

Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues. Edited by Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. 259 pp.

This collection of essays focuses on the significance of Bonhoeffer's life and work for the twenty-first century. As Wolfgang Huber asserts, Bonhoeffer's life story, which ended with his execution by the Nazis in 1945, made him into an international figure. He serves as a model of integrating practical work and theological work in the church. His willingness to resist the Nazis to the point of death lends great integrity to his witness.

The occasion for this book was the “Bonhoeffer for the Coming Generations” Conference at Union Theological Seminary in New York in November 2011. This conference commemorated the publication of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition* (DBWE) and featured the Bonhoeffer Lectures in Public Ethics. (The final of sixteen volumes, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935-1937* [DBWE 11], was not published until 2013.) This conference was geared to Bonhoeffer scholars, and thus the primary audience for these essays will be other Bonhoeffer scholars. But any serious student of the legacy of Bonhoeffer and the church in the Nazi period will find here treasures from historians, theologians, ethicists, and translators and at least seven diverse national perspectives. Victoria Barnett, General Editor of DBWE, offers this assessment of what the conference accomplished: it “examined the numerous aspects of Bonhoeffer’s life and thought that continue to impact Christian life and witness around the world” (93). Though an “unfinished hero,” his legacy continues to bear much fruit.

The book has two major parts. The first part focuses on interpreting Bonhoeffer’s legacy from historical perspectives. The first section of Part I addresses the impact of Bonhoeffer’s life and writings on public ethics in Germany, South Africa, Great Britain, the United States, Brazil, and Japan. The second section features three insightful essays on translation as an interpretive task. The final section of Part I offers five essays by historians who appreciate Bonhoeffer’s legacy but at the same time seek to puncture “common tendencies to oversimplify, to mythologize, and to heroize Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church” (xiii). Part II turns to emerging issues of interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s legacy. Each theologian is compelled to take seriously Bonhoeffer’s context as well as their own. In the first section of Part II the first essay shares insights from a close reading of *Discipleship* and *Ethics*, the second explores the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Bonhoeffer, and the third compares Bonhoeffer’s concept of the church for others with Paul’s critique of empire. The second section consists of three essays highlighting new theological issues and interpretations in Bonhoeffer scholarship.

It is impossible to highlight insights from all twenty-one essays, but several stand out. The first is Huber’s insight that Bonhoeffer’s personal

example has triggered the international impact of his legacy. Second, John De Gruchy, who deeply appreciates the contribution of the life and writings of Bonhoeffer to the struggle against apartheid, offers the provocative assessment that "Bonhoeffer's decision to join the resistance, like that of his fellow conspirators, . . . was elitist, patriotic, and national in ethos rather than liberal and democratic" (21). A third insight is Doris Bergen's blunt charge that Christians in Nazi Germany were not simply silent witnesses of Nazi atrocities or martyrs; they were "killers" (122). Fourth, Christiane Tietz argues that Bonhoeffer's strong Christology serves not as a "hindrance for interreligious dialogue," but as a fruitful "starting point for a Christian perspective on religious pluralism" (188-89). Finally, Clifford Green proposes that Bonhoeffer was beginning to articulate a new Christian paradigm affirming the "worldly presence of Christ and the worldly-social character of Christian existence" (214).

A diverse collection, this may not be the kind of book one reads straight through. But it provides ample evidence why Bonhoeffer's life story and compelling "vision of an ecumenical 'church for the world'" (13) will continue to influence generations to come.

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