

# BEYOND ALL COST

A Play about Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*By Thomas J. Gardiner*

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*Beyond All Cost*

- 2 -

## **DEDICATION**

*Grateful acknowledgement is hereby made to:  
Harper & Row, Macmillan Publishing Company, and Christian Kaiser Verlag  
for their permission to quote from the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and  
Eberhard Bethge.*

*The Chorus of Prisoners is dramatized from Bonhoeffer's poem "Night  
Voices in Tegel," used by permission of SCM Press, London.*

*My thanks to Edward Tolk for his translations from "Mein Kampf," and to  
Union Theological Library for allowing me access to their special collections.*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The play tells the true story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who led the resistance to Hitler in the German church. Narrated by Eberhard Bethge, his personal friend, companion and biographer, the play follows Bonhoeffer from his years as a seminary professor in northern Germany, through the turbulent challenges presented by Hitler's efforts to seize and wield power in both the state and the church. Bonhoeffer is seen leading his students to organize an underground seminary, to distribute clandestine anti-Nazi literature, and eventually to declare open public defiance of Hitler's authority. When Bonhoeffer is fired from the University of Berlin faculty for his political views and his own seminary is closed by the Gestapo, he travels to Union Theological Seminary in New York, but his conscience compels him to return to Germany. He joins the secret unit of German military intelligence plotting the removal or death of Hitler, and travels undercover through Europe for that purpose. Discovered and arrested by the Gestapo, he is sent to prison, where he is visited by relatives and his fiancée in a poignant scene. In a poetic chorus, his fellow prisoners express their dreams and mutual fears. Then he is taken to Buchenwald to meet his fate. The play ends on a note of hope for the future, as Bethge walks off with his young son, who bears Dietrich's name. Historically faithful yet dramatically stirring, the play was approved by Bethge himself.

About 2 hours.

*Beyond All Cost*

- 3 -

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(14 m, 1 w, 1 child. Can be doubled to 10 actors.)*

Eberhard Bethge  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
First Student (Werner)  
Second Student (Hans)  
3rd Student (Johan)  
Adolf Hitler  
Bookstore Owner  
Graduate Student  
Hans von Dohnanyi  
Gestapo Agent  
Karl Bonhoeffer  
Maria von Wedemeyer  
Three Prisoners  
A Child

The actors can double in the following roles:

1st Student/1st Prisoner  
Second Student/Second Prisoner  
3rd Student/3rd Prisoner  
Hitler/Gestapo Agent  
Shopkeeper/Karl Bonhoeffer  
Graduate Student/Hans Von Dohnanyi  
All other roles are played by a single actor

**PLACE** - Germany and New York

**TIME** - 1935 to 1945

## ACT I

*(AT RISE: Dark and empty stage. A spotlight focuses on downstage center. EBERHARD BETHGE walks into the spotlight. Eberhard is a robust middle-aged man dressed in a tweed jacket, white shirt and dark tie, wearing a fedora, and carrying a tan trench-coat over his arm. Though professorially precise in his speech, he establishes a confident familiarity with the audience, to whom he speaks directly.)*

EBERHARD: "Ten years is a long time in anyone's life. As time is the most valuable thing we have because it is irrevocable, the thought of any lost time troubles us whenever we look back. Time lost is time in which we have failed to live a full human life, gain experience, learn, create, enjoy, and suffer; it is time that has not been filled up, but left empty." At least, that's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer thought - and even his enemies admitted he was a thoughtful man. I often find myself unconsciously repeating things he said, though not always in his exact words. "These last years have certainly not been empty. Our losses have been great, immeasurable, but time has not been lost. It's true that the knowledge and experience that were gained are only abstractions of reality, of life actually lived. But just as the capacity to forget is a gift of grace, so memory, the recalling of lessons we have learned, is also part of responsible living." *(HE pauses to remove his fedora.)*

Let me tell you a little about Dietrich. Let's go back to the spring of 1935, when I first met him. *(Strolls to SR.)*

It was on the beach at Zingst, in northern Germany. I had come to study at the new seminary in Finkenwalde that Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had just established there. *(HE throws his hat and coat off SR.)* I thought I'd take a long walk on the beach before I entered the seminary and began my studies.

Beyond All Cost

- 5 -

*(The SOUND of pounding surf rises in the background. As he speaks, EBERHARD removes his jacket and tie, unbuttons his shirt at the neck, and rolls up his sleeves. His movements begin to take on a youthful energy.)*

EBERHARD: *(Cont'd.)* It was an uncertain April day, the sky bright but the cool wind off the Baltic Sea dampening hope of an early sun flowering through fog.

*(SOUND of seagull cries are heard over the surf. HE rolls up his trouser cuffs and slowly strolls toward stage center. Two YOUNG MEN run in from USL. They are in their early twenties but have the adolescent air of college students frolicking on a weekend. They are dressed in T-shirts and short pants, and run barefoot.)*

FIRST STUDENT: He'll never catch us now! *(Puffs for breath.)*

SECOND STUDENT: Don't be so sure - he's faster than you think!

FIRST STUDENT: Well, I give up then.

*(DIETRICH runs in from USL and halts there, laughing breathlessly. He is a healthy-looking man of thirty, with Nordic features, solidly built and brisk in his movements. His blond hair is thinning, he wears spectacles, and beneath his almost athletic enthusiasm there is, faintly perceptible, the diffidence and introversion of the scholar. He, too, wears a T-shirt, short pants, and is barefoot.)*

DIETRICH: There's no escaping me - unless you can swim faster!

*(The two STUDENTS turn and bolt past EBERHARD, jostling him down.)*

FIRST STUDENT: Excuse me.

SECOND STUDENT: Sorry, sir! *(THEY run off, SR, laughing.)*

*Beyond All Cost*

- 6 -

DIETRICH: *(Calling after them.)* Now look what you've done, you ruffians! *(Rushes over to Eberhard and extends his hand, pulling HIM to his feet.)*

DIETRICH: Forgive us for roughing you up like this - it's my fault, really.

EBERHARD: Oh, it's nothing. *(HE brushes himself off.)*

DIETRICH: Since I already shook your hand, let me introduce myself. *(HE laughs.)* My name is Dietrich - Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

EBERHARD: Doctor Dietrich Bonhoeffer??

DIETRICH: Well, yes - do you know me?

EBERHARD: No - yes - that is ... *(HE laughs.)* I've been sent to study with you. I'm Eberhard Bethge.

DIETRICH: *(Clasping his shoulder.)* Eberhard! Our new student! Welcome to Zingst!

EBERHARD: Thank you. *(HE shuffles uneasily.)* Thank you very much ...

DIETRICH: Is something wrong?

EBERHARD: I ... I guess I'm just a little surprised, that's all.

DIETRICH: At what?

EBERHARD: Well...at your age...and...

DIETRICH: *(Encouragingly.)* Yes?

EBERHARD: *(Embarrassed.)* At your conduct.

DIETRICH: *(Laughing.)* But of course, of course! You expected Herr Doctor Professor. *(HE puts his glasses down on his nose and strokes his chin.)* "Was ist das, die metaphysik?" *(THEY both laugh.)*

DIETRICH: As though one had to be obscure to be profound, or solemn to be serious. Good Lord, if Jesus spoke like that, he would have put the fishermen to sleep - and the fish, too! It wasn't theologians He was looking for on the beach: it was real men.

EBERHARD: *(Quietly.)* Yes.

DIETRICH: And speaking of fish, can you swim?

EBERHARD: Yes, but - it's so cold!

DIETRICH: Only at first - then it gets warm. Come on. We might be able to find an old shark for dinner: We could use it to beef up the thin soup we have to serve in the seminary! *(HE runs off, SR.)*

## **End of Freeview**

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