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# Letters And Papers From Prison



## Synopsis

One of the great classics of prison literature, *Letters and Papers from Prison* effectively serves as the last will and testament of the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young German pastor who was executed by the Nazis in 1945 for his part in the "officers' plot" to assassinate Adolf Hitler. This expanded version of *Letters and Papers from Prison* shifts the emphasis of earlier editions of Bonhoeffer's theological reflections to the private sphere of his life. His letters appear in greater detail and show his daily concerns. Letters from Bonhoeffer's parents, siblings, and other relatives have also been added, in addition to previously inaccessible letters and legal papers referring to his trial. Acute and subtle, warm and perceptive, yet also profoundly moving, the documents collectively tell a very human story of loss, of courage, and of hope. Bonhoeffer's story seems as vitally relevant, as politically prophetic, and as theologically significant today, as it did yesterday.

## Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Touchstone; Updated edition (July 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684838273

ISBN-13: 978-0684838274

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 97 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #33,743 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Religious Intolerance & Persecution #18 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Letters #66 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Social Issues

## Customer Reviews

*Letters and Papers from Prison* is a collection of notes and correspondence covering the period from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's arrest in 1943 to his execution by the Gestapo in 1945. The book is probably most famous, and most important, for its idea of "religionless Christianity"--an idea Bonhoeffer did not live long enough fully to develop, but whose timeliness only increases as the lines between secular and ecclesial life blur. Bonhoeffer's first mention of "religionless Christianity"

came in a letter in 1944: What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience--and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving towards a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by "religious." The pleasures of Letters and Papers from Prison, however are not all so profound. Occasionally, Bonhoeffer's letters burst into song--sometimes with actual musical notations, other times with unforgettable phrases. Looking forward to seeing his best friend, Bonhoeffer writes, "To meet again is a God." --Michael Joseph Gross

'With regard to composition there is hardly blemish of any kind: the grammar, the rhymes, the lucidity of expression, the consistency of style, the adaptation to various metres, the use of repetition are all well-nigh perfectly formed...Very good valuer indeed!' Methodist Recorder, February 2007  
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's impossible to write a review that can, in any way, describe the depth and intensity of this book. It merits a review of each letter. It is listed in Terry Glaspey's Great Books of the Christian Tradition. It is a collection of letters to and from the great martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer during his two-year imprisonment prior to his hanging in April 1945. The letters express a vast range of thought and emotion. In a few letters, he does express complex theological ideas, but in most of them, it is profoundly readable as he expresses what it means to be human in a difficult situation. He acknowledged the revelation that the Christian life is not lived in theological work or in contemplation or meditation, but in the ups and downs of daily human life. Much of it is difficult to read not only because of the angst it produces but also because of the tears in the reader's eyes make it difficult to see the words on the page. As I have tried to say, the breadth of thought is too great to summarize in a review, but it was notable to me that he stated that he was no longer certain that the ideas he expressed in his book "The Cost of Discipleship" were valid. In the early days, he said that he read the Psalms every day and was reading the Bible straight through. He often quoted Scripture or referred to passages, testifying to his love of and value for the Bible, a Book that too many people deprive themselves of altogether, even though they are free and not confined in prison. He said that he believed that his time in prison was not wasted though he did not know what would come of it. He wrote, "I believe that nothing that happens to me is meaningless, and that it is good for us all that

it should be so, even if it runs counter to our own wishes. As I see it, I'm here for some purpose, and I only hope I may fulfill it." Of course, his letters themselves present a unique view of what it means to live as a Christian in the most horrible circumstances imaginable. He often said that his fellow prisoners and the guards found him calm and pleasant, while he often felt anything but that inside. He was depressed, happy, lonely, content in solitude, crabby, compassionate. The entire spectrum of human life and feeling is expressed through these letters in a way that could never occur in a formal theology book. And in a sense, he expressed in a simple, straightforward way the thoughts of humankind about life. It is very simple and very profound and heartbreaking, all at the same time. This is a book not to be missed.

Poignant and painful to read, especially since we know the "end of the story." Still, given the current political climate in America, reading everything by Bonhoeffer and about Bonhoeffer (I recommend Eric Metaxas' excellent biography) is appropriate. His life and words are spine-chilling in their application to our own evil times.

Bought based on reviews saying it would be a good intro to Bonhoeffer. First chapter was great. Rest of it seems like a lot of mundane letters to/from family asking for this and that supplies for his incarceration, and a lot of very boring non-theological communications. I have no interest in reading any more. Not a total loss, so I give it two stars, but I clearly should have started with another book of his.

Dr. Bonhoeffer, a kindly elegant intellectually outstanding man, tried to keep the Nazis out of his church, worked internationally as long as he was free to keep church and state separate, was unsuccessful in his quest during his lifetime, was imprisoned for his efforts, and finally murdered by the Nazis a few days before the end of the war.... to make his humiliation complete. He was not humiliated; his letters and books live on. His life work an example of what one man should do when the bad guys gain control of a patriot's entire country. Today his work is studied in fine colleges around the world, as it should be. I am Jewish and learn from every word. May God bless his memory and rest his soul G Kossow

Capturing difficult days in history. Wonderful resource. Thank you.

This is an interesting read, although do not expect for this to read like a traditional book. As the title

indicates this is a collections of letters and papers. That being said very interesting read if you can afford the time to invest in exploring Dietrich's mental journey while he was imprisoned awaiting execution.

Quite moving! Amazing that someone can be SO up, positive, and happy in prison knowing that his end is quite possibly near! Very inspirational!

excellent copy

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