

“In short, it is much easier to see a thing through from the point of view of abstract principle than from that of concrete responsibility.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

“Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion...but he set in its place the **positivist doctrine of revelation which says in effect, 'Take it or leave it'**: Virgin Birth, Trinity or anything else, everything which is an equally significant and necessary part of the whole, which latter has to be swallowed as a whole or not at all. That is not in accordance with the Bible. **There are degrees of perception and degrees of significance**, i.e. a secret discipline must be re-established whereby the *mysteries* of the Christian faith are preserved from profanation.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

“Upon closer observation, it becomes apparent that every strong upsurge of power in the public sphere, be it of a political or a religious nature, infects a large part of humankind with stupidity. It would even seem that this is virtually a sociological-psychological law. The power of the one needs the stupidity of the other. The process at work here is not that particular human capacities, for instance, the intellect, suddenly atrophy or fail. Instead, **it seems that under the overwhelming impact of rising power, humans are deprived of their inner independence and, more or less consciously, give up establishing an autonomous position toward the emerging circumstances.** The fact that the stupid person is often stubborn must not blind us to the fact that he is not independent. In conversation with him, one virtually feels that one is dealing not at all with him as a person, but with slogans, catchwords, and the like that have taken possession of him. He is under a spell, blinded, misused, and abused in his very being. **Having thus become a mindless tool, the stupid person will also be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil.** This is where the danger of diabolical misuse lurks, for it is this that can once and for all destroy human beings.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison DBW Vol 8

“The day will come ... when **people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed.** It will be in a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’s language, so that people will be alarmed, and yet overcome by its power—the language of a new righteousness and truth, a language proclaiming that **God makes peace with humankind and that God’s kingdom is drawing near.**”[56]”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison DBW Vol 8

“If we start with such ideas as God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, we will never arrive at a true knowledge of God. However, **if we participate by faith in Jesus Christ as the one who “is there for others,” we are liberated from self and experience the transcendence that is truly the God of the Bible.**”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison DBW Vol 8

“**God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science has been surmounted and abolished;** and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion (Feuerbach!). For the sake of intellectual honesty, that working hypothesis should be dropped, or as far as

possible eliminated.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

**God would have us know that we must live as those who manage their lives without God.** The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34!). The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. **Before God, and with God, we live without God. God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross;** God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that **Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering!** This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as deus ex machina. The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God; **only the suffering God can help.**

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (pp. 464-465)\

**What we imagine a God could and should do—the God of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with all that.** We must immerse ourselves again and again, for a long time and quite calmly, in Jesus’s life, his sayings, actions, suffering, and dying in order to recognize what God promises and fulfills.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (p. 497). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

**Being a Christian does not mean being religious in a certain way,** making oneself into something or other (a sinner, penitent, or saint) according to some method or other. **Instead it means being human, not a certain type of human being, but the human being Christ creates in us.** It is not a religious act that makes someone a Christian, but rather sharing in God’s suffering in the worldly life. **That is μετάνοια, [Greek: metanoia, most often translated repent] not thinking first of one’s own needs, questions, sins, and fears but allowing oneself to be pulled into walking the path that Jesus walks, into the messianic event, in which Isa. 53 is now being fulfilled!**

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (p. 466). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

Who is God? Not primarily a general belief in God’s omnipotence, and so on. That is not a genuine experience of God but just a prolongation of a piece of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. Experience that here there is a reversal of all human existence, in the very fact that Jesus only “is there for others.” **Jesus’s “being-for-others” is the experience of transcendence! Only through this liberation from self, through this “being-for-others” unto death, do omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence come into being. Faith is participating in this being of Jesus.**

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (p. 485). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

**The church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ himself who has taken form among people.** — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics

The person who’s in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community