

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

Justin Collings

August 2022

Costly Grace

I first learned about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and martyr of the anti-Nazi Resistance, as a BYU undergraduate. Later, while researching for my dissertation, I examined the personal papers of Gerhard Leibholz, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law and a famous German judge. I also spoke on the phone with Marianne Leibholz, Bonhoeffer's niece. I treasure this small tie to the great Resistance hero.

Bonhoeffer was a profound thinker as well as a fearless actor. At their finest, Bonhoeffer's religious writings resemble C.S. Lewis—insightful and incisive, penned in crisply luminous prose. I recently read Bonhoeffer's book, *Nachfolge*, which has been translated into English as *The Cost of Discipleship*. The German title means simply “discipleship” or, more literally, “following.” It embeds the key terms of the Savior's searing summons: “Come, Follow Me” (*Folge mir nach!*).

The book begins with a stark dichotomy between “cheap grace” and “costly grace.” Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer explains, is “grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” It is a grace that costs us nothing. Costly grace, by contrast, demands our discipleship; it “calls us to follow.” And yet it is gracious as well as costly—“a gracious call to follow Jesus.” For Bonhoeffer, grace and discipleship are inseparable; the summons to follow is the proffer of grace. “Christ calls, the disciple follows: that is grace and commandment in one.”¹

At BYU we are striving to forge a community of disciple-scholars—a band of “brothers and sisters seeking together to master [our] academic disciplines while remaining mastered by the higher claims of discipleship to the Savior.”²

Those claims, we know, are costly. The grace we seek is not just there for the asking. “We must do more than ask the Lord for excellence,” President Kimball prodded. “Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is excellence.”³ Even prophets are not exempt. Joseph Smith and his brethren toiled away at their Hebrew grammars. Russell Nelson and his colleagues sedulously refined that first heart-lung machine.

The path of scholar-discipleship is demanding, requiring rigorous effort on multiple fronts. The proper balance among those fronts can often seem elusive. In our last general conference, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf suggested that rather than thinking of balance as “dividing our time among competing interests,” we might strive instead to unite the strands of our discipleship in a single band of consecrated commitment to the Savior. “As we seek to purify our lives and look to Christ in every thought,” he promised, “everything else begins to align. Life no longer feels like a long list of separate efforts held in tenuous balance. Over time, it all becomes one work. One joy. One holy purpose.”⁴

The pursuit of that singular purpose will cost more than our toil and sweat. It will cost

us our wills—“the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar.”⁵ Our teaching, our scholarship, our creative efforts, our citizenship, our professional service—all must merge, in the end, as a single, freewill offering to God.

Fortunately, if counterintuitively, such a submissive offering will foster our fullest individual flowering. Arthur Henry King put it this way:

When we have laid down at Christ’s feet all our scholarship, all our learning, all the tools of our trades, we discover that we may pick them all up again, clean them, adjust them, and use them for the Church in the name of Christ and in the light of his countenance.⁶

One such offering takes the form of our “deliberate student centeredness,”⁷ which will, I believe, provide access to God’s grace in our scholarly, creative, and professional efforts. “Teach ye diligently,” the Lord

promises, “and my grace shall attend *you*” (D&C 88:78; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon tells of preachers who, instead of crafting sermons in their studies, labored in the fields along with everyone else. They had limited time to prepare for preaching, but “for their labor they . . . receive[d] the grace of God” (Mosiah 18:26). Similarly, if we will make our teaching a consecrated offering to God, He will surely respond with the grace we need to fulfill the prophecies about our scholarship.

The final cost of grace is consecration—“A condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything).”⁸ But in the gospel’s grounding paradox, what costs our All yields His (see Matt. 10:39). And so, in this community of consecrated disciples, we seek the Savior’s costly, freely-granted grace.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 43-45, 59.

² “Aims of a BYU Education,” <https://aims.byu.edu/aims-of-a-byu-education>.

³ Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” *BYU Devotional*, October 10, 1975, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/spencer-w-kimball/second-century-brigham-young-university/>.

⁴ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Our Heartfelt All,” *Liahona*, May 2022.

⁵ Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995.

⁶ Arthur Henry King, *Arm the Children: Faith’s Response to a Violent World* (BYU Press, 2000) 47-48.

⁷ See C. Shane Reese, “Deliberate Student Centeredness,” University Conference, August 26, 2019, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/c-shane-reese/deliberate-student-centeredness/>.

⁸ T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding.”