

***Who Am I?***  
**by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)**

***Short Biography of the Author***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German protestant pastor and theologian, involved in Ecumenism at a time when it was still in its infancy.

Very early, he acknowledged the danger of the Nazi ideology. In 1934, he refused the so-called Aryan paragraph that was supposed to bar “non-Aryans” from any type of ministry in the official Church placed under the leadership of the Nazis. He therefore joined the newly founded Confessing Church (*die Bekennende Kirche*) and he soon became one of its leaders.

Shortly before World War II broke out at the beginning of September 1939, he was invited to lecture at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, USA. Although he was warmly invited to stay there, he felt compelled by his conscience to come back to Germany where he joined the resistance movement against the Nazi regime.

On Apr 5<sup>th</sup>, 1943, he was arrested by the Gestapo and held prisoner in Berlin until his transfer to Buchenwald on Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged in Flössenburg, a concentration camp in the South of Germany by explicit order of Hitler who had recently discovered his implication in the July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 plot against him.

World War II would end barely one month later...

***Origin of Today's Poem***

During his time of captivity, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote several letters to his fiancée, to his family and to his friends, as well as personal reflections that would later be published under the German title “*Widerstand und Ergebung*” - literally: Resistance and Submission. In English it was published under the title *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Today's poem is taken from that collection of writings in time of captivity.

***To know more about Dietrich Bonhoeffer***

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dietrich-Bonhoeffer/Ethical-and-religious-thought>  
<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/>

**"Who am I?"**

Who am I? They often tell me  
I stepped from my cell's confinement  
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I used to speak to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I bore the days of misfortune  
equably, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?  
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,  
tossing in expectation of great events,  
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?  
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?  
Or is something within me like a beaten army  
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine,  
Whoever I am, Thou Knowest, O God, I am thine."