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DO 650 The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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DO 650
THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
Dr. Stephen Seamands
Fall 2001

I. PURPOSE
The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to the life and thought of one of the 20th century’s most influential theologians, namely, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. During the course students will be exposed first-hand to most of Bonhoeffer’s major writings. Developments in his thought will be traced and related to the events in his life. The relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology for the life and work of the ministry today will be stressed.

II. OBJECTIVES
By the end of this course students will:
A. Be able to understand and articulate the major theological ideas of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
B. Have examined, evaluated, and read a reasonable range of he literature related to the study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
C. Have grasped the relevance of Bonhoeffer’s theology for the Church and Christian ministry today.
D. Have grown in their knowledge and love of God through their encounter with Bonhoeffer’s life and theology.

III. TEXTBOOKS
Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
*The Cost of Discipleship*  
*Life Together*  
*Ethics*  
*Letters and Papers from Prison*  
John DeGrunchy, ed.,  
*The Cambridge Companion to the Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
Bonhoeffer website: http://www.dbonhoeffer.org

IV. REQUIREMENTS
A. Regular, active participation in class sessions. Since most of the time the class will follow a discussion format, it is important for you to get involved. You will be evaluated as to how well you are able to articulate your understanding of the assigned readings (25%).

B. A Group Presentation (45 minutes) to set the immediate historical context (events in Bonhoeffer’s life, events in Germany, etc.) for the various works of Bonhoeffer we
will be reading and to consider other aspects of Bonhoeffer’s theology (25%).

D. A 12-15 page research paper on some aspect of Bonhoeffer’s theology. The paper may be related to the group presentation the student is involved in. Please include at twelve sources in the paper’s bibliography (50%).

V. COURSE OUTLINE

September 5  Introduction

Video: “Bonhoeffer: Memories”

September 12  Bonhoeffer’s Life & Early Theology

DeGrunchy, Companion, 3-68, 113-130

September 19  Bonhoeffer’s Early Theology (continued)

Kelly & Nelson, A Testament to Freedom, 50-137. (On reserve)
DeGrunchy, Companion, 134-170.

September 26  Grace and Discipleship

DeGruncy, Companion, 173-189.

October 3  The Sermon on the Mount

Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 105-197.

October 10  The Church and Discipleship


October 17  Life Together

Bonhoeffer, Life Together

October 24  Ethics as Formation

Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 21-120
DeGrunchy, Companion, 206-223.

October 31  Ultimate and Penultimate Things

Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 121-185.
November 7  Reality and Responsibility
            Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 186-258, 327-357

November 14  Worldly Christianity

November 28  Religionless Christianity
            Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 181-300
            DeGrunchy, *Companion*, 126-243

December 5  Participating in the Sufferings of God
            Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 301-402

**GROUP PROJECTS**

**for**

**DO 650**

**THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER**

1. The Confessing Church
2. Life Together at Finkenwald Seminary
3. Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth
4. Bonhoeffer on Preaching
5. Bonhoeffer on Prayer and the Psalms
6. Bonhoeffer’s Pastoral Theology
7. Bonhoeffer’s role in the Conspiracy
8. Bonhoeffer’s Prison Experience
9. Love Letters from Prison
10. Bonhoeffer and the Secular Theology of the 1960’s
Bonhoeffer’s Early Theology
_A Testament to Freedom_, 50-137.

1. Based on the materials you read, what does Bonhoeffer say is wrong with the church?

2. What is B’s understanding of the nature of revelation (the divine-human encounter)?

3. B believes that it is important for the church to preach the _commandment_ of God with the same concreteness, certainty and authority with which it preaches the gospel (see p. 98). Where and how does the church hear the commandment of God?

4. According to B., where does the Kingdom of God exist in our world?

5. How does B. define the image of God in humanity?

6. According to B., what is the central problem of Christology?

7. According to B., “Christ is the mediator as the one who exists _pro me_ (for me). That is his nature and his mode of existence”(p. 117). In what three ways is he the center and in each case, what does that mean

8. According to B., how should the church respond to the Jewish Question?
1. What is cheap grace? How does it differ from costly grace? Where do you see cheap grace in the American Church today? At ATS? In your own life?

2. Outline B’s theology of discipleship? What characterises the life of a disciple of Christ?

3. B. links faith and obedience in his famous statement “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes” (p. 63). Is this statement a denial of Luther’s justification by faith alone? Is it as B. claims a useful principle for pastoral counsel?

4. How is B’s own experience reflected in his theology of discipleship?

5. What is the picture of Christ that emerges in these chapters?
The Sermon on the Mount
*The Cost of Discipleship*, 105-197,

1. According to B., “the hallmark of the Christian is the extraordinary (p. 153). What characterises the extraordinariness of the disciple?

2. What does B. mean when he speaks of the hidden character of the Christian life? How can our discipleship be both visible and hidden?

3. What acc. to B. characterises the relationship between the church and the world, the Christian and the unbeliever?

5. How would you characterize B’s approach to and exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount?
Discipleship and Church
The Cost of Discipleship, 201-304.

1. Outline B’s doctrine of the Church. What is the relationship between discipleship and
churchmanship? What is the relationship between Christ and the church? What are
the marks (distinguishing characteristics) of the church?

2. What is the relationship between the Church and the world that B. presents here?
What is the relationship between the Christian and the State?

3. What constitutes the holiness of the Church? In other words what is B’s doctrine of
sanctification in relation to the church?

4. What for B. does it mean to be conformed into the image of Christ?
1. What would Asbury Seminary look like if it was based on B’s vision of Christian community? What specific practices would he structure into the life of the seminary? What current practices would he eliminate? What would you add to B’s vision?

2. What acc. to B. are the greatest hindrances and dangers to Christian community?

3. What does B. mean when he says, “only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only he that is alone can live in the fellowship” (p. 77).

4. How does B’s understanding of Christian community and the concrete practices which are a part of it grow out of his theology of sociality? How, for example, does Christology, the practice of confession, the hindrances to community, and the various practices of ministry all relate to sociality?

5. How does B. envision ministry in the Christian community? Which of his insights are helpful to you as you minister?
1. How does B. contrast the two approaches to the problem of ethics (the approach of all other ethical reflection vs. the approach of Christian ethics, the approach of the Pharisee and the approach of Jesus)? What characterizes these two approaches.

2. What have the recent experiences of the Confessing Church in Germany helped to clarify about Christ? What question do they also raise for the Church?

3. What are the main elements in B’s concept of “ethics as formation”?

4. What does B. say is the inheritance of the West? Why is the West in decay? And what Process is necessary for its renewal?
1. What is the ultimate? What is the penultimate?

2. What is the proper relationship between the ultimate and penultimate? Where is that proper relationship determined? What are the practical implications of this relationship for pastoral ministry today?

3. Beginning with his concept of the natural, outline B’s case against abortion

4. What does B. mean by “the natural”? 
1. What is B’s concept of Reality? How is reality related to Christ?

2. How does his concept of reality affect his understanding of (a) the relationship of the church and the world and (b) the purpose of Christian ethics.

3. What is B’s concept of Responsibility? Outline the structure of responsible life?

5. What is B’s understanding of the relationship of church and state?
Worldly Christianity

1. Based on B’s experience, what advice would you include if you were writing a manual on how to live triumphantly in prison?

2. In the face of the great evil of Nazism what ethical approaches does B. judge to be inadequate? What is the approach that he advocates?

3. Where in these materials do you find B affirming the world and the things of this world?
1. When B. uses the word “religion” in a negative, pejorative way, what does he have in mind?

2. What characterizes the kind of religion he feels is no longer relevant to our age?

3. B. objects to Barth’s “positivism of revelation” (p. 280,286)? What does B. mean by that term and why does he object to it?
Participating in the Sufferings of God
*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 301-402.

1. What does B. mean when he says that man has “come of age”? How does he trace the process whereby man has come of age? Does he view the process negatively or positively?

2. In the face of man come of age what form does Christ take? That is, what is the shape of B’s Christology in the light of man come of age?


4. What is the role of the Church in B’s non-religious scheme? How does the church relate its message and go about evangelism in a world come of age?