

Foreword

On any short list of theologians who will shape the contours of Christianity in the twenty-first century will be the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While his execution by the Nazis in April of 1945 for complicity in the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler is perhaps the most dramatic cause for praise and recognition, Bonhoeffer's profound contributions to theology, ecclesiology, and Christian ethics will also prove to be enduring elements of his legacy. For sure, his final sacrifice of life for others served to confirm and authenticate all that he taught and preached.

Similarly, any short list of theologians whose work will influence the direction of Bonhoeffer studies in the twenty-first century will include the name of Geoffrey Kelly. We all know that the "generation following after" persons of significance often shapes their legacy in ways inseparable from the legacy itself. Consider Plato's rendering of Socrates, St. Paul's interpretation of Jesus, or Melancthon's explication of Martin Luther. While Eberhard Bethge (1909–2000), Bonhoeffer's closest friend and later biographer, will remain the most prominent authority offering first-hand history and reliable insights, Geoffrey Kelly will certainly stand as one of those in

the “generation following after” who brings the breadth and depth needed to insure an authentic picture of Bonhoeffer for the Church of the future. Breadth, because Kelly has offered not only four decades of impeccable scholarship, but also because he has experienced personal relationships with those who knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer first hand; depth, because the theological/spiritual legacy of Bonhoeffer has been Kelly’s companion for the same four decades, on the mountain tops and in the valleys. If there is such a phenomenon as God’s presence in Jesus Christ being mediated through other persons, Dietrich Bonhoeffer would be one such person, mediating Jesus Christ for, and then through, Geoffrey Kelly.

I am deeply honored to be invited to write these introductory words for Kelly’s book, and for two reasons. First, he has been for me a mentor in Bonhoeffer studies for thirty years, and I trust these affirmative words will reveal how grateful I am to him for our friendship as well as my affiliation, through him, with the International Bonhoeffer Society. Second, the legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer has also been of profound importance for my faith experience and theological orientation. To offer these words of introduction hopefully indicates my gratitude to Dietrich Bonhoeffer as well.

Concerning the text of *Reading Bonhoeffer: A Guide to His Spiritual Classics and Selected Writings on Peace*, I cannot overemphasize its importance for Bonhoeffer studies as well as for the life of the church of Jesus Christ. I hope in this Foreword in some modest way to prepare the readers for an inspirational and educational journey into the life of a truly modern saint, who knew so well that he was also a sinner.

It is no accident that Geoffrey Kelly selected *Discipleship* and *Life Together* as the dual foci for this glimpse of Dietrich

Bonhoeffer. While Geoffrey could well have used *The Communion of Saints*, *Act and Being*, *Ethics*, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, or *Fiction from Tegel Prison* to introduce Bonhoeffer to the reader, he chose these two pieces because of their organic relationship with each other as well as their primary place in the corpus of Bonhoeffer's writings. Further, by choosing these, he is providing help for a very wide audience, because these two books are surely the most familiar of Bonhoeffer's works. Let me say more about the organic relationship between *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. At the core of Bonhoeffer's preaching and teaching from very early on was his understanding of Jesus Christ as the center of all reality—not least the church—and this reality remained the foundation for his entire theological orientation.

Although nurtured in the bosom of Germany's liberal theological tradition at the turn of the twentieth century, Bonhoeffer's exposure to and experience of the radical-dialectical-crisis theology of Karl Barth was the primary cause leading him to such a Christ-centered vision and vocation. For Bonhoeffer, "following after" (*Nachfolge*) this living Christ into all the world was the essence of discipleship. His theology was not about thoughts or abstractions or principles that were simply to be believed. To know God was to experience Jesus Christ as an active/personal presence in every nook and cranny of life. Intrinsically related to this dynamic understanding of discipleship is the context or setting for such a vocation. *Life Together* (*Gemeinsames Leben*) is the setting and the shape Christian discipleship must necessarily take. Only in community is Jesus Christ experienced and enjoyed! The church, to quote St. Paul, is "the body of Christ." Authentic discipleship always means life together, and au-

thentic life together involves life following after Jesus Christ. I trust that the reader of Geoffrey Kelly's book will soon—and significantly—notice this organic relationship between discipleship and life together in a Christian community.

One of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's criticisms of "religion," as it was often experienced and expressed in his day, was that religion compartmentalized life into spheres of sacred and secular, holy and profane, godly and worldly, and with such divisions, created a church out of touch with the world and a world unrelated to God. Against this false bifurcation of reality, Bonhoeffer spoke of God—in Christ—known in the "center of the village," in "strength not only in weakness," and in "life, not only at the time of death." In fact, he understood his involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler as an act of standing in solidarity with Jesus Christ at the center of life, with all its challenges and curses.

Geoffrey Kelly understands deeply and affirms passionately Bonhoeffer's view of "Christ the Center" when he turns our attention in chapter 4 to Bonhoeffer's peace statements and sermons. He knows how closely related Bonhoeffer's convictions about peace were to Christian discipleship and life together. It has been Geoffrey's lifelong passion to speak about peace, a passion he shared with his best friend and colleague, Burton Nelson, to whom this book is dedicated. Especially now, at a time in history (2008) when the Bush Administration in America holds up war as a divine crusade, the legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is needed—a legacy that only understands peace to be God's will and war as always a tragic outcome of human failure and sinfulness. Had war been understood as a last resort rather than a tactical choice for retribution, attempting to impose one ideology on another

er, the current state of world affairs would be quite different. Bonhoeffer's peace writings, shared here by the author, can be of immense help in our day, no less than his.

My hope for you, the readers of this book, who now begin a journey with Geoffrey Kelly to and through the life-witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is that the God who became flesh in Jesus Christ will be at the center of your discipleship and life together; that the peace that only God gives, but that virtually every human being seeks in a variety of less-than-fulfilling ways, can finally be experienced as persons follow after Jesus Christ together. I believe both the author and the subject would be disappointed if this book did not somehow draw you, the readers, closer to Jesus Christ and to your neighbor.

John W. Matthews

President of the International Bonhoeffer Society—English Language Section and author of *Anxious Souls Will Ask . . . : The Christ-Centered Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*