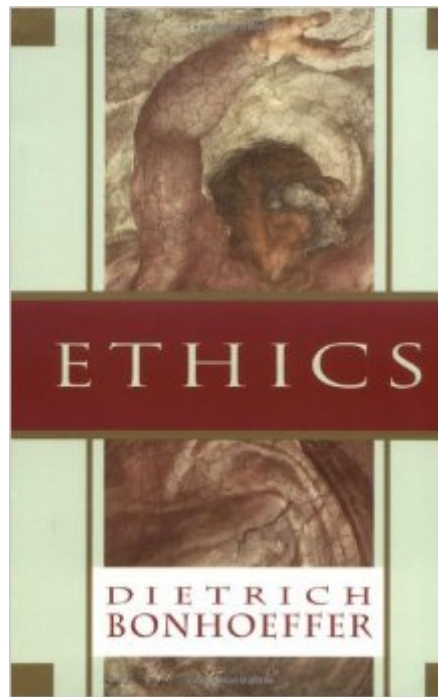


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# Ethics



## Synopsis

From one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century, > is the seminal reinterpretation of the role of Christianity in the modern, secularized world. The Christian does not live in a vacuum, says the author, but in a world of government, politics, labor, and marriage. Hence, Christian ethics cannot exist in a vacuum; what the Christian needs, claims Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is concrete instruction in a concrete situation. Although the author died before completing his work, this book is recognized as a major contribution to Christian ethics. The root and ground of Christian ethics, the author says, is the reality of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This reality is not manifest in the Church as distinct from the secular world; such a juxtaposition of two separate spheres, Bonhoeffer insists, is a denial of God's having reconciled the whole world to himself in Christ. On the contrary, God's commandment is to be found and known in the Church, the family, labor, and government. His commandment permits man to live as man before God, in a world God made, with responsibility for the institutions of that world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I imagine many of you reading this have read The Cost of Discipleship. Having just completed Ethics, I feel it is a superior work. I was constantly challenged as I was reading to rethink many of my assumptions about ethics from a Christian perspective. The portion at the end about "telling the truth" is alone worth the price of the book. A couple of difficulties I had were that many sections were left incomplete with a bare outline to indicate where he was heading. Also, some of the latter portion of the book was very heavy on historical Lutheran writings, of which I am quite unfamiliar. It was

certainly stimulating for me as an American to read a quite different perspective on some issues, e.g. submissive relationships. It is typical in this country for people to feel that all rules should apply equally to all. Of course this is absurd when applied to parent/child or teacher/student or ruler/subject relations. Since ethics has to do with how people act towards other people, the actual type of relationship involved has to play a role in how to think about ethical behaviour from one individual to another.

"The sword can never bring about the unity of the Church and of faith. Preaching can never govern nations." --Ethics  
In an time where secularity is in the mainstream of modern thought, Bonhoeffer's Ethics is a must-read, with regards to Christian behaviour in a modern era. In this (unfinished) book, Bonhoeffer focuses on the realms of both Heaven and of man, and finely describes how the two are inter-related, and yet separate, outlining true Christianity action, behaviour through love and compassion. As far as Christian action is concerned, he emphasizes the necessity to react against injustice and cruelty, as opposed to a legislated, perhaps even non-existent Christian ethos. Bonhoeffer's unfortunate and untimely death at the hands of Nazi Germany leaves this book partially incomplete, and to some degree, not fully arranged, thus the footnotes are of utmost importance; A primer on the basic rights of man/social contract might also aid the uninitiated reader. In the end, however, Bonhoeffer's insight is as timely now as it was when he wrote it. Refreshing and vividly spiritual, it is both a comfort and food for thought.

The new edition of Bonhoeffer's ETHICS (Fortress Press 2005) is completely re-arranged, newly translated, full of helpful notes, and includes an introduction and a commentary by the editors. These help explain Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking and his radical critique of Nazi policies. The text and the commentary help the careful reader understand Bonhoeffer's rationale for working in the conspiracy against Hitler, and his challenge to Christians and the church in the postwar period. Bonhoeffer regarded his ETHICS as his most important mature writing, and reviewers have called it "one of the greatest works of 20th century theology." Incomplete because interrupted by Bonhoeffer's arrest, the old edition's arrangement created problems for readers. The new edition largely overcomes these problems.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a rare individual. He transcended the human plane as he practiced what he taught. This is his last writing, and it is unfinished because he was executed in prison for living the ethics he preached. In this book, Bonhoeffer states, "Ethics as formation, then,

means the bold endeavor to speak about the way in which the form of Jesus Christ takes form in our world, in a manner which is neither abstract nor casuistic, neither programmatic nor purely speculative." Partly because his theology would not allow a speculative ethic, Bonhoeffer returned from the safety of New York City to a Germany ruled by the insanity called National Socialism. There, he became a leader, along with Martin Niemöller and Karl Barth, in the "bekennende Kirche" opposing National Socialism and an advocate on behalf of Jewish People. His efforts earned him imprisonment in 1943. As the Second European War (1939-1945) came to a close, Bonhoeffer was hanged until dead in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the cost of discipleship. I think that this book has something to offer people who have faith, regardless of creed. It is written by someone of strong convictions, and is inspiring to me as I develop my own ethical standards. It is not easy to develop a spiritual relationship in a temporal world. Reading "Ethics" increased my resolve and desire to try. If you are interested in learning about Christianity and ethics from someone who lived what he taught, this book will be interesting to you.

You can't speed read Bonhoeffer; as a German he was used to a high degree of order and formality in his life and this is reflected in his writing style. But his is a voice that deserves to be heard, because he was so acutely aware of the horror of the Nazi rule in his native land and his treatise on ethics was written in this environment. Throughout its writing, Bonhoeffer knew that at any time he might be executed by the Nazis, which is what finally happened just days before the war's end. As when reading *The Cost of Discipleship*, I found myself understanding and agreeing with Bonhoeffer most of the time, but at times I couldn't quite connect - perhaps because I haven't reached the depth of his faith or his sensitivity to the issues on which he wrote.

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