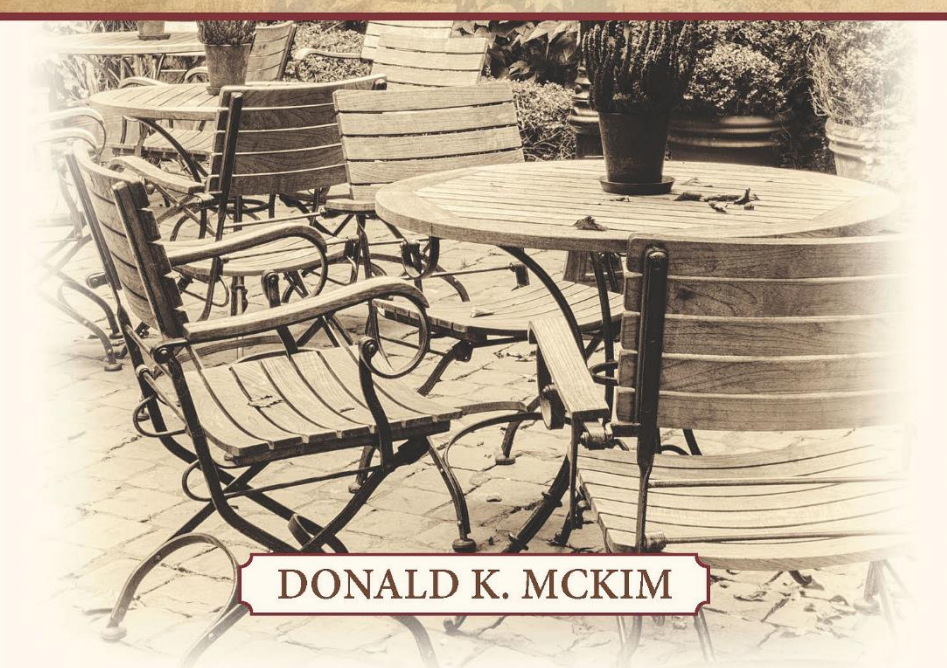




MORNINGS WITH  
**BONHOEFFER**

100 REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



**DONALD K. MCKIM**

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## Preface

Through the years, I've had a passion to communicate theological insights to others, especially in the context of the church's life. One way I have tried to do this is through devotional books to introduce and interpret theologians by providing short, devotional reflections on a quotation from their writings. Thus *Coffee with Calvin: Daily Devotions* and *Moments with Martin Luther: 95 Daily Devotions* emerged.

Now it is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's turn. Bonhoeffer's language may be more directly understandable than Luther's and Calvin's since he is closer to us historically. But his thoughts are profound for Christian theology and for Christian living. My hope here is to interpret Bonhoeffer and reflect on the meaning and significance of his thoughts for our lives today in the church and as Christian disciples.

I first encountered a Dietrich Bonhoeffer book when I was a sophomore at Westminster College in Pennsylvania in 1968. On Sunday evenings, our Christian study group read and discussed Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. I'd known about Bonhoeffer's life, but his classic book put forth the demand of Jesus to "Follow me" in direct and compelling ways. Bonhoeffer's book helped orient me to a life of discipleship and the meaning of the "costly grace" that obedience to Jesus Christ brings.

## Preface

A few years later, I took a course on Bonhoeffer at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with Dr. Arthur C. Cochrane, an expert on Bonhoeffer as he was on Karl Barth. This course introduced me to a range of Bonhoeffer's writings and the power of Bonhoeffer's theological witness in the midst of the evils being perpetrated by the Nazi regime in Germany.

When I taught theology in seminary, I always had students read Bonhoeffer's *Christ the Center* in courses on Christology. This pressed the question of how we understand Jesus Christ theologically, as the church has wrestled with this question through the centuries. But Bonhoeffer also asks the timeless question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" This gives importance and immediacy to understanding Christ as a present reality who engages the world and each of us.

Bonhoeffer's thoughts are interconnected. Each theme in Bonhoeffer is related to other themes. This book of reflections does not try to present Bonhoeffer's theology as a coherent whole or to go into theological depth about the quotations presented for each reflection. Instead, the short reflections seek to present basic understandings and open visions for interpreting what Bonhoeffer's thoughts can mean for our Christian faith.

The reflections are divided into two main parts: "Believing as a Christian" and "Living as a Christian." Several themes make up each part. These are fluid categories, and there is no attempt to be thoroughly systematic in presenting the reflections in a specific order. The book can be used on a daily basis and read straight through, or it can be read at

## *Preface*

“random”—any time and in any order. Some suggestions about using the book follow here. The theological hope is that the Holy Spirit will be actively engaged in the reading and reflection on each piece—whenever and wherever!

I would like to thank folks at Abingdon Press, who have been collegially helpful with this project. Mary Catherine Dean, associate publisher and editor-in-chief, has been most gracious and supportive. Dawn L. Woods enthusiastically and encouragingly helped through the publication approval process, for which I am most appreciative. Susan Salley has been kind and efficient through the publication process. Thanks also to Christina Boys for sharing her excellent editorial skills and to Susan Cornell for her fine help as well. Brenda Smotherman has valuably worked on publicity and marketing.

As always, my work could not be done without the love of my family. My wonderful wife, LindaJo, is my loving partner in all things, bringing gladness and delight to our life together. Our son Stephen and his wife, Caroline, with Maddie, Annie, and Jack, bless our lives in incomparable ways; as do our son Karl and his wife, Lauren. For the deep goodness of family love, we rejoice.

Special thanks go to the interlibrary loan department of the Germantown Public Library. These neighbors have been unfailingly competent and friendly in securing interlibrary loan materials.

My thanks extend to all who have labored long to provide Bonhoeffer resources, especially those involved in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English project. Thanks to those who

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have written extensively on Bonhoeffer, especially on the works in the “Selected Resources for Further Reflection” section.

When I was an editor for Westminster John Knox Press, it was a joy to invite my friends Stephen R. Haynes and Lori Brandt Hale, two superb Bonhoeffer scholars, to write *Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians* with illustrations by Ron Hill. This, I believe, is the best short introduction to Bonhoeffer’s life and thought available.

This book is dedicated to my friend, Steve Haynes. Steve is the Albert Bruce Curry Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis and has been a firm friend for a long time. Though he describes himself as “more of a Bonhoeffer devotee than a Bonhoeffer scholar,” he certainly is a Bonhoeffer scholar and has made a number of important contributions to Bonhoeffer scholarship. Steve is a deeply committed Presbyterian Church (USA) minister, a fine teacher with a pastor’s heart, and a wonderful person who embodies Bonhoeffer’s words: “Discipleship is joy.” I am most grateful for our friendship.

My hope is this book will introduce readers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For those who already know him and his writing, I trust new insights on Bonhoeffer and from Bonhoeffer will be yours through these reflections.

Donald K. McKim  
Germantown, Tennessee  
February 1, 2018



# Using This Book

This is a book of reflections on Christian faith based on quotations from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The reflections are meant to explain Bonhoeffer's thoughts and open considerations on the meanings of Bonhoeffer's words for the church and for Christian life today. The quotations in each devotion are drawn from the volumes in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works from Fortress Press with volume and page number at the end of each quotation. A list of volumes used can be found in the "Selected Resources" section at the back of the book.

My article looking into Bonhoeffer's life and the events that shaped his thoughts can be found at [www.abingdonpress.com/MorningswithBonhoeffer](http://www.abingdonpress.com/MorningswithBonhoeffer).

This book can be used for group devotions in various gatherings, or it can be used for personal devotion and reflection.

**Read.** A Scripture passage or verse is found at the top of each page. The Scripture can be meditated upon before the reflection is read. These thoughts can be kept in mind as the reflection is read.

Since the writing for each reflection is compact, each sentence has meaning and can be a source for contemplation. Reading each sentence can be deliberate, and one can pause after each sentence to think about it.

**Meditate.** After the reflection is read, one can ask:

## *Using This Book*

- What has Bonhoeffer said here?
- What do Bonhoeffer's thoughts mean for the life of the church?
- What do Bonhoeffer's thoughts mean for my life?
- What changes of attitude or actions are Bonhoeffer's words calling me (or us) toward?
- What are practical ways Bonhoeffer's thoughts can be put into practice in the church community? In my own life?

**Pray.** Incorporate what has emerged in your reading and meditation into a prayer. Pray for God's Holy Spirit to take this experience and lead into what God would have you be and do.

**Act.** Put into practice what the reflection points toward by acting in ways that reorient your present directions in life or that open new directions for service and action.



The title of each reflection can serve as a key phrase to bring important dimensions of the reflections to mind. You can review the contents and summarize what each reflection has meant to you, perhaps in the space at the end of each one.

If you keep a journal, a summary of the reflection/experience and what it means to you can be recorded. These summaries can be reviewed at various times in the future.

You can also consult works in the “Selected Resources for Further Reflection” section to pursue further readings by and about Bonhoeffer.

# Christian Beliefs

1

## Scripture Is God's Own Word

*What is Holy Scripture?* It is God's own word, in which, through the prophets and the apostles, he proclaims to me and to the church-community that Jesus Christ is God's Son and my sav[ior]. (14:785)



**F**or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as for all Protestants, Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The biblical canon—the books of the Old and New Testaments—is God's revelation. In Scripture, God communicates God's own self to us humans. Without the Scriptures, we would have no way of knowing God. We cannot peel back the clouds and look upon God in heaven! If we are to know who God is, it is God who has to "make the first move." God must reveal who God is if we are ever to come to a knowledge of God.

We believe God has spoken in the Scriptures. The Bible is "God's own word," says Bonhoeffer, given to us "through the prophets and the apostles." The biblical Scriptures are given through human beings who witness to what God has said and done.

The Bible is given to the "church-community," as Bonhoeffer said, and "to me." It proclaims a message: "that

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Jesus Christ is God's Son and my savior." This is the purpose of the Bible. Scripture points us to what God has done in sending Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son. Jesus died on the cross so our sin against God can be forgiven. Jesus is our savior. When we believe in Jesus Christ we have "eternal life" (John 3:16).

Scripture gives "good news"—a word from God proclaiming God's love for us and the way of salvation, how we can live as God's people and be in a relationship of trust and love with God. We read God's Word, hear the Scriptures proclaimed, and live in faith as God's people.

2

## The Mirror of the Creator

Humankind is here the final work of God's self-glorification. The world is created for God, for God's honor alone, and humankind is the most precious receptacle, the very mirror of the Creator. It is totally for the sake of God's glory and honor as Creator that everything comes to pass. (3:72)



Genesis 1 tells us of God creating the heavens and the Earth. God is the sovereign creator of all things.

The climax and completion of creation is the creation of humankind. God's good work of creation is expressed most clearly when God created humans in the divine image: "So God created humankind in his image" (Genesis 1:26).

Bonhoeffer commented on humankind in his theological work, *Creation and Fall*. He wrote, "Humankind is here the final work of God's self-glorification. The world is created for God, for God's honor alone, and humankind is the most precious receptacle, the very mirror of the Creator. It is totally for the sake of God's glory and honor as Creator that everything comes to pass."

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God's creation brings honor and glory to the creator. God's honor permeates the universe and is displayed on earth. The "most precious" place where God's glory is received is in humans. Human beings are "the very mirror of the Creator." We "reflect" God as a mirror since we are created in the "image" of God. When people see us, they should be reminded of God—not by how we look but by who we are and what we do. We live for God's glory! Are we a "mirror" of our Creator to others?

God creates and then sustains and guides the creation so it is "for the sake of God's glory and honor" that all things happen. Let us rejoice and reflect our good Creator!

3

## No Longer Loving the Other

This [the fall] means the human being no longer regards the other person with love. Instead one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself. (3:122)



**T**here is a sad situation in human life. We see it every time we read the daily news. The bad news is the human condition—who humans are and what they do.

Bonhoeffer wrote a powerful book, *Creation and Fall*, in which he interpreted the early chapters of Genesis, which tell not only of God’s creation of humanity but also what humans did—which has affected human nature ever since.

God created humans to live in God’s image, to live in freedom and obedience to their Creator. But the stories in Genesis 3 describe what theologians such as Bonhoeffer call “the fall” of humanity. Instead of obeying God, humans rebel against God. They want to be “like God” (Genesis 3:5). Instead of putting God, from whom humans draw life, at the center of life, humans turn in upon themselves (an image Luther often used) and put themselves at the center of their



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existence. Humans have fallen away from God, seeking to become their own creator.

The result is the relationship of trust and obedience between God and humans is lost. By being divided from the creator, humans also become divided against themselves. As Bonhoeffer writes, “This [the fall] means the human being no longer regards the other person with love. Instead one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself.”

The daily news shows people against each other, even violently so. Love is not our natural inclination. Only God can help. God help us!

## About the Author

Dr. Donald K. McKim is an Honorably Retired minister of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He has served as executive editor for theology for Westminster John Knox Press, a seminary theology professor and academic dean, as well as a pastor.

Dr. McKim is the author and editor of a number of books, including *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*; *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (with Jack B. Rogers); and *Reformation Questions, Reformation Answers: 95 Key Events, People and Issues*. He has also written devotional books, which include *Coffee with Calvin: Daily Devotions*; *Moments with Martin Luther: 95 Daily Devotions*; and *Living into Lent*. His *Sanctuary for Lent 2017* and *Advent: A Calendar of Devotions 2017* were written for the United Methodist Church. He lives with his wife, LindaJo McKim, in Germantown, Tennessee. They have two married children and three grandchildren.