

***Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics*, by Walton Padelford. Mountain Home, Ark.: BorderStone Press, 2011. 223 pages.**

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer is remembered as a young theologian whose life was cut short by martyrdom. His life, especially his role in the German resistance during the Third Reich, is the subject of numerous books, several documentaries, and at least one movie. Despite all of the attention given to his life, he remains in many ways a mysterious figure. We feel that we know him, and yet there is so much more we wish that we knew.

Scholars and admirers have written much attempting to relate Bonhoeffer's writings to almost every conceivable topic. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics* by Walton Padelford is, to my knowledge, the first book to use Bonhoeffer's work to teach business ethics. When I first heard of the book, I wondered, "How does one do that?"

The author of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics* is Walton Padelford, a professor of economics in the McAfee School of Business at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. For the past thirty plus years Dr. Padelford has been preparing men and women for careers in business. As a Christian teaching at a Christian University, he is committed to preparing his students both intellectually and spiritually for the highly competitive and ethically challenging business world.

Professor Padelford seeks to accomplish three goals. His first goal is "to try to say something distinctively Christian about the whole topic of business ethics." Second, he wishes to "introduce a new generation of college students to the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." Third, and most important, Padelford uses Bonhoeffer's work—especially *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*—to challenge the business student "to think in a challenging way about business and the opportunities for real discipleship in business—might we say for real sanctification in business?"

The typical approach to teaching business ethics is to wade through a variety of case studies where subtle or obvious ethical issues must be resolved. What is the right course of action to be taken, or the "right thing" to do, ethically speaking? What is the right, or "safe" decision, the one that will not violate one's conscience? The problem with this approach is that ethical behavior in the world of business is not limited to Christians.

Padelford suggests that for the Christian business person, ethical behavior is a natural byproduct of the individual's relationship to Jesus Christ. True, the Christian makes choices as does the non-Christian, but with a difference. The difference is that a Christian's relationship to Jesus Christ underlies the choice. The Christian does not choose "right" over "wrong" because choosing the former will somehow merit reward, financial or otherwise. The Christian chooses "right" over "wrong," because it is the Christian's nature to do so.

Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor, and no doubt well-studied in Martin Luther's works. In one of his most important writings, *The Freedom of the Christian* (1520), Luther spoke of justification and the life of a Christian as a sort of "royal marriage" between Jesus Christ and the sinner. Scripture teaches that in marriage the bride and groom become one flesh. "And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage," writes Luther, "it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957], 343).

Luther argued that the Christian will choose right over wrong—i.e., do good works—out of a new love for God. The one who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ no longer lives just for himself. Rather, "He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By Love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor" (*ibid.*, p. 371).

For Bonhoeffer, Christian ethics must be focused upon living in light of the reality that in Jesus Christ God has reconciled the world to Himself. By rooting ethics in the person of Jesus Christ, the Christian is freed from the need to conform to the world's standards and is thus free to conform to Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ takes form in the individual Christian. The Christian, like the church, is then free to participate in the suffering of Christ in the life of the world.

According to Bonhoeffer, there is no moral or ethical code, no pattern of behavior that can be labeled "Christian." If that was possible, then living a Christian life could be separated from Jesus Christ. It then can be followed by anyone who is attracted to it, whether or not that person is conforming to Jesus Christ.

In the short section, "Business Ethics as Formation," Padelford says much the same thing: "For Bonhoeffer the Christian understanding of the person at the most basic level is always that of the person in a social and ethical encounter with the other person; this is the Christian basic-relation of I and You, self and other. It presupposes the theological axiom that the human person always exists in relation to an Other, namely God, and that human relations are in some way analogies of this fundamental relation. Since human beings are created in the image of God, all the people with whom I come into contact have a claim upon me. They may be part of the body of Christ, or they may be 'enemies' for whom I must show love according to the teaching of Christ" (pp. 67–68).

One cannot talk about Bonhoeffer and ethics without discussing his teaching on the "divine mandates" in *Ethics*, written between 1940 and 1943. The divine mandates are four—labor, marriage, government, and church. They are social relationships, or structures, by means of which God brings order out of the chaos of the fallen world. In the social relationships of the divine mandates, the individual Christian lives as a member of a community. As the individual Christian becomes conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, he or she becomes the means through which Jesus Christ becomes manifest in the world, and the world is transformed.

There is no divine mandate to somehow "Christianize" business. Rather by living as a disciple of Jesus Christ, "the dominion of Christ over all of life and over all the world" is proclaimed, and the reconciliation between God and the world is

manifested. Employers and employees no longer see each other or their customers as objects, machines, or, to use a term from economics, “widgets.”

To deny God’s mandates “leads to the abuse of power by leaders and followers, by governors and the governed, by employers and employees” (p. 194). To acknowledge God’s mandates allows the individual Christian to experience both freedom and responsibility. The Christian becomes free to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in the world by living as a responsible member of the community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics is well organized and written with clarity. It is not one of those “dissertation-become-books” that is more likely to put the reader to sleep than inform and enlighten. The book, itself, is a quality publication for which the publisher deserves recognition. However, there is one unfortunate shortcoming that may compromise its usefulness as a textbook. It does not include an Index. An Index, at least so far as this reviewer is concerned, is an essential part of any book that is not a novel.

Walton Padelford deserves recognition for taking the teaching of business ethics beyond using some definition of Christian ethics to examine hypothetical cases to understanding ethics.

***Human Rights and the Ethics of Globalization*, by Daniel E. Lee and Elizabeth J. Lee. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Paperback, xvi + 264 pages. ISBN: 978-0521519335.**

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Regardless of whether or not one believes that there are or should be things called Rights, natural rights, inalienable rights and other variations on the rights theme, it is hard to deny that human beings claim having them. That is as true of scholars as it is of employees mistreated by corporations, citizens denied freedoms from governments, or for that matter, students claiming unfairness by their professors. In an effort to bring more precision to discussion about rights, especially with respect to issues pertaining to business, Daniel E. Lee and Elizabeth J. Lee present in this book a balanced framework of the philosophical foundations of human rights and ethics and how these rights inherently matter to individual lives and conscientious decision-makings by multinational companies. The book is a welcome addition to the business ethics literature, though it is surprising that the Lees do not build on the extensive literature on the topic in the field itself. Nevertheless, the Lees’ contribution is valuable, especially given the way they connect philosophical formulations to the legal enforcement of rights.