

THEOLOGIAN OF RESISTANCE: THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, by Christiane Tietz. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. Pp 132. \$23.99 (cloth). Translated by Victoria J. Barnett from *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologie im Widerstand*, Munchen, C. H. Beck, 2013.

Finally! A concise, contextual biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is now available in the English language for virtually every level of readership; in fact, for anyone interested in the life and thought of this Christian pastor, theologian, and martyr. Christiane Tietz, currently president of the German Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society and professor of systematic theology at the University of Zurich, has given the world (first in 2013 in German and now in 2016 in English) what has been lacking for over forty years. Bonhoeffer's good friend and biographer, Eberhard Bethge, authored *Costly Grace* (Harpercollins) in 1980, which is now out of print, as a concise counterpart to his (Bethge's) larger, definitive, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Fortress Press, 2000; revised edition). Further, *Theologian of Resistance* has the advantage of almost forty years of additional insights from volumes of more recently unearthed primary source material.

The completion of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* (1986–1999) and its translation, *The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English* (1996–2014) edition, has resulted in the publication of virtually all of the extant materials—primary and some secondary—of the Bonhoeffer legacy. Christiane Tietz has devoted her professional career to focusing on understanding and perpetuating the legacy of Bonhoeffer. Being chosen to lead the German Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society indicates the high esteem in which she is held among her colleagues. Tietz's impeccable scholarship is evident in her careful selection of historical

and theological material for this volume. David Gushee (Mercer University) captures the quality and appeal of *Theologian of Resistance* in his jacket endorsement: “this book should become the new standard concise biography of the towering German theologian of Christian discipleship and resistance.”

One could reasonably ask why this book about Dietrich Bonhoeffer is needed, given the plethora of books already available. Is this not simply “one more book”? In fact, Tietz's concise volume is currently one of a kind and very timely. Since the appearance of Bethge's Bonhoeffer biography in 1970, a number of historical novels have been written about Bonhoeffer: Theodore Gill's *Memo for a Movie: A Short Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Macmillan, 1971); Mary Glazener's *Cup of Wrath: A Novel Based on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Resistance to Hitler* (Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Denise Giardina's *Saints and Villains: A Novel* (W. W. Norton, 2010). Many books have focused on specific aspects of his legacy (e.g., ministry, ethics, theology, resistance) and several biographies have been published: Charles Marsh's *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Ferdinand Schlingensiefen's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945* (T. T. Clark, 2010); Eric Metaxas's *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Spy* (Thomas Nelson, 2011).

While every attempt to tell Bonhoeffer's story—or unfold his contributions—aims at objectivity and authenticity, some succeed more than others. Don't we all have our agendas and biases? Whereas Mark Nation, Anthony Siegrist, and Daniel Umbel (*Bonhoeffer the Assassin?: Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peace*, Baker, 2013) see—and sincerely write about—Bonhoeffer through their lenses of Mennonite pacifism, and Andrew Root (*Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, Baker, 2013) authentically reads—and then writes about—Bonhoeffer through his lens of youth and family ministry, the conservative/

evangelical theology of Georg Huntemann (*The Other Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Baker, 1993) and Eric Metaxas (*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Spy*, Thomas Nelson, 2011) clearly colors their interpretation. Christiane Tietz describes today—as objectively and authentically as anyone has—the real Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And, she has done this in one hundred forty-one pages! Tietz has carefully selected the biographical, historical, and theological detail necessary to tell Bonhoeffer’s story, concisely and contextually. So, yes, this volume has a very important place among today’s plethora of books about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

It is in her epilogue in *Theologian of Resistance* that Tietz speaks about Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ongoing influence. While contextualizing “The Reception of Bonhoeffer after 1945,” Tietz displays her understanding of

more recent Bonhoeffer scholarship, and states where she believes his legacy is focused today. Asking why Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s name and life continues to attract people’s attention, often people of quite divergent religious persuasions, she discusses how Bonhoeffer’s legacy has been useful in places as different as the former German Democratic Republic, South Africa, and South Korea. In stating how “Almost all his (Bonhoeffer’s) contemporaries and the first generation of Bonhoeffer scholars are gone, and the second generation has now retired” (117), she points to a time now when scholarship is more “critical” and “shaped by the moral and social positions of today” (117). The author rightly points out that Bonhoeffer’s influence and importance today should find expression less with people asking “What would Bonhoeffer do?” and rather in seeing his authentic life and particular responsible actions as inspiration for the way we authenti-



Transform your ministry

Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching—The preacher brings the word to life. Preaching weaves the drama of the biblical message into the listeners’ lives. This program will refine your vocational development as a preacher.

Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership—The church needs new missional leaders to articulate and practice the biblical and theological understanding necessary to revitalize existing congregations and develop new ones. This is particularly important in the context of one of the great mission fields of the 21st century—North America.

AD1002-14

Apply by Feb. 15  **LUTHER SEMINARY**
(651) 641-3521 | admissions@luthersem.edu | www.luthersem.edu/dmin

cally and responsibly engage our particular social and religious challenges (i.e., less hero worship and more shared responsibility).

Although I routinely assign my own book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the undergraduate students and parishioners I teach, I am very tempted henceforth to use Christiane Tietz's new volume, because it is as readable as it is

objective and authentic. I believe her book will be of significant value to persons new to Bonhoeffer's legacy as well as seasoned scholars. I highly recommend *Theologian of Resistance*.

John W. Matthews
Grace Lutheran Church
Apple Valley, Minnesota