

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION UNDERGROUND: 1937–1940

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Victoria J. Barnett, ed.)

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012 726pp £36.54hb

ISBN: 9780800698157

Those familiar with Dietrich Bonhoeffer will know that his life, though short, was—to use the English understatement—eventful. From his early days growing up in an illustrious aristocratic Berlin family to his final days in Tegel prison, there was hardly a dull moment for the German theologian and pastor, who courageously defended the gospel during the turbulent times of the Second World War. Such diversity of excitement, may, however, prove overwhelming to readers looking for an appropriate

entry point into a story that has commanded so much attention in church and academy alike. To facilitate introductions and study, Fortress Press has published the official scholarly edition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's works in English (referred to by scholars as *DBWE*), which corresponds to its German equivalent. The 16 volumes are divided into two types: Bonhoeffer's major theological works such as *Discipleship* and *Life Together*, and a series of letters, sermons, lectures, essays, devotionals, and other miscellaneous material collected according to significant time periods in his life. This makes for a helpful chronological organisation for readers to explore and discover different stages on Bonhoeffer's path.

Belonging to this second group, Volume 15 *Theological Education Underground* chronicles the momentous years leading up to the war and ending in Bonhoeffer's decision to formerly join the German resistance movement against Hitler through the *Abwehr* military intelligence office. True to the standard *DBWE* format, the book provides a thorough introduction and afterword to set the historical, biographical, and theological scene. As Victoria Barnett explains, there are several factors that make this volume particularly interesting. These years saw the *Anschluß* of Austria in March 1938, the Sudeten Crisis and Munich Agreement, *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, and the beginning of the Second World War with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Moreover, the Confessing Church reached a new low under increased pressure by the Reich Church. Many pastors capitulated to swearing the loyalty oath to Hitler and to the legalisation process, whereby clergy trained in illegal seminaries could reintegrate into the Reich Church by recognising its authority. Given the mounting personal cost of resisting a totalitarian regime, the allure of financial security and personal safety became harder and harder to combat. In addition, these years presented Bonhoeffer with critical decisions, whose weight afflicted him with remarkable inner turmoil. Most notably, Bonhoeffer feared military conscription and through various international contacts received a position to teach at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the summer of 1939. While the Americans celebrated saving the rising star from impending war and dreamed of his contribution to American theology, Bonhoeffer struggled intensely under the burden of his 'brethren' who suffered without him in Germany. After only a month, leaving his colleagues offended and confused, Bonhoeffer was back in Germany just before the war began. Though not documented for obvious reasons, the return would mark his fateful initiation into the German resistance circle associated with the *Abwehr*, through his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi. Although this resolved the short-term issue of military conscription, it would eventually lead to the gallows.

The volume is simply a joy to read. Bonhoeffer's exceptional pastoral gifts shine through in his letters, sermons, and meditations. Due to the

heightened need for encouraging his seminarians, many of whom were dying at the front, these texts are soaked in scriptural exegesis. He dispenses comfort, hope, and loving exhortation with aplomb to a church in crisis. The most noteworthy theological piece is 'Protestantism without Reformation,' Bonhoeffer's observations on the differences between Protestantism in America and Europe. All in all, I highly recommend this book not just to curious scholars, but also to any Christian hungry for encouragement and inspiration. As Bonhoeffer preached in a sermon on Romans 5:1-5, 'The life of a Christian consists not of words but of experience...the experience of the cross of Jesus Christ.' In these pages you will find much of this experience from a man who knew it all too well.

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GOD IS IMPASSIBLE AND IMPASSIONED: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion

Rob Lister

Nottingham: IVP, 2012 336pp £16.99pb ISBN: 9781844746019

The venerable doctrine of divine impassibility has enjoyed a resurgence of interest in recent years, and, amidst the predictable tumult of vulgar derision, has found itself to have a number of very able defenders. Thomas Weinandy, Paul Helm, Gerald Bray, Paul Gavriluk, David Bentley Hart, and Kevin Vanhoozer have all written persuasively on the necessity of an impassible divine nature to any conceptually coherent, confessionally orthodox and biblically faithful account of the doctrine of God—an ecumenical choir, as it were, singing in perfect harmony.

Rob Lister's work is an attempt to add his voice into the mix—but there are, sadly, one or two discordant notes. The book is detailed, thorough, clearly-written, and nicely-structured. Lister begins with a substantial analysis of the patristic, medieval, Reformed, and Evangelical accounts of impassibility, before assessing the widespread modern rejection of the doctrine. In the second half of the book, he carefully sets out a hermeneutical method for dealing with the breadth of scriptural witness on the subject, before advancing his own thesis, namely, that one must affirm *both* God's impassibility, and his genuine emotional experience.

There is much here for which to be thankful. Dr Lister convincingly dismisses the hoary old Hellenisation hypothesis, according to which the church Fathers fatally subordinated the Christian God to the strictures of Greek philosophy. Not so: the Fathers retained a clear commitment to the primacy of Scripture, and they defended distinctive Christian doctrines (such as creation *ex nihilo*) against the prevailing orthodoxies