

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer dramatization provides insight for Jewish- Christian Dialogue

By Jerry Daring

MOBILE—Christian-Jewish Dialogue events are usually lectures with discussions, but on April 21 a different kind of event took place. Dr. Al Staggs presented for the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue a one-man dramatization entitled "A View from the Underside: The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

Bonhoeffer was a Protestant theologian who became increasingly disillusioned with Nazism. He eventually turned against Hitler, was arrested for participation in a conspiracy, and was hanged days before the end of the war.

As an artistic rendition, the play did more to raise questions than to provide answers. Some of the questions regarding the Holocaust were explicitly stated in the play. How could a nation that boasted of sons such as Beethoven and Goethe commit such atrocities? Where is God in all of this? Who are God's people, the Jews who are being murdered, or the Christians who are locking Jews in the gas chambers?

Other questions were implied. What does it mean to be a faithful Christian? How should the church relate to the world around it? What should be the

Christian response to oppression? What role does apathy play in the unfolding of evil?

The play gave some insight into Bonhoeffer's life and struggles, his development of a view from the perspective of the outcast, his courageous return from the United States to Germany. Some of Bonhoeffer's theology came through as well, such as his talk of "cheap grace."

But there was something missing. Professor Kenneth G. Barnes, writing in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, says, "Truly in the shadow of the Holocaust, Bonhoeffer's words and actions appear small, tentative, restrained, and ambivalent." There was no sense of that in Staggs' play.

Barnes, however, went on to say, "Yet his life was like a small candle in the black hole of his time. The Bonhoeffer phenomenon, the public reception of this man, illustrates that people would rather huddle around one point of light, no matter how feeble and flickering the flame, than sit alone in darkness." So at the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue, we huddled around this point of light so as not to sit alone in the darkness.