

GTW Winter 2021
Discipleship According to Bonhoeffer
Week 1, January 6, 2021
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First Presbyterian Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Week 1: Introduction to the Life, Martyrdom and Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

GTW Content Blog: <https://my.firstprescos.org/growtogether>

- Welcome and Introduction
- Devotional and Prayer
- Walk Through Syllabus
 - Special Attention to Small Group Formation
 - (Please type questions in the chat box)
- Introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Timeline in German History¹

- 1914 - WWI Begins
 - Dietrich is born in 1906 to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer
 - Twin, 8 children, youngest boy
 - The relationship of church and state in Germany (1918-1945)
 - The church fully endorses WWI
 - Dietrich's older brother goes off to war ... and dies very soon
 - Brother's death triggered theological studies and steps to pacifism
 - End of WWI (1918), Germany humiliated, monarchy transitions to weak democracy, the future of Germany is completely up in the air.
- 1920s
 - Family more political than religious, so a surprise when Dietrich moves to study theology

¹ Primarily built from the film “*Bonhoeffer*” directed by Martin Doblmeier (2003) and “*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*” by Eric Metaxas (2010).

- Dietrich's experience of the church wasn't very positive and his whole family rarely went to church
- Is the church a society (social club) or a worshipping community?
- Christianity hit hard when in WWI Britain, France, and Germany all claim the Christian God as their ticket to a justified war.
- Karl Barth's emphasis on God's Word as supreme in all things
 - Bonhoeffer's dissertation on "the communion of saints" would be called by Barth, "a theological masterpiece." Dietrich was 21 years old.
 - "The church ought to be the presence of Christ on earth." DB
- 1925 Hitler becomes leader of the National Socialist (Worker Party) Movement
- 1930 – New York
 - Dietrich goes to New York as the roaring 20s give way to the Great Depression
 - Union theological seminary, teaching scholarship
 - Reinhold Niebuhr (social ethics)
 - Dietrich did not see the high Christo-centric writing in Niebuhr that he was looking for
 - What is the purpose of ethics? To change the world for the better?
 - Abyssinian Baptist Church, Upper Manhattan / Harlem
 - New York's first African-American Baptist Church (1808).
 - (Central Park ends at 110th, Abyssinian is at 138th, 1.5 miles NE of Union TS)
 - Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Preacher
 - Political and Social Engagement while not losing the Word
 - "A man was lynched yesterday" banner
 - "I have had the chance to hear the gospel preached in church... the black Christ is preached with passion and vision." DB
 - Dietrich loved the spirituals: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot"
- John Lasserre, friend at Union, pacifist (French)
 - The Sermon on the Mount
 - Do gospel ethics become suspended when the State says, "it's time for war?"
 - For Dietrich, the SotM wasn't a mirror to reveal one's sinfulness, but an invitation, indeed a call, to live unto the righteousness of Christ.
- 1930s – Back in Germany
 - Evangelical Germany historically has been very supportive of the government
 - Hitler promised a Leader State (back to the days of monarchy?)

- 1933 Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany
 - January 30th “the day of salvation”
 - Dietrich is in his late 20s
 - Dietrich gives radio broadcast critiquing Hitler
 - The broadcast was cut off before Dietrich was finished
 - Many church leaders wanted the church back in the mainstream
 - Protestant local independent churches disappear to the State church
 - Dietrich teaches theology in Berlin
 - “When you read the Bible you must think that here and now God is speaking to me.” DB
 - Word + Christ
 - Hitler taught that salvation was in the State, Dietrich maintained that salvation is through Christ as laid out in Scripture.
- 1933 - April 1
 - 10am boycott “Germans, liberate yourselves from the Jews!”
 - The Aryan Paragraph
 - No Jews in government,
 - Dietrich declines to preach at the funeral of his brother-in-law’s father. Later Dietrich will confess that “I am tormented (by my action)... how could I have been so afraid? All I can do is ask for forgiveness.”
- “The Church and the Jewish Question” (Chapter 10, Metaxas, 150.)
 - Dietrich is one of the first German Evangelicals to say, “Hey, we must act!”
 - 3 ways to respond to the State who is acting unjustly:
 - Ask the State to change
 - Aid the Victims
 - “Jam a spoke in the wheel itself”
 - Desmond Tutu, “When God grabs you by the scruff of the neck...”
- 1933 - Summer
 - “Konkordat” Catholic autonomy for not organizing against Hitler

- The Pastor's Emergency League 7,000 of 20,000 pastors
 - Dietrich writes to Karl Barth
- The Confessing Church
 - The church's freedom to preach the gospel versus
 - The church's freedom to stand by the victims
 - (Dietrich realizes this is the real struggle now)
- 1935 - Finkenwalde (northern coast)
 - The Confessing Church needs a seminary
 - "I need to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously, it alone will blow all this nonsense sky-high." DB
 - A community committed to: Study, mutual service, and prayer
 - "Brother Bonhoeffer"
 - Ill. making beds each morning and Dietrich checking
 - Bringing in the spirituals from Harlem "Swing Low Sweet Chariot"
 - Dietrich would play his Spirituals records for the students
 - Dietrich saw that the historical oppression of Blacks and Jews had similarities
 - This seminary was illegal! (No funding, etc)
 - Dietrich recognized for his preaching
 - Bonhoeffer writes Discipleship
 - Cheap / Costly Grace
 - Seminary lasted 2 years
 - September 1937 - Gestapo closes the seminary
- 1938
 - Hitler calls for "the destruction of the Jewish race."
 - November 9th "the night of broken glass" (Kristallnacht)
 - "Only he who cries out for the Jews (can worship God)." DB

- Yet the confessing church is silent
 - Dietrich saw an attack on God in the destruction of Jewish places of worship
 - The Resistance
- 1939 – Summer
 - Karl Barth expelled from Germany
 - 100s of pastors imprisoned
 - Friends plea for Dietrich to go back to New York, and he agrees
 - Dietrich asks if one would grant absolution to the murderer of Hitler
 - What does it mean to do good? versus
 - What is the will of God?
 - What is it, in this moment of life, that we called to do?
 - “I have made a mistake in coming to America.”
 - Dietrich gets on the last ship back to Germany before the War starts.
- 1939 - September
 - Germany invades Poland, WWII begins
- Moving from a well-known pacifist to plotting an assassination
 - 1) war 2) persecution = Dietrich joins the Resistance
 - Dietrich provides a moral backbone
 - Lie, plan murder, violate oath
 - Dietrich becomes a double agent
- 1943 – April 5
 - Dietrich arrested
 - Dietrich continues to be a lion for the Kingdom of God while in prison
 - “The church is the church only when it exists for others.” DB
 - Dietrich reads Scripture every day in prison

- Working on Ethics ... “the old kind of ethics doesn’t work anymore (under Hitler)... the only thing you can do is throw yourself on the mercy of God and do what you think is best.”
- July 20, 1944
 - Final assassination attempt (Valkyrie)
- April 1945 – Hitler orders all remaining members of the Resistance to be executed as Berlin falls
- April 9, 1945
 - Dietrich is hanged, naked
 - “This is the end. For me, the beginning of life.”
 - Years later, Eberhard Bethge collects the scattered letters and notes from prison and completes “Ethics.”

Questions for Reflection

- What inspires you most from the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer?
- What do you most hope you get out of this class?
- Would you like to be in a small group beginning next week?
 - Email Ina Meyer, Program Manager for Discipleship: imeyer@firstprescos.org