A RESOURCE COMPANION TO THE FILM

This feature length documentary film is about the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who joined Germany’s anti-Nazi resistance during the 1930’s and 1940’s. Bonhoeffer is currently showing in select congregations prior to its theatrical run. In late 2003 it will be shown on public television. Go to www.bonhoeffer.com to sign up to receive updates on the release of Bonhoeffer on VHS and DVD.

Theological Reflection in a Congregation
Small groups search for quality resources. This book appears modest on the outside yet stands as an excellent primer on living in Christian community. Bonhoeffer helped establish an “underground” seminary in Nazi Germany. Much of this book describes, in practical terms, ways he encouraged the seminary to be a faith community. Though the book comes from a specific, historical context, it has broad application for today’s congregations.

In his introduction, Robert Coles provides an overview of Bonhoeffer’s life and the social and theological struggles that shaped his actions. The book includes excerpts from all of Bonhoeffer’s major works, each introduced with a description of the context in which they were written. This is a great introduction to Bonhoeffer’s life and thought. It would be useful for small group discussion.

This adult study curriculum contains six sessions dealing with themes related to Bonhoeffer’s faith. Each chapter connects a theme with a Bible passage. The lessons are about six pages long and close with a discussion question. Themes include “Who is a Disciple,” “Life in the
Community of Christ,” and “The Cost of Grace.” This study would work well for a small group study or a Sunday School class.

The daily question of the faithful person is how to connect one’s beliefs to one’s life. This book describes a way to make such faith connections. Theological reflection creates a conversation between one’s reality and one’s faithful hopes. This accessible book provides a model for both personal faith reflection and group faith reflection. Without such intentional reflection, people of faith rarely see the distance between cultural dynamics and faith proclamations. Bonhoeffer himself is a model for personal theological reflection.

*Life of Bonhoeffer*
Bethge has written the definitive biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The book is exhaustive. The over 1000 pages of material details Bonhoeffer’s life from childhood until his death in prison. Bethge was a friend of Bonhoeffer. So the book, while scholarly, pictures a three-dimensional figure written through the lens of friendship. Bethge speaks extensively in the documentary *Bonhoeffer* by Journey Films. This volume is most appropriate for clergy or other congregational professionals.

This highly readable biography is an excellent introduction to the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Readers gain a glimpse into the social and political world in which he lived. Organized around the “chapters” of his life--early years, formative years as a pastor and theologian, and struggling years immediately before and during World War II—this biography portrays a man of deep faith and strong conviction. Kleinhans’ biography is less detailed than Bethge’s but is a good overview for personal reading and/or group discussion.

This compact disc is a “radio” play depicting the life of Bonhoeffer. Winning a Peabody Award in 1997, this presentation takes the listener through Bonhoeffer’s decision to plot against Hitler and the repercussions of that decision. This production is from Focus on the Family. The intensity of the subject matter makes this most appropriate for high school age and above. This material might be suitable for confirmation classes.

*Voices in the Night* is a collection of Bonhoeffer’s ten poems written while he was a prisoner in Flossenbgurg awaiting his execution for conspiring to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Written to his friends and fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer, the poems reveal the depth of Bonhoeffer’s emotions. The book includes biographical information as well as a commentary on each poem. This collection is one that can be revisited repeatedly much like the Psalms.

This video is a recording of Al Stagg’s performance of a one-man play depicting Bonhoeffer in his prison cell engaged in conversation with the audience. Viewers can experience with Bonhoeffer the agony of his struggle between the church that he loves and the horror of the Nazi regime that the church has been willing to tolerate. Jewish and Christian audiences alike have acclaimed this video. It provides a meaningful experience for interfaith dialogue.

**Faith and Public Life**


Bonhoeffer spoke of “religionless Christianity.” He did not by any means seek to discount faith or the Gospel. He did want people to practice what they preached. For Bonhoeffer, such practice led people to embrace the world in love and not to hide from it. *Public Offerings* tells the stories several congregations that embrace their local context with love and mercy. For example, the author describes a Jewish Synagogue that encourages members’ social commitment. She tells the story of a Catholic parish that has created an alternative school for youth. Outreach committees or teams would benefit from this work.


Bonhoeffer had a transforming experience as part of the urban ministry of a Harlem congregation. This book tells the story of 28 urban churches. Each of these congregations has been renewed by beginning social service or economic development projects. The book connects each congregational story with a crucial lesson. For example, one story demonstrates the need for strong pastoral leadership while another models the power of a local congregation to change an entire community. Clergy or congregational boards that want to engage their community in deeper ways will find this volume challenging and helpful.


Bonhoeffer was passionate about the role of the church in addressing injustice and reaching out to the downtrodden. *Models of Metropolitan Ministry*, one of 11 videos in a series on the public role of religion, addresses how congregations partner with one another and with other agencies to meet the needs of the community in ways that they could not do alone. Emphasizing the fact that no one partnership model works for every context, this video presents to congregational and community outreach groups some possible options for joining forces to meet the needs of the community.


Bonhoeffer’s life was deeply influenced by his friendship with Frank Fisher, an African-American, fellow student at Union Theological Seminary. Through Fisher, Bonhoeffer learned about the crisis of racism in America. Working from an African American perspective, author Josiah Young demonstrates how Bonhoeffer’s theology confronts the evils of racism and promotes justice and community for all, most particularly the oppressed. Clergy and lay leaders wishing to explore theological foundations for eradicating one of America’s continuing problems would find this book most informative.
Non-Violence


This seven part video series unpacks the Biblical and spiritual message of non-violence. Wink describes the “powers that be” as those sometimes hidden forces that shape our lives, even when we do not consciously know how they are shaping our lives. The tape is Biblically grounded, provocative without creating defensiveness. The tape would work well as a multiple week adult study. It is particularly timely.

Jewish Life and the Holocaust


This Indianapolis area center hosts training events for educators from a variety of settings who intend to teach Holocaust learning models. In addition to these training events, the center provides a variety of resource materials helpful to professional and lay teachers.

Websites

Bonhoeffer’s Cell by Darren Sumner. www.thesumners.com/bonhoeffer

Writer, web developer Darren Sumners offers a collection of Bonhoeffer internet resources. The site includes a brief online biography of Bonhoeffer, an extensive bibliography of Bonhoeffer’s works, an online group discussion about Bonhoeffer, online papers (“Examinations”), a bookstore and links to other Bonhoeffer sites.


This website is the home of the International Bonhoeffer Society and the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works translation project. It includes events related to the life and work of Bonhoeffer, online research, links to other websites and much more. This site would be most helpful to the serious student and/or researcher of Bonhoeffer.

Jewish-Christian Relations. www.jcrelations.net

This website is owned and maintained by the International Council of Christians and Jews. It offers a variety of resources — articles, organizations, events, statements — to foster mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Jews.

Online Exhibitions/Dietrich Bonhoeffer. www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/inex.html

On the US Holocaust Memorial Museum website is an extensive article (“exhibit”) about Bonhoeffer by Victoria Barnett. Barnett acknowledges that Christian and Jewish scholars “evaluate Bonhoeffer’s legacy quite differently”. Although Bonhoeffer resisted the Nazi persecution of the Jews, his early theology was characterized by Christian Supersessionism—the Christian belief that Christianity superceded Judaism “in the eyes of history and in the eyes of God.” There is no way of knowing how Bonhoeffer’s theology would have developed in the post-Holocaust era. This article is helpful for reflecting upon and discussing the dangers of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in Christian circles. The holocaust website contains a wealth of information for learning about the horrific time in world history during