



Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Being there for others

John Moses

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was executed with other conspirators against the Nazi regime on the personal orders of Adolf Hitler after two years imprisonment at the very eve of the end of the Second World War. He has arguably become the most important theologian of the age in any language. Remarkably his reputation was rescued from oblivion by a former student and close personal friend Eberhard Bethge who soon after the war began publishing Bonhoeffer's letters and other writings composed while he was in Gestapo incarceration. Bethge went on to publish a monumental biography that made Bonhoeffer a household name among theological students and church people around the world. He was indeed a veritable theological Wunderkind . The young German's vast erudition, penetrating insights and the wide focus of his work before and during the Nazi dictatorship are breathtaking in their impact. Indeed his theological acumen has triggered revolutionary insights not only for German scholars who continue to wrestle with its implications. The consequence has been a veritable mountain of published works that deal with the many aspects of Bonhoeffer's thought. Now the collected works extending to 17 volumes have appeared in English enabling scholars world wide to access the mind of this truly remarkable man of God . This tract, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Being There for Others, draws attention to only three key concerns of the young German thinker: the centrality of Ecumenism, the theology of state power and Anti-Semitism. These issues attracted the present writer, who is an Australian-born and German- trained historian and also an Anglican priest, to highlight in this tract what aspects of Bonhoeffer's work he considers should first and foremost interest his fellow countrymen and women. Indeed, the inter-Church dialogue is a priority of existential significance for a world wracked by religious-cultural conflict. Church-State relations continue to be an ongoing issue and of course, the "Jewish Question" and the subsequent problem of the continued existence of the state of Israel all make Bonhoeffer's thought on these three themes of vital current concern. What a great read ... only John Moses, with his powerful grasp of German history and Christian theology and his willingness to ask uncomfortable questions, could have written this Tract . It is a great meditation, free of hero-worship, ending by looking critically at an insight Bonhoeffer reached. Craig Wilcox, Military Historian

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