



Bradford Remembers - Dietrich Bonhoeffer



A light can make us feel safe in a dark place. Sometimes in troubled times individuals and groups of people may be like lights: they resist bad people and try to protect those who are threatened and in danger; this often takes great courage, which is a gift. Such courageous people are a light in the darkness.

This is a short story about a man who visited Bradford in 1933, who shone like a light in a dark time. His gift was the courage to protect others from persecution by speaking out against racism and oppression.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian, German priest. He was a member of the German Protestant Church, but he didn't always agree with their actions. Dietrich didn't live in Bradford, but he did visit here in 1933 to attend a conference of German Protestant priests, held at the German Evangelical church (now the Delius Centre) in Little Horton.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Hitler's National Socialist party (the Nazis) were in control in Germany. Instead of one human race the Nazis claimed there were different races and that the White, European, race was superior (better) than others. They claimed White people were better than Black, men better than women; people with disabilities, Gypsies, Roma and Eastern European people were seen as inferior; gay men and those from political or religious groups, whose views opposed Fascism, were imprisoned and often killed. Ethnic Jews and people of Jewish descent were particularly victimised.

The Nazis began to impose laws that discriminated against Jewish people. For example, Jewish children were prevented from going to school with non-Jewish children, Jews could not receive treatment in a hospital which cared for non-Jews, Jews could not work in the government. Eventually Jews were not allowed to ride bicycles, go to the cinema, use public swimming pools, keep pets or do a range of everyday things, which everyone else took for granted.

Eventually in 1938 Jewish men, women and children were openly attacked during the night of breaking glass - Kristallnacht. The situation got even worse between 1939 and 1945 during World War II. Jews were arrested, imprisoned, forced to work as slaves and murdered by the Nazis.

It was not the Jewish religion that the Nazis were opposed to as much as the Jews as a people, to the extent that they demanded that Jews who converted to Christianity, should be expelled from the church and not be accepted as Christians. The German Protestant Church leaders were coerced





(persuaded by force or threats) into expelling people who were from Jewish backgrounds and telling the Nazis who they were. This often led to Christians of Jewish descent initially being imprisoned and later being killed by the Nazis.

Dietrich spoke out at the conference in Bradford against the Nazis' racism and the way in which some members of the church, if not supporting, were not opposing, Adolf Hitler's policies against the Jewish people. Dietrich was outspoken about the Nazis. He challenged their racist laws and propaganda and the idea that Christians with Jewish backgrounds should be expelled from the church. He stood up and spoke out. *He shone in the darkness, like a light that refused to be blown out!*

At the Bradford conference Dietrich convinced other people that to help Hitler persecute Jewish people was wrong, it was against the teachings of the Christian religion. A written declaration (a declaration is a statement of intention or belief) to this effect was composed and then signed in the church in 1933, by the people who attended the conference. This became known as the **Bradford Declaration** and it opposed any agreement between the Church and the Nazis, which would lead to the persecution of Jewish people in Germany.

After the conference Dietrich bravely returned to Germany where he continued to preach and write articles, arguing for a just church, speaking out against racism and highlighting and challenging the persecution of the Jews. His courage was a symbol of hope in what were very dangerous times for many, many people. Dietrich stood up and spoke out in particular against this hatred and discrimination and let people outside Germany know about the fate of the Jewish people.

The end of Dietrich's story is not a happy one. He was eventually arrested by the Nazis for speaking out and defending the Jewish people. He spent much of the Second World War imprisoned for his beliefs and actions. Eventually he was executed on the 9th April, 1945 at Flossenburg Concentration Camp. He remained determined to the end, to let others know that someone cared about them and their right to a life free from hate, fear and persecution.

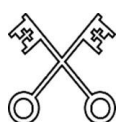
His gift was to be able to influence others to be courageous too and to help those in need.



Today the building where the Bradford Declaration was signed is known as the German Church and Delius Centre, after the famous composer, Frederick Delius.

Delius's parents donated money (along with other German families in Bradford in the 19th century) to build the church. It is still a place where different Christian groups worship and where people (of all faiths and none) come together to socialise, be creative and challenge prejudice.

In 2008 a new Bradford Declaration against hatred and racism was signed in the church. A candle was lit by a





member of Bradford's small Jewish community (the late Rudi Lever) who himself lost 12 members of his family, murdered by the Nazis in Germany. The light was lit in memory of all those who died (six million plus), but also in memory of those who survived, many because of the courage and help of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose light is still burning bright; his lasting gift is a symbol of peace and hope for the future.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Wissen911 - Bettina Rott: Wilhelm Rott, 1908–1967: Lebenszeugnis, Pro Business Verlag, 2008, CC BY-SA 3.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52692413> Rudi Lever at the German Church:

Bradford Telegraph and Argus.

Bonhoeffer quote: Wikimedia Commons.

Key Questions

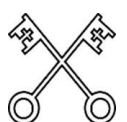
- Why is courage a gift?
- How can being courageous help other people?
- Is it important to stand up, speak out to make a difference?

Key Activities

- Write a new Bradford Declaration, simply 'I declare that I' on a scroll template (See below).
- Decorate the scroll with key words e.g. courage, equality, help and gifts.
- Design a Bonhoeffer poster suggesting why his words and actions were gifts to other people.

A Bonhoeffer Poster

- Use the internet to find more quotes.
- Make a statement about Bonhoeffer in your own words.
- Design your own poster!





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WE ARE TO DRIVE A
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Dietrich Bonhoeffer





Write your own declaration e.g. I believe that bullying is wrong!
See if any of your friends will sign your declaration.

My Bradford Declaration

I declare.....

Signed

