

The Cost of Discipleship

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich

Foreword

Highlight(yellow) - Page 11 · Location 52

“WHEN CHRIST CALLS a man,” says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “he bids him come and die.”

Memoir

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National Socialism was a brutal attempt to make history without God

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and to found it on the strength of man alone.

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He went to Pomerania to direct an illegal Church Training College, first in a small peninsula in the Baltic, later on in Finkenwalde near Stettin.

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This College was not formed after any existing model.

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“I shall have no right,” Bonhoeffer wrote to Niebuhr before leaving America, “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....”

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The guiding force in Bonhoeffer’s life, underlying all that he did, worked and suffered for, was his faith and love of God, in whom he found peace and happiness.

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Bonhoeffer believed in man as a free spiritual being, but this freedom was conferred and inspired by divine grace and granted man, not for his glorification, but for the conservation of the divine ordering of human life.

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To Bonhoeffer, Christianity was not the concern of the believing, pious soul who shuts himself up and keeps himself within the bounds of the sacramental sphere. No, according to him Christianity has its place in this world and the Church as the Body of Christ, and the fellowship in him can only be the visible Church.

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Christian must be ready for martyrdom and death. It is only in this way that man learns faith.

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These men were in truth the upholders of the European and Western tradition in Germany, and it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who more than anybody else realized that nothing less than a return to the Christian faith could save Germany.

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Bonhoeffer accepted the traditional Lutheran view that there was a sharp distinction between politics and religion. Gradually, however, he revised his opinion, not because he was a politician or because he refused to give Caesar his due, but because he came to recognize that the political authority in Germany had become entirely corrupt and immoral and that a false faith is capable of terrible and monstrous things.

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the process of debasing Christianity as inaugurated by liberal theology led, in the long run, to a complete perversion and falsification of the essence of Christian teaching by National Socialism.

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Bonhoeffer did not take the pacifist line,

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we owe it to the inspiration of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life and death, and of those who died with him, that Western civilization can be saved.

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He has set a model for a new type of true leadership inspired by the gospel, daily ready

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for martyrdom and death and imbued by a new spirit of Christian humanism and a creative sense of civic duty.

Introduction

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How can he help us to be good Christians in the modern world?

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When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience. If they follow Jesus, men escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ.

Part I: Grace and Discipleship

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Grace is represented as the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost!

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In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God,

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Yet it is imperative for the Christian to achieve renunciation, to practise self-effacement, to distinguish his life from the life of the world.

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Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

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Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross,

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grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

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Luther grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son:

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In the life of Peter

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grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs.

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Thus monasticism became a living protest against the secularization of Christianity and the cheapening of grace.

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Luther had grasped by faith the free and unconditional forgiveness of all his sins. That experience taught him that this grace had cost him his very life, and must continue to cost him the same price day by day. So

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But if grace is the data for my Christian life, it means that I set out to live the Christian life in the world with all my sins justified beforehand. I can go and sin

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as much as I like, and rely on this grace to forgive me, for after all the world is justified in principle by grace. I can therefore cling to my bourgeois secular existence, and remain as I was before, but with the added assurance that the grace of God will cover me.

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those who try to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves.

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What had happened to all those warnings of Luther’s against preaching the gospel in such a manner as to make men rest secure in their ungodly living?

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Cheap grace has turned out to be utterly merciless to our Evangelical Church.

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The word of cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works.

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How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?

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grace simply means discipleship.

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Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship,

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and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

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In such a religion there is trust in God, but no following of Christ.

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The call to follow implies that there is only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God.

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Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting—they must rise and follow him.

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For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.

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Unbelief thrives on cheap grace, for it is determined to persist in disobedience.

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to rely on Christ’s word, and cling to it as offering greater security than all the securities in the world.

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it is possible to have wealth and the possession of this world’s goods and to believe in Christ—so that a man may have these goods as one who has them not.

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The elimination of single-minded obedience on principle is but another instance of the perversion of the costly grace of the call of Jesus into the cheap grace of self-justification. By this means a false law is set up which deafens men to the concrete call of Christ.

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In our effort to combat legalism we hand ourselves to the worst kind of legalism. The only way of overcoming the legalism is by real obedience to Christ when he calls us to follow him; for in Jesus the law is at once fulfilled and cancelled.

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the whole Word of the Scriptures summons us to follow Jesus.

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Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.

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they are left free to choose for themselves, nothing is expected of them, nothing forced upon them. So crucial is the demand of the present hour that the disciples must be left free to make their own choice before they are told of the law of discipleship.

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To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.

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Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection.

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The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.

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only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.

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But how is the disciple to know what kind of cross is meant for him? He will find out as soon as he begins to follow his Lord and to share his life.

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Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship.

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the Church as the community of those “who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel’s sake.”

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Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.

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To bear the cross proves to be the only way of triumphing over suffering.

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Suffering has to be endured in order that it may pass away.

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For God is a God who bears. The Son of God bore our flesh, he bore the cross, he bore our sins, thus making atonement for us. In the same way his followers are also called upon to bear, and that is precisely what it means to be a Christian.

Part II: The Sermon on the Mount

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When reproached, they hold their peace; when treated with violence they endure it patiently; when men drive them from their presence, they yield their ground. They will not go to law to defend their rights, or make a scene when they suffer injustice, nor do they insist on their legal rights. They are determined to leave their rights to God alone—

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God does not forsake the earth: he made it, he sent his Son to it, and on it he built his Church.

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In order that they may be merciful they cast away the most priceless treasure of human life, their personal dignity and honour.

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He will cover them with his own honour and remove their disgrace.

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Who is pure in heart? Only those who have surrendered their hearts completely to Jesus that he may reign in them alone.

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Only those whose hearts are undefiled by their own evil—and by their own virtues too.

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They are wholly absorbed by the contemplation of God.

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not only have peace but make it.

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renounce all violence and tumult.

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They maintain fellowship where others would break it off. They renounce all self-assertion, and quietly suffer in the face of hatred and wrong.

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Not recognition, but rejection, is the reward they get from the world for their message and works.

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For its own sake, as well as for the sake of the earth, the salt must remain salt, the disciple community must be faithful to the mission which the call of Christ has given it.

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salt was required in the ritual of the Old Testament sacrifices, and why in the baptismal rite of the Roman Church salt is placed in the infant’s mouth

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A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him. “Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on the stand.”

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The only way to overcome our enemy is by loving him.

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our enemies Jesus means those who are quite intractable and utterly unresponsive to our love,