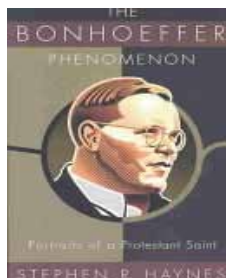


## WHO EXACTLY WAS BONHOEFFER?

### Book Title:

The Bonhoeffer phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant saint

### Book Cover:



### Author:

Stephen R. Haynes

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Who exactly was Bonhoeffer?

### Reviewer:

Ignatius (Natie) W.C. van Wyk<sup>1</sup>

### Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Africa Institute for Missiology, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Reformed Theological College, University of Pretoria, South Africa

### email:

aim1@mweb.co.za

### Postal address:

The Africa Institute for Missiology, PO Box 32186, Waverley 0136, South Africa

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That Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was an exceptional person and theologian, I always knew. During my studies in Bonn (1981–1983) this man was often discussed in our student residence (das Adolf Clarenbach Haus). Many of us wrote papers on his work and Bonhoeffer's friend, Eberhard Betghe was even invited to address us. That he was considered to be a Protestant saint, over and above the prominent place he holds in the German Evangelical Church, I did *not* know. However, after having read this informative book by Stephen Haynes (Associate Professor of Religion at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee), this perception of mine changed. This thoroughly researched book (with 68 pages of notes and a bibliography comprising 16 pages) leaves no doubt that Bonhoeffer has, at least in the United States, reached cult status. Prior to reading this book, I had no idea of the Bonhoeffer mania that exists in certain parts of the world. For this reason alone, it would be worthwhile to read the book.

The book consists of an introduction and two parts. Part one: 'Who is Bonhoeffer for us?' deals with the various portraits of this exceptional man. Haynes concentrates on this 'saint' as seer, prophet, apostle and bridge. Part two deals with the interpretation of the Bonhoeffer phenomenon. Bonhoeffer as saint, his cult status and the attempts to domesticate him, receive attention.

Haynes makes two important contributions to the debate on Bonhoeffer. Firstly, he indicates how a variety of theological schools seek moral self-justification by claiming that they are following in his legacy. On the left, people such as John de Gruchy of Cape Town, sought moral self-justification in the struggle against Apartheid. It is clear that Bonhoeffer also provided inspiration to opponents (theologians and action groups) of not only the Vietnam War, but also of Republican governance in general. On the right, anti-abortion fanatics also claim Bonhoeffer for their cause, especially those who are willing to kill for the rights of the unborn, quoting Bonhoeffer as their spiritual inspiration and legitimisation. Secondly, the writer contributes to a modern-day understanding of 'martyrdom'. He correctly indicates that Bonhoeffer was never put before a choice requiring him to denounce Christ. His was a political choice. This choice was indeed based on his religious beliefs, but was not at the heart of his faith. Although Haynes does not use the word, he argues that modern-day martyrdom is all about 'moral heresies' which are dubious in themselves.

This is a well-written book by an author with a great command of the English language. Not only theologians interested in Bonhoeffer's theology should read this book, but also pastors and lay people seeking spiritual inspiration. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's story is so fascinating and of such significance that as many Christians as possible should be familiar with it. This book will satisfy the curiosity and needs of almost every reader.

The author plans a second book on Bonhoeffer in which he will set out his own relationship *vis-à-vis* the Bonhoeffer phenomenon. Hopefully, this publication will be of the same high academic standard of the first book. I really want to recommend this book - reading this book will prove not to be a waste of time. ■