

# [Dietrich bonhoeffer against hitler](https://assignbuster.com/dietrich-bonhoeffer-against-hitler/)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is remembered for many things. He was a highly influential theologian and preacher. His importance as a theologian has only increased since his death. However, he is also remembered for his opposition against Nazi Germany. For the purposes of this paper, I look at three aspects of Bonhoeffer’s involvement. First, I examine his statements against Hitler and the extent to which he sought to make his opinions known. Second, I consider his involvement in conspiracies to eliminate Hitler. Lastly, I examine Bonhoeffer’s reflections on his actions, which he wrote while in prison. Although Bonhoeffer’s actions may raise many questions of morality and ethics, there is no doubt that he played a significant role within the opposition of Nazi Germany.

When many people study the Holocaust, they fault Christians for remaining silent as Hitler performed one horrific act after another. Many would say that silence was just as horrible as killing the victims. Bonhoeffer cannot be faulted for this. Rather, he proved to be very outspoken. One of his most popular speeches was that on a German radio show. He was to speak on ‘ The Younger Generation’s Altered View of the Concept of Fuhrer’ in the Berlin ‘ Potsdamerstrasse Voxhaus’ (broadcasting house). Dietrich was not hesitant to express how he felt about the Fuhrer principle. This speech was given on February 1, 1933, and Hitler had just risen to power days prior. Much of Bonhoeffer’s words addressed the notion that the youth had been led astray concerning their concept of the Fuhrer. His boldest statement was said toward the end of the broadcast. However, once broadcasters realized that these words should not be heard by others, he was turned off. This was proof that Joseph Goebbels (the Nazi minister of propaganda) had most likely gained the control of the radio station. Bonhoeffer stated that his speech was carefully planned to fit the allotted time. His final sentences read, “ should the leader ‘ surrender to the wishes of his followers, who would always make him their idol- then the image of the Leader will gradually become the image of the ‘ misleader’…Leaders or offices which set themselves up as gods mock God” (Bethge, pg. 260). His entire speech was later copied and distributed. Bonhoeffer felt that the Fuhrer principle was nothing short of idolatry. Therefore, he was implying that Hitler demanded his people to worship him. This was contempt.

This proved to be one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s first outbursts on Hitler. However, there were many others of the sort. There is an account in which Bishop Bell gives that he speaks of Bonhoeffer being very outspoken against Germany. Bell recalls sitting with him amongst others at a friend’s home in Geneva. Dietrich is approached with the question about what he is praying for. He responds with very harsh statements. “ If you want to know the truth, I pray for the defeat of my nation, for I believe that is the only way to pay for all the suffering which my country has caused in the world” (Bosanquet, pg. 229). He was much convicted about the acts of injustice in which Hitler was repeatedly performing. Bonhoeffer knew that the annihilation of the Jews was wrong, and he was not ashamed to let others know his beliefs. Bell gives an account of a later statement that Bonhoeffer made, “ If we claim to be Christians there is no room for expediency. Hitler is Antichrist; therefore we must go on with our work and eliminate him, whether he be successful or not” (Bosanquet, pg. 229). He felt that it was necessary for him to aid in the elimination of the Fuhrer.

Next, I study Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the conspiracy to kill Hitler. He participated in the Abwehr, which was the military counter intelligence. Within this group was also his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi. It is said that Dohnanyi was directly involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler. However, Bonhoeffer had somewhat of a different role. It was his duty to contact other countries to gain their support if the assassination were to prove successful. He spent much time traveling, making others aware of the resistance movement. He felt that it was important to know that they had allies assuming that the German government was taken over. Upon visiting Geneva, he attempted to convince them of this, “ What they needed, Dietrich explained, was a signal from the Allies that once the Nazis were overthrown, the Allies were prepared to recognize a new German government” (Raum, pg. 126). This was clearly a well thought out plan. Dietrich traveled to Norway, Italy, as well as Switzerland to gain the support of Bishop Bell. He also attempted to make connections with other German resistance groups, but difficulties arose.

A very important assassination attempt took place on March 7, 1943. Hitler was traveling to East Prussia by way of plane. A gift disguised as a box of Brandy was given to him. However, it was a bomb. The bomb was sneaked onto the plane, but it never ignited. Involved in this attempt were members of the Abwehr. This included General Oster, Admiral Canaris, Dohnanyi, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, and General Henning von Tresckow (Raum, pg. 132). Due to the failed attempt, the Abwehr decided to try again. They developed another strategy to kill Hitler.

Hitler was originally scheduled to attend a ceremony at an army museum on March 16, 1943, however he rescheduled for March 21st. Colonel von Gersdorff was supposed to get the bomb into Hitler’s presence without causing much commotion, even if this meant killing himself in the process. Needless to say, this attempt failed as well. Fortunately, they were not caught in the attempt to execute the assassination. Bonhoeffer was at home with his family during this attempt; however he was expecting a phone call announcing Hitler’s assassination, and was disappointed to hear of the failed endeavor. There was in fact a third attempt to kill Hitler, but Bonhoeffer had already been arrested. “ He was arrested in 1943 in connection with the assassination attempt on Hitler” (Scott and Cavanaugh, pg. 139). However, since the Abwehr was a secret group, many of the documents were hidden or destroyed. As a result, there was limited evidence. Much of the evidence used to arrest Bonhoeffer was his connection to Operation 7. The operation was designed to help to free several Jews. The Abwehr was attempting to help the Jews to Switzerland. The fact that Bonhoeffer was involved in several attempts to kill Hitler raises many questions. Due to the fact that Dietrich considered himself a devout member of the Confessing Church makes one question how his beliefs would support such an act. However, Dietrich does not express any conviction about his involvement in the multiple plots to murder Hitler.

Bonhoeffer clearly felt that the assassination of Hitler was the last resort. Hitler’s actions were proving to gain momentum and were spinning out of control. Therefore Dietrich felt that it was necessary to take action. Through the reading of his writings leading up to his death, he does not seem to be living in fear. He almost appears to be welcoming death. In the first sentence of a writing titled Death, he states “ Come now thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal” (Bosanquet, pg. 265). As one can see, Bonhoeffer appears to be at great peace with his fate. Many within the prison commented that Bonhoeffer seemed to be very lively and almost happy. Others would argue that this was due to the fact that the Soviets were closing in and that the prisoners were anticipating liberation. However, fellow prisoners describe it as an inner joy that he experienced. This joy Bonhoeffer desired to share with others. During his imprisonment at Tegel while awaiting trial, many describe Bonhoeffer as victorious. Bonhoeffer experienced a change of heart. As a result, he no longer viewed his own sufferings within prison as something of which he should be concerned. Rather he stated, “ we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but the sufferings of God in the world” (Bosanquet, pg. 271). Bonhoeffer viewed the acts of injustice as not only actions taken against innocent victims, he saw them as actually taking unjust actions toward God. It appears as if Dietrich did not view his involvement in the Abwehr as wrong. Through his writings in prison and the comments of others, he had a clear conscience and eagerly awaited his arrival in Heaven.

In conclusion, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a very influential person during the World War II and especially in opposition to the Nazi Regime. As one can see in his radio broadcast, from the beginning he was very outspoken against Hitler and the Fuhrer principle. He was very bold in comparing this principle to the mockery of God. He played a very active role in the military counter intelligence (Abwehr). Bonhoeffer never hesitated in completing his assignments to gain support of the actions to overthrow the German government. Many would agree that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was very confident that his actions against Hitler were not wrong. Rather, he felt that they were his duty as a result of a conviction to do the right thing. His statements on death and also his inner joy as a result of a relationship with God greatly support this claim.