

The Price of Resisting Hitler

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who resisted Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany.

At a time when much of the church in Germany was turning a blind eye to the evil around them to escape persecution, Bonhoeffer could not. He believed that the true church must suffer in a godless world.

In his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer – who was hanged by the Nazis just before the end of World War II – said, “The worse the evil, the readier must be the Christian to suffer; he must let the evil person fall into Jesus’ hands.”

Apart from his theological writings, Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to Hitler’s dictatorship, including vocal opposition to the German leader’s euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews. Bonhoeffer was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Tegel prison for a year and a half.

Later, he was transferred to a Nazi concentration camp. After being allegedly associated with the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, he was briefly tried, along with other accused plotters, and then executed by hanging on April 9, 1945. This occurred as the Nazi regime collapsed, just two weeks before Allied forces liberated the camp and three weeks before Hitler’s suicide.

Bonhoeffer was stripped of his clothing and led naked into the execution yard, where he was hanged, along with fellow conspirators.

As reported by *Wikipedia*, Eberhard Bethge, a student and friend of Bonhoeffer’s, writes of a man who saw the execution: “I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer ... kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God ... At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the few steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost 50 years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”

Even though Bonhoeffer was hanged by the Nazis, his suffering is still glorifying God today. He knew that suffering was the price of overcoming evil with love.

Bonhoeffer’s life as a pastor and theologian of great intellect and spirituality who lived as he preached exerted great influence and inspiration for Christians across broad denominations and ideologies, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-Communist democratic movement in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, and the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa.



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More than ever, there is an anti-Christian sentiment in the United States and worldwide today. Those of us who acknowledge being followers of Jesus may face ridicule or denunciation. Many Christians in other countries – like Bonhoeffer – are being martyred for their faith. Or, like anyone else, we can encounter hardships of one kind or another that life may serve up, such as financial challenges, the loss of a loved one or the attack of a terminal disease.

The question is: Would someone witnessing our suffering see enough of the love of Jesus in us to change them?

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter 4:16).

– Beecher Hunter