

WHO IS

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

"The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live... The rising generation will always instinctively discern which of these we make the basis of our actions, for it is their own future that is at stake." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Thanks to a best-selling biography by Eric Metaxas, **Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become known in our time by four dramatic titles: pastor, martyr, prophet and spy.** Though these four are certainly true and descriptive of Bonhoeffer's story, there is one other title that led to the others: youth worker.

He was born in 1906 as the sixth of eight children in a religious, but not church-attending home. He was highly educated, earning his doctorate with honors in Berlin and defending his dissertation on the Church as a community of Christians (as opposed to a cultural necessity or an ancient ritual, as it was seen at the time).

He dove, with all his characteristic passion and vision, into children's and youth ministry. He even chose a group of promising young men to disciple and share life with every Thursday night, discussing anything from politics to culture to religion.

In 1928, he took a pastoral assistant vicar position at a German-speaking church in Barcelona, Spain. This congregation, however, was full of comfortable diplomats and expats unaffected by the economically devastating terms of surrender to a crushed post-World War I Germany. He saw an un-

challenged, religiously apathetic congregation and sought to change it in his one-year assistantship. He focused heavily on investing into the children and students, seeing great transformation and multiplication by communicating large concepts in simple terms, so that even the most unchurched kids could understand basic theology.

At this time, Germany trusted in the grand promises of Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer spoke out prophetically against the Nazi platform (even his earliest radio broadcast was cut off before he could finish). **He realized the key to preserving true Christianity was teaching young people the Truth.**

One of his students, Otto Dudzes, later said, "We heard from everywhere that our salvation was now in the hands of Hitler, but Bonhoeffer taught us that salvation came from Christ alone. Bonhoeffer never directly mentioned what was happening in the world around us, but it was just the remedy we needed to hear."

In an attempt to save Bonhoeffer from the growing threat to his life and ministry, friends in New York invited him back to teach, but he only stayed a few weeks. He still believed what he taught his students in Germany, as his immortal words from "The Cost of Discipleship" say: **"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die...** If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection at the hands of men, we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow Him. But if we lose our lives in His service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellow-

ship of the cross with Christ."

Bonhoeffer would do just that. Along with family and friends, he joined the conspiracy to kill Hitler, communicating international intelligence through his many Church contacts. Though he fully believed murder was against God's Law, he was willing to sacrifice himself, even spiritually, to save others from the Nazi's mass genocide. He was arrested in 1943, a year before the group's infamous failed assassination attempt with a bomb under Hitler's desk. While in prison, Bonhoeffer ministered to fellow prisoners and his guards as an unofficial chaplain. He was executed by hanging on April 9, 1945, but largely through the faithful work of his students following his death, **his timeless contributions to Christianity continue to impact the world.**



Jenna DeWitt is the managing editor of MORF magazine. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Baylor University, where she served as editor of Focus magazine and Arts and Entertainment editor of The Baylor Lariat. Jenna loves Christian music, Great Britain and all things Baylor.

DISCUSS
THIS

at MORFmagazine.com