and certainly its precedent-setting bending of the rules would seem to be something he would have disdained. So what does the campaign for, against and about the non-conferral of the title represent? Many virtually unknown individuals who risked their lives have received the honour and their names can easily be viewed on the website of Yad Vashem, as can Von Dohnanyi's. Is it that Christianity (or particular Christians) would like to be able to say that there was a world-class pastor, scholar and advocate who can be counted among the Righteous and thus there remains a little less collective guilt for the deaths of so many Jews? Surely use of the 'collective guilt' argument is ironic, if John XXIII's *Nostra Aetate* declaration was correct and Bonhoeffer's verifiable actions stand on their own merits in this matter, without the need for either Jewish or Christian champions to agitate for him.

Only in the case of the Jews did Hitler imperil his war effort by diverting trains, staff, materials and technology to the purpose of destroying millions of Jewish people from wherever Nazism spread, regardless of the progress of the military war effort. This is best known from the Holocaust in Europe particularly the destruction of Rhodesian, Salonikan and Athenian Jews in waves between 1943 and 1944 and Hungarian Jewry in May-June and November 1944. Less well known, is the proposed North African destruction of Jews, which would have begun in earnest, had it not been for the collapse of the *Afrikkakorps* in 1943. However, millions of victims of the Reich were marked for destruction not by virtue of their political deviance, their ideological risk-taking, espionage or their use of the pulpit as a mass medium of defiance.

Many who were an impediment to 'racial purity' were obliterated from the population of the Reich, in a program which began with the euthenas-

ing of Aryan, Christian children left blind, deaf, dumb or brain damaged by childhood diseases.⁷ In the absence of German heroes who are known to have fought for their preservation and been recognised for that defiance of state policy, is it easier to suggest that the lack of a Jewish honour for a courageous Christian is more 'murky' than the collusion of low-ranking German officers who began mass killing strategies against helpless Christian children? Those victims of the Reich had no opportunity or capacity to leave any repudiation of their murder, which was covered up for decades. If there is outrage at the killing of Bonhoeffer, then that outrage must be multiplied to match the millions who perished without the opportunity for the dignity of consolation through a cultivated and sophisticated faith in their final moments.

Rearward Glance

Without doubt, Bonhoeffer was an exemplary man whose theology drove his actions. He was gifted and diligent, a dutiful and affectionate son, a reliable friend and at the end of his life a fiancé. He tried, with many others, but failed to prevent war. He did not avert his eyes from the excesses of Hitler and acted where many others chose not to do so. He walked a difficult tightrope in the 1930s but ultimately, joined an assassination plot for which his brother-in-law lost his life and for which he would pay the same price. In this, Bonhoeffer was not a victim to be likened to so many others who also died, but had neither the means at their disposal to act against the state nor, given the chance, had the will to do so.

Bonhoeffer achieved greatness because his aspiration to live a fully Christian life drove him to participate in actions that would never have needed to be taken in a Godly world. In order to prevent further depravity, this man whose religious sophistication and theological impact is uncontested, took steps for which he was fully prepared to account to God in the final reckoning. The self-possession with which Bonhoeffer went to his execution was recorded by other prisoners. It is testament to the absolute confidence in the judgment he would receive from the merciful and loving Christ in whom his faith was unshakable. Some who quibble with and are made uneasy by his indirect participation in the plot to kill

7. The work of Deborah Lipstadt uncovered much of this in the 1990s, long before she turned her attention to David Irving's brand of Holocaust denial.

Hitler do him an injustice when reading his theology without reference to his example in lived experience and at the moment of his death.

Bonhoeffer studied the teachings of the past and met or corresponded with the role models of his own time, discerning new theological applications but speaking in a voice of his culture, class, milieu and Germanic measure and precision. He came from the level of society about whom the breathless and adoring Maria wrote in 1943, in reference to her patients in the Clemeninenhaus Hospital in Hamburg, 'the first thing you learn is that the educated, wealthy breed are a really awful bunch'.⁸ He was educated and more than comfortably endowed with worldly goods. Yet we assume that she would not have fallen for him had he been 'awful'. Indeed, he comes across as having been a very caring and likeable man who managed his great abilities with self-possession on the world stage and also in his prison cell.

He was unbending in his faith, but we cannot know how that faith would have reflected a future which he never had the chance to enjoy. Despite his tussles with the theology of separation of church and state, he judged that the more noble of options was to protest through his living example, rather than sit on his hands and do nothing. We note both his active political choices, of which all who wonder whether they would respond to the call to action can be proud and its outcome, with which we can sympathise. But Bonhoeffer had the luxury of making the decision as to whether or not to join the German Resistance. Unlike others, Christians and non-Christians whose physical disability, mental handicap, political views, sexual orientation or ethnic origin marked them for 'concentration', forced labour and death and who were taken away as a matter of policy, Bonhoeffer died as a result of making a decision and taking the consequence. He died a German, an Aryan and a Christian and paid the price for being a dissenter from the corruption of Aryan German Christians of the Reichskirche and Catholic churches.

We have no record of the extent to which he knew about or was troubled by the post 1942 policies that attempted to take the ideals of Aryan race laws to their ultimate conclusion. We do accept that even if he did know, he could not have written anything about them from prison and thus must accept his silence and allow ourselves to speculate, but not conclude. The millions who died in Hitler's attempt to 'cleanse' his world did not have at their disposal the means by which to mount an attempt on

8. Maria Von Wedermeyer from, *Love Letters From Cell 92*, English translation, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 29.

the Fuhrer's life in order to stop the carnage. The Allies who did have that capacity, specifically the British Home Office, were informed of the gas chambers and crematoria at death camps, which exterminated millions and incinerated their remains and asked to arrange for bombardment of those installations. The claims were dismissed by Civil Servants who extended their stereotyping of Jews to include their alleged propensity to tell tall tales and thus refuted the evidence on the grounds that its scale had to have been fabricated. Even when the death camps had been verified, bombing was considered too terrible to contemplate 'because inmates would die'. Thus, as a result of deliberate inaction, further millions certainly did die and there was no disruption to their orchestrated destruction as might have been the result of allied bombings of camps of which Auschwitz-Birkenau is the symbol.

The extent to which the courage of the powerless could be exercised against a regime which successively stripped them of their rights to education, work, property, food, proximity to their family and ultimately their life, was limited to the individual and collective acts of resistance against the system and humanity towards each other. Bonhoeffer the prisoner wrote of declining additional food from the prison kitchen realising that it would be provided to him at the expense of the rations of other inmates. But his daily ration whilst extremely meager is not a deliberate starvation allocation, which would result in the deaths of all inmates as deliberate policy. We are similarly touched by the gift of Maria's butter ration to her betrothed in the hope that his suffering would be ameliorated. Whilst she fantasised about the furniture they might acquire for their future together, her gift was a tangible help at the expense of her own rations. There is a touching mutuality here alongside a loving irony.

These observations remind us that similar questions must be asked of the writers who add to the Bonhoeffer tradition. Some employ his courage as a rallying cry to galvanise us in our present day to act with faith and courage in response to injustice, knowing that there will be an earthly price to pay in health, freedom, cost to career and family relationships. Others use his work to add veracity to their claims of what constitutes right action in these times, just as he and all biblical and exegetical scholars have done before them. Perhaps God does not reply directly to those who reach wrong conclusions on behalf of the Divine or else they wouldn't have such long careers. What remains is that we are obliged to be honest with ourselves and grapple with our own faith systems as we imbue them with our needs and wants, as we use texts to serve what we

believe to be right but which God neither confirms nor denies. All contributors in this volume have done the same. What remains is our trust that readers will scan our offerings and at least pause to reflect on their truth and shelf life.

End Note

Having been labeled a 'double agent', usually not a compliment, a small but important correction must be noted, because Bonhoeffer's unique situation relies on his integrity as the foundation upon which his contribution is assessed posthumously. It is undisputed that his theology was Christian and conservative, in the German early-Modern style, with meticulously verified source materials assembled with traditional precision in careful sequence to form logical progress toward unassailable conclusions. Whilst that scholarship heritage, cultural style and gender presumption about pre-war Christian theology marks it as being vastly different from that of my own, its integrity provides the ground upon which to stand for the purpose of commentating from the Postmodern, late Feminist, some would say Post-Christian time frame. Bonhoeffer himself may have had the greatest difficulty in accepting the voice of someone who deliberately drifted away from the orthodoxy of her Jewish childhood formation and ultimately became Australia's first woman ordained a rabbi.

Yet, at precisely the time that Dietrich was working abroad for the World Council of Churches, moving on the international stage where women were largely the supporters but not the key players, the first woman to seek rabbinic ordination in the contemporary period was preparing herself for the role in Berlin. Regina Jonas commenced her career training as a teacher and progressed to advanced level study at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the Academy for Higher Jewish Studies in Berlin. She would complete all the requirements set for male students but still be denied ordination until 1935, by which time the urgency of Jewish community need had become extremely pressing.

Rabbi Leo Baeck, of traditional background and Liberal persuasion, was the undisputed figurehead of German Jewry at the time. He is alleged to have declined to provide her with ordination on the grounds that the consequence would impact negatively on the internal dynamics of the Jewish community. Jonas found another Rabbi to admit her to the task and title. But by the time she and Baeck were interned at Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, together with other key Jewish leaders and intellectuals, Rabbi Jonas was contributing in every way to

the pastoral and intellectual needs of the inmates, as did Rabbi Baeck, for whom the Progressive rabbinic seminary of London where I trained, was named.

Like most rabbinic students of London's Leo Baeck College, I had taken my first schooled steps in Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue at the Catholic 'Hedwig Dransfeld Haus' in Bendorf, near Bonn, Germany in the late 1980s. I had been obliged to dwell in the country, hear the language, work with German Christians and Muslims and critique my own responses to being in the place whose very name conjured the Holocaust in ways which were only beginning to be labeled with new understandings of trauma transmission. I do not recall Bonhoeffer's name or theology making a mark as part of those experiences. Yet, studying and engaging in weeklong encounters with strangers who were religiously and culturally 'other' was the start of my embrace of empathic, rather than simply academically critical study of their traditions.

After months of struggling with my complex responses to the papers which follow, I conclude this Preface sitting at my desk in Berlin, in the pre-dawn morning of February 11th, the second day of the Berlin International Film Festival. I am here to interact with the film industry representatives, to see movies and hopefully begin to arrange to secure them for screening at the Jewish Film Festivals in Australia later this year. My hotel sits only a few meters from the excavated basements of former Nazi Headquarters and a little further from Check Point Charlie, which remains even though the swathe of the now-dismantled Wall nearby has largely been filled with new buildings and green spaces. Last night I walked past the offices of the Evangelical Church of Germany and began to feel that next week I must seek out the Bonhoeffer trail and walk some of Bonfoeffer's path with deliberation and thoughtfulness. I have been changed by the experience of having written for this volume. I have the chance to reflect on the process and its result in the very city in which Bohoeffer lived and was imprisoned. I am ready to embrace what follows in affect and further study. I suspect that there will be other consequences arising from my opinions. I hope they will be positive and bring further conversations on the ground of religious diversity. If they are not, then there is no need to flinch from the consequences. This is a new beginning in sense and experience, even if some of the papers will seem familiar though the voices of their authors. As we weigh our replies, let them be nuanced and multi-dimensional and make room for others on the grounds of faith, lest we repeat the very patterns which deprive so many of their lives even now.

Introduction

Gordon Preece

If Protestants had saints, Dietrich Bonhoeffer—martyred under Hitler on 9 April 1945 just days before the Allies reached his concentration camp—would be one of the first canonised. Not just his unsought martyr's death,¹ but his life's movement from privilege to growing identification with the suffering, his courageous return from the safety and beckoning success of the US to Germany, his work with the Confessing Church and, more controversially, with the underground resistance in the plot to assassinate Hitler, all argue his case for canonisation.

Bonhoeffer's books—*Discipleship*, *Life Together*, *Letters and Papers from Prison* and *Ethics* the best known—have nurtured many during dark nights of the soul, during difficult days for the Australian church, and desperate days for the South African church. His writings have been my (Preece's) companion since late adolescence; they and his friend Bethge's biography of Bonhoeffer kept me going during my son's second major bipolar episode in 2006. The congruence between Bonhoeffer's life and thought, his 'walking the talk', 'sets him apart from most public figures in his time and our own'.²

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1. See Craig J Slane, *Bonhoeffer as Martyr: Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004).
 2. Stephen R Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004). But see also his *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) for a discerning account of Bonhoeffer's gradual development, eg in understanding the plight of the Jews and his own passive complicity in that through stereotypical views of them. Bonhoeffer was more than 'the best of a bad lot' but he was also a man of his own time. It is important to hear these antidotes to hagiography in the light of Rabbi Kiven's challenging foreword to our volume.

Like all 'saints' made into static statues, as Carl Wendell Hines' wonderful poem 'Now that he is safely dead'³ warns us, if we are not to build mere monuments, rather than a movement for change, we must move even beyond the originating hero. Bonhoeffer is among ten twentieth-century martyrs above the Great West Door at Westminster Abbey, where their portraits often tell more about the artists and their age than the saint and theirs, the movement of their lives and the movements they belonged to or founded.⁴ This is certainly true of Bonhoeffer and the Church of his anguished age. As Ragan Sutterfield writes, 'Bonhoeffer is not a comfortable saint; his is a sainthood of contradictions. Since September 11 [and his death] no Christian figure has been appealed to so much or so broadly as Bonhoeffer. But Bonhoeffer has not been a single saint. He is now the pacifist Bonhoeffer [the Bonhoeffer Four⁵], the just-war Bonhoeffer [Jean-Bethke-Elshstein and George W Bush], the resistant Bonhoeffer,⁶ even the terrorist Bonhoeffer.⁷ We are left to ask, where is Bonhoeffer the man in all of the invocations of his name?'⁸

Bonhoeffer's writings are often read by both left and right, liberals and conservatives, as if they are separate, contradictory fragments—not helped by the fact his *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (LPP) were smuggled in pieces out of prison. That is why Karl Barth focused on his student's earlier writings rather than the more 'enigmatic' later ones.⁹

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3. Written in 1971 three years after Martin Luther King's death and cited in Vincent G Harding, 'Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr and the Future of America', *Journal of American History*, 74 (September 1987): 468.
 4. See Stephen R Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) for a discerning account of Bonhoeffer's gradual development, eg in understanding the plight of the Jews and his own passive complicity in that plight through stereotypical views on the Jews. Bonhoeffer was more than 'the best of a bad lot' but he was also in many ways a man of his own time. It is vital to hear these antidotes to hagiography in the light of Rabbi Kiven's challenging foreword to our volume.
 5. Talisman Sabre, 'The Bonhoeffer 4 & Kevin Rudd' in Pace e Bene <<http://paceebene.org/blog/jarrold-mckenna/talisman-sabre-bonhoeffer-5-kevin-rudd>>. Accessed 7 April 2012.
 6. Larry L Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).
 7. RodtRDJ, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Nonviolent Terrorist', in Political Jesus at <<http://politicaljesus.com/2010/01/27/dietrich-bonhoeffer-nonviolent-terrorist/>>. Accessed 3 April 2012. Bonhoeffer has also been appealed to by assassins of abortion doctors.
 8. 'No Easy Saint', *Books & Culture* (May/June 2005) with a range of mainly US examples.
 9. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (London: Fountain, 1977), 792 citing *Die Mundige Welt*, Vol I 1955, 121ff.

This has led to a split in the church between those who take different sides of Bonhoeffer's legacy, either the worldly, 'religionless Christianity', or the worshipful community of disciples—and we are greatly impoverished because of its fragmentation—like a bird with one wing. Earlier on, *LPP* (or, rather, sound-bites from it) was a set text for the 'God is dead', situation ethics, and 'Secular City' movements of the 1960s. *The Cost of Discipleship*¹⁰ and *Life Together* were compulsory reading material for the Evangelical radical discipleship and Christian community movements of the 1970s and 80s, of which I was a part.

Eric Metaxas' best-seller *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* is Exhibit A for the conservative Evangelical tendency to see Bonhoeffer in its own image.¹¹ Evangelical Rhys Bezzant's review of Metaxas is rightly critical of such tendencies:

I am waiting for a modern biography of Bonhoeffer that is fair and doesn't try to force him into an evangelical box. [Metaxas' biography makes] Bonhoeffer appear to be a conservative evangelical, who read his Bible every day, who hated preaching . . . divorced from the Scriptural text, and who had a conversion experience in a Baptist Church in Harlem. Actually, he confessed to his closest friend that there were times when he found it too difficult to read the Bible and pray, he was no inerrantist, and had multiple turning-points on an erratic pathway to sanctification . . . I was left wondering if this was a Bonhoeffer deliberately shaped for right-wing Christian conservatives in the US, who would value the Bible-reading Bonhoeffer, but may be less appreciative of the Bonhoeffer who criticises Christians too closely aligned with power.¹²

Fortunately Bezzant's prayers were answered by Schlingensiepen's recent biography.¹³

10. As then incorrectly known instead of the German *Discipleship* (*Nachfolge*).

11. Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010). See Evangelical historian Richard Weikart, 'So Many Different Bonhoeffers?' *Trinity Journal* 32 NS (2011), 69, 72–75 for a telling critique of Metaxas and other ahistorical readings of Bonhoeffer, from right and left theologians.

12. Rhys Bezzant, *Essentials* (Spring 2011), 11.

13. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).