

Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Scripture, Christ, and Church

HIS/TH615 – Fall Semester

September-December 2022

Tuesdays, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (PDT)

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Purpose:

This course introduces students to the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by exploring his approaches to biblical interpretation, Christology, and ecclesiology. Students unfamiliar with Bonhoeffer will benefit from this accessible introduction to his writings; students familiar with his more popular works will benefit from exploring selections of his lesser-known writings. Throughout this course, Bonhoeffer's theology will be examined with attention to its historical context, enabling students to gauge the impact of events in Nazi Germany on Bonhoeffer's thought. Bonhoeffer's later reception will be addressed, inviting students to reflect critically on how Bonhoeffer continues to be represented and reinterpreted today. This course will allow students to engage with a special topic in Bonhoeffer studies: Bonhoeffer on peace and war, Bonhoeffer and Jewish-Christian relations, or Bonhoeffer and racism. Students will gain confidence analyzing and discussing Bonhoeffer's theological outlook while also developing the academic skills needed for theological studies.

Competence Objectives:

In completing this course, a student will be able to:

- (1) analyze and articulate Bonhoeffer's approaches to key theological topics (including biblical interpretation, Christology, and ecclesiology);
- (2) assess the impact of Bonhoeffer's historical context on this key figure in church history;
- (3) describe and evaluate a special topic in Bonhoeffer studies [*Basic Degree*];
- (4) display competent theological analysis of primary and secondary texts; and
- (5) demonstrate effective oral and written academic skills by articulating theological content with precision and attention to detail.

Format:

This class meets for 3 hours per week over 11 weeks. The format will combine lectures with seminar discussions.

Expectations/Evaluation:

- (1) Participation [*Expectation: all students*]

In order to cultivate an effective learning environment, students are expected to participate in ways that demonstrate discipline and respect. Discipline requires attending consistently, arriving punctually, and preparing adequately to take part in discussions. Respect involves gracious and charitable interactions with students and instructor, including an openness to listen and learn from others.

In order to facilitate meaningful participation in discussions, it is essential that students complete all the required readings carefully and attentively. Note that only Advanced Degree students are required to read the supplementary bibliography.

(2) Presentation [*Expectation: Basic and Advanced Degree*]

By September 16, each student must register for one class presentation: the classes available for presentations are 2-11. Presentations should focus on the secondary reading(s) (i.e., not Bonhoeffer's own writings) assigned for that class. Presentations should not summarize the reading(s), but rather should present thoughtful and charitable analysis of one or two important points. Presentations should additionally demonstrate the importance of the reading(s) for interpreting the text(s) by Bonhoeffer.

Presentations should last approximately 15 minutes. If two (or more) students are scheduled to present on the same class, they must coordinate their separate presentations to avoid redundancy.

(3) Reading Points & Peer-Response Points [*Expectation: Basic and Advanced Degree*]

For Classes 2-11, students are required to post Reading Points on Populi **no later than 5:00 p.m. (PDT) on the day before class**. Reading Points comprise **two** brief responses to the required readings **for the upcoming class**:

- *Questioning Point*: describe one analytic question left unresolved by the required readings.
- *Discovery Point*: describe one substantive discovery or insight resulting from the required readings.

Each point should be approximately 80-100 words. Students should be prepared to discuss, explain, and illustrate their points in class. Effective points will demonstrate that the student has read the assigned texts carefully, critically, and with attention to detail.

Additionally, students are required to post one Peer-Response Point within 24 hours of the end of class (i.e., **no later than 12:00 p.m. PDT on Wednesday**). Peer-Response Points should offer a constructive and charitable response to a fellow student's Reading Point. Peer-Response Points should also be informed by the content of the previous class (i.e., a Peer-Response Point should demonstrate the respondent's engagement with the themes and discussions of that specific class). Each Peer-Response Point should be approximately 80-100 words.

(4) Final Paper: due for all students by 5:00 p.m. (PDT) on December 16

Reflection Paper

[*Expectation: Certificate*]

Certificate-level students will write a reflection paper that explores theological questions raised in the course. For details, see Appendix A.

Special Topics in Bonhoeffer Studies

[*Expectation: Basic Degree*]

By means of Reading Points, Peer-Response Points, class discussions, and presentations, Basic Degree students will develop the analytic and comparative skills needed to discuss a text by Bonhoeffer in connection with related scholarly articles. The final paper will provide Basic Degree students an opportunity to demonstrate and confirm these skills. For details, see Appendix B.

Integrative Paper: Scripture, Christ, and Church

[*Expectation: Advanced Degree*]

Advanced Degree students will write an integrative paper that addresses the interrelations between Scripture, Christ, and Church in Bonhoeffer's thought. For details, see Appendix C.

Online Course:

This is a hybrid course: the instructor will teach the course online, with students attending either online or in-person. The CTA (Classroom Technology Assistant) will be in-person at VST. The Zoom link will be uploaded to Populi. A link to the recording of the class will be posted to Populi following class.

Deadlines:

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional, and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus for each course. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time will affect the final grade for the course. Two late assignments will result in a reduction of one letter grade for the course without legitimate excuse. Students registered for this course are permitted no more than two absences. More than two absences will result in a loss of credit for the course.

Required Texts/Readings:

Clifford J. Green and Michael P. DeJonge, eds., *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

Christiane Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

Other assigned readings will be available online (via Populi or the library system).

Course Schedule/Readings:

UNIT 1: BONHOEFFER'S LIFE & CONTEXT

Class 1: September 13, 2022

Topics:

- Course Introduction: policies, expectations, and assignments
- Bonhoeffer's Life and Context

Required Readings:

- Matthew Hockenos, "The Church Struggle and the Confessing Church: An Introduction to Bonhoeffer's Context," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 1 (2007): 1-20. [[LINK](#)]
- Christiane Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance*, 1-110 and 123-130.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- David A. R. Clark, "Antisemitism, Violence, and Invective against the Old Testament: Reinhold Krause's *Sportpalast* Speech, 1933," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 7 (2018): 124-137.
- Nancy J. Duff, "'Stages on the Road to Freedom': A Brief Introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Theology Today* 71 (2014), no. 1: 7-11.
- Jutta Koslowski, "Details from the Life of the Bonhoeffer Family: New Insights about the Biography and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Memoirs of His Youngest Sister Susanne," *Theology Today* 77, no. 1 (April 2020): 9-32.

UNIT 2:
EARLY YEARS (1925-1933)

Class 2: September 20, 2022

Topic:

- Scripture: Theological Interpretation

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Paper on Historical and Pneumatological Interpretation of Scripture" (*Reader*, 3-14).
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (*Reader*, 210-260).
- Nadine Hamilton, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Necessity of Kenosis for Scriptural Hermeneutics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71, no. 4 (November 2018): 441-459.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Jordan J. Ballor, "Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer's Orders of Preservation and Natural Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-22.

Class 3: September 27, 2022

Topic:

- Christ: Christ the Centre

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," (*Reader*, 261-313).
- Lisa E. Dahill, "Jesus for You: A Feminist Reading of Bonhoeffer's Christology," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 4 (August 2007): 250-259.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Matt Jenson, "Real Presence: Contemporaneity in Bonhoeffer's Christology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2 (May 2005): 143-160.

Class 4: October 4, 2022

Topic:

- Church: Christ in Community

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (*Reader*, 18-56).
- Brendan Leahy, "Christ Existing as Community': Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Notion of Church," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 1-2 (February 2008): 32-59.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Tom Greggs, "Ecclesiology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 225-240.

UNIT 3
MIDDLE PERIOD (1934-1938)

Class 5: October 11, 2022

Topic:

- Scripture: Christological Interpretation

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Contemporizing New Testament Texts” (*Reader*, 415-431).
- David A. R. Clark, “Psalm 74:8 and November 1938: Rereading Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Kristallnacht* Annotation in Its Interpretive Context,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71, no. 3 (August 2018): 253-266. [[LINK](#)]

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Jens Zimmermann, “Reading the Book of the Church: Bonhoeffer’s Christological Hermeneutics,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012): 763-780.
- John Webster, “In the Shadow of Biblical Work’: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Reading the Bible,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 75-91.

Class 6: October 18, 2022

Topic:

- Christ: The Call to Discipleship

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (*Reader*, 455-513).
- Jennifer M. McBride, “Christ Existing as Concrete Community Today,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (April 2014): 92-105.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- A. I. McFadyen, “The Call to Discipleship: Reflections on Bonhoeffer’s Theme 50 Years On,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 4 (1990): 461-484.

No class on October 25, 2022 (Reading Week)

Class 7: November 1, 2022

Topics:

- Church: Christ Mediating Community

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (*Reader*, 514-561).
- Donald Fergus, “Finkenwalde—An Experiment to Restore a Failing Ecclesiology?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69, no. 2 (May 2016): 204-220.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Susan Rakoczy, “The Witness of Community Life: Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* and the Taizé Community,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 127 (March 2007): 43-62.

UNIT 4
FINAL YEARS (1939-1945)

Class 8: November 8, 2022

Topic:

- Scripture: Turning to the Old Testament

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible* (Reader, 562-567).
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “December 5, 1943,” in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.
- David A. R. Clark, “Bonhoeffer’s Christological Interpretation of the Psalms: Tensions, Subjectivity, and the Voice of Christ.” *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 2 (May 2022): 175-195.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- David A. R. Clark, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, and the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (RSK): Reassessing the Historical Record.” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, no. 1 (March 2022): 1-19. [[LNK](#)]
- Michael Mawson, “Scripture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 123-136.

Class 9: November 15, 2022

Topic:

- Christ: “who is Christ actually for us today?”

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Reader, 761-817).
- Natalie Knödel, “Theology for a World Come of Age: The Meaning of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for Doing Systematic Theology Today,” *New Blackfriars* 76 (November 1995): 491-500.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Martin Marty, “The Birth of a Book,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography*, 1-30 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

Class 10: November 22, 2022

Topic:

- Church: Ethics in Community

Required Readings:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, selections from *Ethics*:
 - “Christ, Reality, and Good. Christ, Church, and World” (Reader, 594-612); “The ‘Ethical’ and the ‘Christian’ as a Topic” (Reader, 667-684).
- Karen V. Guth, “To See from Below: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Mandates and Feminist Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 131-150.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Brian Brock, “Bonhoeffer and the Bible in Christian Ethics: Psalm 119, The Mandates, and Ethics as a ‘Way,’” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (December 2005): 7-29.

UNIT 5
LATER RECEPTION

Class 11: November 29, 2022

Topic:

- Bonhoeffer's Later Reception

Required Readings:

- Karen V. Guth, "Claims on Bonhoeffer: The Misuse of a Theologian," *The Christian Century* 132, no. 11 (May 2015).
- Stephen R. Hayes, "Readings and Receptions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 472-485.
- Christiane Tietz, *Theologian of Resistance*, 111-121.

Supplementary Bibliography (required for Advanced Degree only):

- Victoria J. Barnett, "Bonhoeffer is widely beloved. But to fully understand him we should first dial back the hero worship." *The Washington Post*, April 9, 2015.
- P. G. J. Meiring, "Bonhoeffer in South Africa: Role Model and Prophet," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (2007): 150-165.
- Anthony Walton, "Bonhoeffer in Harlem" (poem), *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire* 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 66.

Select Bibliography

For select bibliography, please see the "Supplementary Bibliography" listed for each class.

APPENDIX A

Final Paper Instructions **Reflection Paper** [*Expectation: Certificate*]

- The paper should be approximately 1,400 words, including footnotes.
- The paper is due by 5:00 p.m. (PDT) on December 16.
- Citations should conform to the Turabian standard; instructions will be provided.
- The paper should demonstrate familiarity with the course readings; no outside research is expected.

For this Reflection Paper, consider two theological questions that were raised for you during the course. With attention to the assigned readings, describe how these questions arose. Explain the theological importance of these questions (i.e., why are these questions worth asking?). Explore how course readings helped resolve—or, perhaps, heightened—these questions for you. Suggest how your reflection on these questions might impact your own approaches to ministry, theology, and the church.

APPENDIX B

Final Paper Instructions Special Topics in Bonhoeffer Studies [*Expectation: Basic Degree*]

- Basic Degree students will select one topic, informing the instructor of their selection no later than November 1.
- The paper should be 1,800-2,000 words, including footnotes.
- The paper is due by 5:00 p.m. (PDT) on December 16.
- Citations should conform to the Turabian standard; instructions will be provided.
- The paper should demonstrate careful attention to the assigned readings; no outside research is expected.

Topic 1: Bonhoeffer on Peace and War

What is the nature of Bonhoeffer's commitment to peace? Consider (1) how Bonhoeffer understands 'peace,' (2) the limitations or qualifications of his commitment to peace, and (3) how his understanding of peace is shaped by his broader theological outlook. Drawing on all three assigned readings, construct a clear and original thesis that explores these issues. The assigned readings are:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Fanø Theses Paper and Address: The Church and the Peoples of the World" (*Reader*, 393-397).
- Clifford Green, "Bonhoeffer's Christian Peace Ethic, Conditional Pacifism, and Resistance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 344-362.
- Clifford Green, "Pacifism and Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer's Christian Peace Ethic," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (December 2005): 31-47.

Topic 2: Bonhoeffer and Jewish-Christian Relations

How is Bonhoeffer's legacy for Jewish-Christian relations both promising and problematic? Consider (1) the implications of "The Church and the Jewish Question," (2) his activities and writings during the Nazi period, and (3) his reception in the post-Holocaust context. Drawing on all three assigned readings, construct a clear and original thesis that explores these issues. The assigned readings are:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question" (*Reader*, 370-378).
- Victoria J. Barnett, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. [[LINK](#)]
- Victoria J. Barnett, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Relevance for Post-Holocaust Christian Theology," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 1 (2007): 53-67. [[LINK](#)]

Topic 3: Bonhoeffer and Racism

How may Bonhoeffer's experiences in Harlem have impacted his broader outlook on racism? Consider (1) the implications for interpreting "After Ten Years" (especially "The View from Below"), (2) developments in his understanding of racism, marginalization, and oppression, and (3) the possible effect on his later construal of the context of Nazi Germany. Drawing on all three assigned readings, construct a clear and original thesis that explores these issues. The assigned readings are:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "After Ten Years" (*Reader*, 761-775).
- Reggie L. Williams, "Bonhoeffer and Race," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 383-396.
- Reggie L. Williams, "Developing a *Theologia Crucis*: Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Harlem Renaissance," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (April 2014): 43-57.

APPENDIX C

Final Paper Instructions

Integrative Paper: Scripture, Christ, and Church [*Expectation: Advanced Degree*]

- Advanced Degree students will write an integrative paper that addresses this broad and complex question: “How are Scripture, Christ, and Church interrelated in Bonhoeffer’s thought?”
- Advanced Degree students will submit a brief paper proposal no later than November 1. The proposal will describe the area of focus for the paper (i.e., how this broader question will be approached). The proposal must also include a provisional/working thesis statement.
- The paper should be 2,800-3,200 words, including footnotes.
- The paper is due by 5:00 p.m. (PDT) on December 16.
- Citations should conform to the Turabian standard; instructions will be provided.
- The paper should demonstrate careful attention to a range of course readings including supplementary bibliography. Additional research may be conducted, as appropriate.