

**A RADICAL CONNECTEDNESS**  
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In the depth of the heart of every human person lies an inviolable core of freedom. This freedom, which some have called “transcendental”, is not the freedom to choose this or that, but the freedom to choose one’s goal in life, to provide fundamental answers to life’s enduring questions. The word ‘fundamental’ is crucial in this context, for this freedom provides the foundation (in Latin, *fundamentum*) for all other choices that humans make.

Deep in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s heart lay two truths of Christianity, truths which, when held next to each other, allow a third truth to emerge. These truths are: the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, and God is a community, a Trinity of persons sharing deeply in life, love and everything. From these two truths comes a third: namely, that we are most Godlike when we live as community, when we live in genuine communion with others. At 21 years of age, in his doctoral dissertation entitled *Sanctorum Communio*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer discovered the truths to which he would hold fast for the rest of his life.

The notion of a radical connectedness with all other human beings led him to identify with those persecuted by Nazism. Open always to learning from new experiences, his experiences at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York and his friendship with the pacifist Jean Lasserre aided in the formation of a conscience that would not allow him to stand idly while Jewish people were persecuted. He faced his own shortcomings honestly; his reticence to bury his Jewish brother-in-law’s father led him to identify even more deeply with God’s suffering people.

In choosing his life’s goal - genuine communion with others, especially with the victims of persecution - Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to know what Saint Paul calls “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). He made as his own choice, in a deep and abiding way, the fundamental choice placed before us by Jesus in Matthew 25: 31-46. When we see him hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or imprisoned, what will we do? The voice that spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3) spoke of freedom and of solidarity with those who suffer injustice at the hands of others. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer freedom of religion meant not the ability to hold services and to preach, but the freedom to identify with the suffering, the freedom to stand by the victims of injustice.

People who have attained this kind of freedom are frightening, and they are dangerous. They are frightening because they do not play games; they are not dependent upon societal approval, and they cannot be manipulated. They are dangerous because they let nothing stop them from fulfilling their mission in life. Jesus Christ knew that kind of freedom, and, by God’s grace, so did Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Such people cannot be deterred; one must either follow them or, as Nazi Germany chose to do, kill them. As the scholastic philosophers would have said, *tertium non datur*: there is no third option.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does the author mean when he says an inviolable core of freedom lies in the depth of every human heart? Have you ever felt this to be true for yourself?
2. Bonhoeffer said “The church is the presence of Christ, just as Christ is the presence of God... When the community is split, is Christ himself divided?” What kind of relationship do you have with the communities in your life?
3. How does the author describe Bonhoeffer’s understanding of freedom of religion? What do you understand about the idea of freedom of religion?
4. What does the author mean when he says “people who have attained this kind of freedom are frightening”? Who do you think has shown this kind of “frightening freedom”? How have they demonstrated it? Where do you think it comes from?
5. Toward the end of his life, Bonhoeffer said “The will of God may lie deeply concealed beneath a great number of possibilities.” Have you ever felt that way?

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