



Reichsbischof Ludwig Mueller attends the inauguration of the national synod in Wittenburg, at the Castle Church where Martin Luther first posted his 95 theses against the abuse of indulgences. He is surrounded here by the theological storm troopers, as they called themselves - like infantrymen uniformed in field grey, they were members of the "teaching platoon" of Augustusburg Leadership College in Saxony | 27 September 1933, Wittenburg

## Bonhoeffer and Grey Martyrdom: The Cost of Convictions

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**Abstract:** In what is known as *The Cambrai Homily*, a seventh century Celtic monk articulated three colours of martyrdom; red, white and green. Traditionally only red martyrs, those who lose their lives for Christ are considered martyrs proper. In this paper, a fourth colour, grey, is added describing the lot of many reformers who commonly face rejection from ecclesiastical authority. Of course, Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders of his day. This paper posits that grey martyrdom is when one's credibility, reputation and ecclesiastical standing suffer for Jesus' sake. Luther was excommunicated. Bonhoeffer too was a grey martyr before he was a red one. This paper considers the differences between grey martyrs who side with the truth of Christ against the plurality of world, and those who are merely casualties of the world they have allowed to eclipse the truth. Modern considerations are evident; Will the emerging generation of Christian scholars in various disciplines be willing to stray from the establishment scripts regarding things like origins and ecology? Will clerics and churches be willing to stand for traditional conceptions of morality even if it means losing their ministerial pensions, credentials, and buildings? Bonhoeffer stood tall among the grey martyrs of Christendom and paid the high cost of his convictions.

A Celtic monk in the seventh century, in what we call *The Cambrai Homily*, outlined three categories of martyrdom designated by colours; red, green and white.<sup>1</sup> Red martyrdom refers to

<sup>1</sup> "The homily expounds on Matthew 16:24 with a selection from the *Homilia in Evangelia* by Pope Gregory I and an explanation of three modes of martyrdom, designated by the colours red, blue (or green, Irish glas), and white. *The Cambrai Homily*, in reference to the French town *Cambria* where it is kept at the municipal library, is one of the few surviving written sources for Old Irish in the period 700 to 900." Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambrai\\_Homily](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambrai_Homily) cited.... Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 54–56. Also: *The Cambrai Homily* appears in a manuscript of the *Bibliothèque Municipale* (Cambrai, MS. 679, formerly 619, fos. 37rb–38rb). Also from Wikipedia: "The manuscript was copied in the period 763–790 by a Carolingian scribe working in northern France for Alberic, bishop of Cambrai and Arras. The language of the homily itself, however, dates it to the late 7th century or the beginning of the 8th. It was inserted into the text of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, apparently from a stray leaf that had been slipped into the Latin exemplar. The scribe's knowledge of the Irish language appears to have been limited or nonexistent. An edition was published in 1903 by Whitley Stokes and John Strachan."

when blood is shed; when they lop off your head or throw you to the lions. If Christ is indeed first, personal safety and security are at least a distant second. The problem for these early Celtic saints is they “had to forgo the bloody ‘crown of martyrdom’ until the Viking invasions at the end of the 8th century” and therefore they conceived of other forms of martyrdom, living forms because they still knew the call of Christ was to lose your life to find it.<sup>2</sup> After red martyrdom, *The Cambrai Homily* presented green martyrdom to describe those who sell their possessions and give them away to the poor, those who leave behind comforts and pleasures, deny their flesh via monastic ascetics, assuming vows of poverty and chastity, opting for simple living and frugality. White martyrdom is the separation from loved ones. The designation white martyrdom actually goes back four additional centuries being first used by the desert hermit St. Jerome in the third century. White martyrdom is kissing your family goodbye before getting on a ship to sail to a faraway place to spend your life reaching the people God called you to reach. It is when your non-Christian loved ones reject you because of your faith in Christ.

My suggestion in regard to these colours of martyrdom is that we conceive of fourth and fifth colours, yellow and grey martyrdom. Yellow I choose because it is the colour occasionally ascribed to cowardice, and I’ll consider the yellow martyr in this paper as the Christian who, through compromise and timidity, becomes a casualty of the world, and of the doctrines of the world. Those who try to save their lives, lose them instead. This will come to describe compliant and complicit German pastors in the 1930’s who (drawing on Robert P. Ericksen’s three books<sup>3</sup>) succumbed to the spirit of the age and that present darkness. Yellow is the only one of the five that is not a “Christian” martyrdom, per se. As I portray it here it represents the apostate who, under the pressure of popular opinion and political correctness, conforms to the world, and becomes a casualty of the world.<sup>4</sup> Yellow martyrdom is pseudo-martyrdom, it is dying in vain. It is to hear the words on that fateful day – “Away from me, I never knew you.” It is saving your life, putting it, your interests first, in stupidity and stubbornness, and ultimately losing it.

Grey, as I conceive this, can become the colour of conviction, the colour of foundation stones. The grey martyr pays the high price of standing for and on Christian foundations and core

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<sup>2</sup> Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge University Press, 1940, 1985 ed.), p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert P. Ericksen’s three books: Ericksen, Robert P. *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Also, Ericksen, Robert P. and Susannah Heschel, editors, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. And, Ericksen, Robert P. *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittle, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985. Another important resource is mentioned below in footnote 7.

<sup>4</sup> DBW-3 *Creation and Fall*, Editors Introduction to the English Edition, John de Gruchy, pg. 3. Germany was a “nation on the threshold of catastrophic apostasy.”

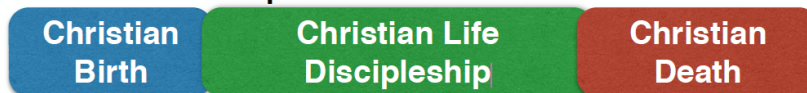
Christian convictions against the crowd, and against the way of the world, even the church world. As every aspiring Reformer of every age discovered, following Jesus and following the Church are not always the same thing. This paper posits that grey martyrdom is when one's credibility, reputation and ecclesiastical standing suffer for Jesus' sake. Jesus himself took a different path than the religious leaders of his day and the cost of his convictions was high. Martin Luther was defrocked. Barth was dismissed from his lectureship at Bonn. And Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a grey martyr more than a decade before he was a red one (I assume the legitimacy of his red martyrdom as a Christian martyrdom). Grey martyrdom is the lot of many reformers who faced rejection from ecclesiastical authority, excommunication, being shunned and regarded as dead. Grey martyrdom is when friendship with Jesus makes one an enemy of their ecclesiastical authority.

The notion of martyrdom as related to Bonhoeffer typically recalls his *Nachfolge* as a call to *come and die*.<sup>5</sup> In his biographical years, the Tegel to Flossenbürg period of 1944-1945 would seem to be the most likely place to look for Bonhoeffer the martyr, and this is correct, however only within the framework of traditional martyrdom, red martyrdom. In his biography on Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Bethge acutely perceived a different biographical era of Bonhoeffer's life to warrant the heading, *The Cost of Discipleship*.<sup>6</sup> That period is the 1931-1940. In my reading of this period, these are the years of Bonhoeffer's grey martyrdom, fully a decade before the red martyrdom period. Considering the brevity of time allotted for this paper, narrowing this reading to the

<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Volume 4: Discipleship*. (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003), pg. 87. "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." More literally rendered: "Every call of Jesus is a call to death."

<sup>6</sup> Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. (London: Collins, 1970), pgs. vi-ix, 127-582. Perhaps controversial Bonhoeffer biographer Eric Metaxas also placed the high cost of discipleship for Bonhoeffer in the 1930's as the ordering in his subtitle can be read to suggest; *Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. That *martyr* is not last is at least curious. Bethge also wrote a book on *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr* (1976). Exile is martyrdom as the death of who you were takes place. Exile is a living martyrdom, it is living with these deaths. All Christian living is dying. We are born again into death, Christ's and ours. The Christian life is essentially conversion, then martyrdom as we respond to Christ's call to come and die. He was "born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate." His life was a continuing humiliation, a continued kenosis all the way to the Cross. So will ours be. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:31; "I die every day..."

### Traditional Conception of the Christian Life



### Bonhoeffer: Every call of Jesus is a call to death



I see Bonhoeffer collapsing conversion and martyrdom into one, one Christian life lived. He was collapsing the process of becoming a follower (discipleship), born-again into a new and living faith, and the process of dying to self and to the world. All of life that takes place in between our being born (called)-into and dying-for is living martyrdom, it is the Christian life, and an acceptance of the invitation to come and die, obedience to the command, the call to follow Christ into humility.

Bonhoeffer of January 1934 presents Bonhoeffer's grey martyrdom at the crucial point where he crossed the point of no return and began to pay the cost of his convictions.

Briefly, a general historical sketch of that time period will illustrate the pressures to conform which Bonhoeffer was under at the time. Eight months earlier, on April 7, 1933, the Third Reich inserted the Aryan Paragraph into the *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service*, a regulation that only those of Aryan descent, without Jewish parents or grandparents, could be employed in civil service. This was quickly expanded to include German schools and universities - Aryans only. Jews were being systematically moved to the margins and expunged from society. On July 23, 1933 Hitler shrewdly ordered unconstitutional and premature re-elections of all presbyters and synod in all the Protestant regional church bodies in Germany; "[these] "elections" had] heralded a great spiritual surrender to the world-epochal mission of the Führer."<sup>7</sup>

On September 11, 1933 sixty opposing pastors elected Pastor Martin Niemöller president of a *Pastor's Emergency League* (A year later 7,036 pastors of the 18,842 Protestant pastors in Germany signed a statement rejecting the Aryan Paragraph). The dissenting pastors agreed the rejection of the Aryan Paragraph was a *status confessionis* (Latin: confessional situation) – a matter on which the Church must take its stand.<sup>8</sup> On September 27, 1933 the Nazi government appointed Ludwig Müller as Reichsbischof. Müller as a theologian in the German Church was an advocate of the Aryan Jesus and supported efforts to purifying Christianity of what he deemed "Jewish corruption," including stripping away significant sections of the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup>

To appease this significant uprising of pastors and theologians, Reichsbischof Müller temporarily rescinded the Aryan Paragraph. As biographer Eric Metaxas retells the story; "Then the Janus-faced Heckel sent an epistolary olive branch to the German congregations in England (where Bonhoeffer was), effectively saying there was nothing to fight about any longer, and mayn't we all get along?"<sup>10</sup> In similar fashion to the prophet Jeremiah where religious leaders were crying *peace peace when there is no peace*, in her letter of January 17, 1934, Bonhoeffer's mother Paula wrote to

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<sup>7</sup> Marsh, Charles. *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), pg. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), pg. 207. Also Marsh, pg. 167: "The phrase in Latin means a "confessional situation," and denotes a moment in which the church, "in order to be true to itself and its message, must distinguish as clearly as possible between truth and error."

<sup>9</sup> Heschel, Susannah. *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008. "The Aryan Jesus was now the male figure who required rescuing from the effeminizations of Judaism. In 1936, for example, Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller published a revised, Germanized version of the "Sermon on the Mount" that transformed its gentle message into a militaristic, warrior-life tract. Matthew 5:4-5 became: "Happy is he who bears his sufferings like a man, he will find the strength never to despair without courage. Happy is he who is always a good comrade; he will make his way in the world." pg. 53, citing: Müller, Ludwig. *Deutsche Gottesworte aus der Berpredigt verdeutscht*, Weimar: Verlag Deutsche Christen, 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Metaxas, pg. 206.

him saying “at the moment all we can think about is how... the bishops truce is not in fact a true peace.”<sup>11</sup> A few months later, as expected, the Aryan Paragraph was re-asserted by the Bishop. During this period, Bonhoeffer was monitoring developments closely, even daily, from his pastorate in London. On January 6, 1934 Bonhoeffer and the German Evangelical Pastors in London sent a telegram to the Reich Church Government in Germany effectually saying they do not recognise Reichsbischof Müller’s authority. The telegram simply said;

For the sake of the gospel and our conscience we associate ourselves with the Emergency League proclamation and withdraw our confidence from Reich Bishop Müller. German Pastors in London.<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer wanted stronger language than “withdraw our confidence” and proposed “and no longer recognise the National Bishop.” Either way, a line was crossed, a point of no return. At 28 years old, Bonhoeffer was taking stands knowing they could potentially put an early end to his academic career and negatively effect any future pastoral appointments.<sup>13</sup>

Across Germany during this period theologians were being arbitrarily dismissed from their universities, compulsory retirements were issued. Most notably, on January 13, 1934 Karl Barth was dismissed from his lectureship in Bonn. Two weeks later, January 25, 1934, Hitler and Müller met with dissenting church pastors in Berlin and rather than Müller being removed, Hitler gave his strong support, and revealed his diabolical nature with an angry renunciation of the *pfaffens* - the troublesome pastors. *Pfaffen* is a combination of two German words, pastor (*Pfarrer*) and ape (*Affen*). The troublesome pastors were pastor-apes (perhaps Hitler’s deadly Social Darwinism was showing through).

In his biography of Bonhoeffer, *Strange Glory*, Charles Marsh devoted a chapter to the “*Theological Storm Troopers*” (as they called themselves) a reference to “the ‘teaching platoon’ of the *Augustus Leadership College* in Saxony [who] assembled to stand guard for the future Reichsbischof as he entered the Castle Church... bearing their rucksacks like infantrymen, uniformed in field grey, with a purple cross and runes of the Schutzstaffel (SS) emblazoned on their arms.”<sup>14</sup> Bonhoeffer was in the balcony that day and “let out a short sharp laugh” at the sight. Perhaps he was thinking what he said the year before; “the most intelligent people have totally lost

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<sup>11</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Volume 13: London 1933-1935*, cited [DBW-13]. (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007), pg. 85.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Marsh, pg. 193. Berlin Pastor Wolfgang Schlunk told him on the eve of his departure... “Wishing Bonhoeffer well in England, Schlunk offered his teacher some sobering insight, ‘It will be difficult for you to go on working in the church, and outside the church there will hardly be any possible employment left for you in German.’... and “the university will chase you out.”

<sup>14</sup> Marsh, pg. 189.

both their heads and their Bible.”<sup>15</sup> As Marsh retells it, “theological storm troopers in the German Church marched to the clashing strains of Nazi war anthems, both pagan and pseudo-Christian.”<sup>16</sup>

On the one hand there were pastors and professors who were *theological storm troopers* for the Nazi Church, and on the other hand there were non-compliant pastors and professors who were regarded as *pastor-apes*. The pulpit became a natural platform for resistance.<sup>17</sup> In his London Church, on Sunday morning January 21, 1934, Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached a message from Jeremiah 20:7, “O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.” In this sermon, Pastor Bonhoeffer saw himself neither as *pfaffen* or as a *theological storm trooper*. A decade before Tegel, Bonhoeffer spoke of being God’s prisoner. He saw himself as a captive of the Word of God;

...the word that confronts us, seizes us, takes us captive, binds us fast... the overpowering word of the Lord that calls us into his service... it is no good trying to resist... [the] enticing word of the Lord’s love... has thrown a lasso over the person’s head, and there is no getting away anymore. Any attempt to struggle only shows how even more impossible it is, for the lasso will pull tighter, a painful reminder of one’s captivity.<sup>18</sup>

Bonhoeffer was speaking of being a captive of his convictions, like Jeremiah;

Jeremiah was not eager to become a prophet of God. When the call came to him all of a sudden, he shrank back, he resisted, he tried to get away. No, he did not want to be a prophet and a witness for this God. But as he was running away, he was seized by the word, by the call. Now he cannot get away anymore, it’s all up with him, or as one passage says, the arrow of the Almighty has struck down the hunted game.<sup>19</sup>

Bonhoeffer words emerge in the context of feeling the death of what I’m construing here as grey martyrdom. His homily continues;

This path will lead right down into the deepest situation of human powerlessness. The follower becomes a laughingstock, scorned and taken for a fool, but a fool who is extremely dangerous to people’s peace and comfort, so that he or she must be beaten, locked up, tortured, if not put to death. That is exactly what became of this man Jeremiah, because he could not get away from God... Imagine how Jeremiah would have preferred to talk differently— how gladly he would have joined with others in shouting “Peace” and “Well-being” where there was in fact strife and disaster. How happy he would have been to have kept quiet and agreed that they were right to say so. But he simply couldn’t; he was compelled and under pressure, as if someone were breathing down his neck and driving him on from one prophecy of truth to the next and from agony to agony... He felt the pain of being continually humiliated and mocked, of the violence and brutality others sued against him. After one episode of agonising torture that had lasted a whole night, he burst out in prayer: “O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> DBW-12, pg. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Marsh., pg. 171.

<sup>17</sup> See: Stroud, Dean G. editor. *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> DBW-13, Sermon on Jeremiah 20:7, London, Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 21, 1934, pg. 350.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 351.

His homily ended leaving no doubt his message was drawn from the depth of his own experiences as a prisoner of conviction, a prisoner of the Word;

Today in our home church, thousands of parishioners and pastors are facing the danger of oppression and persecution because of their witness for the truth. They have not chosen this path out of arbitrary defiance, but because they were led to it... because God had become too strong for them... because a door had closed behind them, and they could no longer go back beyond the point where they received the word, the call, the command of God.<sup>21</sup>

Others, like the Dean of the Theological Faculty of the University of Berlin Erich Seeberg, were advising him to stay in London and keep an arms length from the troublesome pastors; “I think it would not be in your best interest to wear yourself out too soon in this church conflict. I think it is important to keep back some men who will then be fresh and able to come forward when the time comes for genuine rebuilding.”<sup>22</sup> Yet the door had already shut behind him, Bonhoeffer was a prisoner in the grey cell of the conviction of the command of God, the word of the Lord, the truth. From this point on, through the rest of the decade he paid the cost of his convictions; in 1936 his lectureship in Berlin was terminated abruptly. In 1937, his seminary at Finkenwalde was closed. These are just two examples of his grey martyrdom, the cost of his conviction adhering to truth.

The following chart is an attempt to illustrate visually the danger of the truth being eclipsed by the World and the Church. The yellow martyr allows the World and the Church to eclipse the Truth, the Command before, the Word before. The grey martyr does not, she or he places the world and the church behind with only the Truth before. These were the moments Bonhoeffer found himself in January 1934. He referred to this time as “this disastrous moment.”<sup>23</sup> Keith Clements described this time vividly; “It was not just a dramatic time but also an emotionally draining one of propaganda and counter-propaganda, of the forming of alliances and therewith, inevitably, also the breaking of former associations and friendships.”<sup>24</sup>

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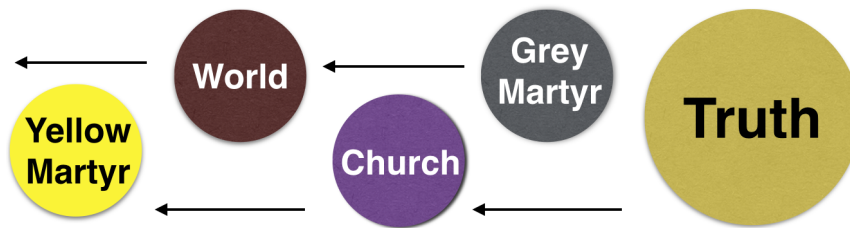
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> DBW-13, Letter from Erich Seeberg, from Berlin, January 9, 1934. Pg. 79.

<sup>23</sup> DBW-13, pg. 90, Bonhoeffer letter to Théodore de Félice, January 19, 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Clements, Keith. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ecumenical Quest*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2015), pgs. 91-92. In a presentation at St. Mary's University - Twickenham, at the Bonhoeffer and Reformation Conference, October 28, 2017, Clements spoke of the danger of thinking of martyrdom as glamorous. He told a story of a conversation he once had with an East German man whose father was a Confessing Church pastor during these years. In the conversation the man commented; “My father didn't put on a uniform (of the theological storm troopers), he had a breakdown instead.” Such was the strain of grey martyrdom for pastors of not knowing who in his parish was informing the SS every week on his activities and messages. Clements also told of a time in the 1960's he heard Pastor Martin Niemöller speak in London. He recalled that Niemöller requested they not sing *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* because the young people of that day knew nothing of the martyrdoms spoken of in the stanzas therein.

## Yellow and Grey Martyrdom and the Eclipse of Truth by the World and the Church



In conclusion, what are the questions the grey martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer raises for our time and setting, in theological academies and in parish ministry? Of course, both the theological academy and the parish ministry were the very contexts of Bonhoeffer the Professor and Bonhoeffer the Pastor. Will the emerging generation of Christian scholars in various disciplines be willing to stray from the establishment scripts regarding things like origins and Creation science, Israel and Zionism, ecology and the ethics of human embryos? Will clerics and churches be willing to stand for traditional conceptions of morality even if it means losing their ministerial pensions, credentials, and buildings? Those are the costs of conviction for today's grey martyr. What to do when telling the truth is a crime against popular opinion, political correctness, and as these things soon go... a crime against country? What to do when God-in-the-generic remains tolerable but the name of Jesus is to be avoided?

Last month Oxford College “banned the Christian Union from its freshers’ fair on the grounds that it would be “alienating” for students of other religions, and constitute a “micro-aggression... The organiser ...argued Christianity’s historic use as “an excuse for homophobia and certain forms of neo-colonialism.”<sup>25</sup> The inglorious irony of the spirit of our age is the intolerance of those who claim tolerance as our society’s greatest virtue. Bonhoeffer’s rich legacy of ecumenism is misconstrued when he is claimed as a forerunner of any today who sacrifice truth for a tolerant unity. The distinction drawn in this paper has been between grey martyrs who side with the Truth of Christ against the plurality of World in collusion with the Church, and the yellow martyrs who merely casualties of this present age having allowed the World and the Church to eclipse the truth.

<sup>25</sup> Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/10/oxford-college-bans-harmful-christian-union-freshers-fair/>



Grey martyrdom describes the repercussions in academia for espousing unpopular and inconvenient truth. What to do when radical discipleship and allegiance to Jesus and the Word of God takes us beyond the borders of the doctrines of the day, even the doctrines of demons? How do we treat theological troublemakers and dissenters? As today's guardians of the status quo scorn whistleblowers, will we resent our forthcoming reformers? Are there conclusions to be drawn, cautions and necessary conversations before the next crisis comes on us? Perhaps a starting place is to agree that as it was for Bonhoeffer (the captive to God's command) it is also for us— that our relationship to the truth determines if we are a casualty of the world in the yellow sense, or a true Christian martyr in the grey sense?