Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography by Eberhard Bethge.

(Translated by Eric Mosbacher, et. al., revised and edited by Victoria Barnett. Revised edition based on seventh German edition. Originally published in German in 1967. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.)

The appearance of a revised version of Bethge's classic biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers an opportunity to revisit the life of a theologian many consider a modern saint and martyr. This new version includes much that was left out of the original English edition, but makes for a 1000+ page volume that is, to say the least, daunting to read. I'm not sure the additional material substantively adds to our understanding of Bonhoeffer since it concern mainly details of his judicial proceedings. Bethge wanted to prove to his German audience that Bonhoeffer's participation in the plot against Hitler was both an act of true patriotism and Christian commitment since both had been called into question.

This book introduces us to the world of the German aristocracy in which Bonhoeffer was raised, and we can better understand how a theologian could be so intimately involved in German political life, including the plot to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was a musically gifted and precocious child who was influenced by his Pietist mother. Although his scientist father did not fully appreciate his son's choice of career, he supported him until his execution, and used his own status as a respected psychiatrist to shield his son from the authorities.

The author was a student of Bonhoeffer, and he approaches his topic with love and admiration. The strongest sections of the book, I think, deal with life in the Finkenwalde Seminary of the Confessing Church. There we glimpse an intimate portrait of a man who was a theologian, teacher, confessor, and church leader. Moravians will be particularly interested in this section since it is clear that this was one of the many points in his life that Bonhoeffer was directly influenced by the hymns of Zinzendorf and the *Daily Texts*. In fact, his image of true Christian community that he attempted to realize in the underground seminary reflect Moravian notions of spirituality.

We often read or hear that there are similarities between our day and the days of the Barmen Declaration (1934) when Bonhoeffer, Niemöller, Barth, and others stood against Nazi theology and proclaimed the Lordship of Christ. Bethge's presentation of that part of Bonhoeffer's life demonstrates just how different his day was from ours. The major issue at Barmen was who would control the State Church – the church and its clergy or the Third Reich. Much of the Barmen story concerns politics as much as theology, but the two are related because the State tried to foster a new theology on the church, namely a bitter anti-Semitic theology that denied even the Jewishness of Jesus. Barmen stands as a witness against those who would make the church's message depend on political agendas and ideologies. We need to remember that most of Bonhoeffer's students did not survive the war.

Bethge also shows us the development of Bonhoeffer's theology. Having grown up in the midst of German culture, Bonhoeffer embraced the refinements of secular life and the achievements of science without sacrificing his deep commitment to Christ. Before the war, his great dream was to study with Gandhi and learn his path of non-violent resistance to oppression. In America, he came to value Reinhold Niebuhr's notion that ethics is the focus of Christian faith, and during the war, he found more honesty and integrity among those outside the church than those inside. While he was in prison (where he was able to continue his impressive reading) that he developed his idea of "a world come of age" and his definition of Christ as "the man for others." Bethge demonstrates that the "secular" Bonhoeffer was the same Bonhoeffer of *Life Together.*

Craig D. Atwood

If you've read a recent book that you think others should know about, send in a book review! This is a good way to share information and encourage conversation.

Editorial

Normally I simply introduce the contents of each issue of *The Hinge* and do not write editorials; however, I feel that I should say something about *The Hinge* and the importance of theological discussion in the Moravian Church today. The synods of both the Northern and Southern Provinces met this spring. I did not attend the Northern synod, but I have heard many reports from delegates. I was a participant in the Southern synod. It is no secret that both synods confronted controversial and potentially divisive issues.

The controversy in the North focused on the presence of gay men and women in the Moravian church and in the clergy. This was the topic of an issue of *The Hinge* several years ago and has been the subject of much study in the Northern Province during the intersynodal period. Clearly the church is divided and emotions run high in addressing the many questions related to homosexuality. For many it is a black and white issue, but there is sharp disagreement on what is black and what is white. For some in the church, homosexuality is itself sinful and the church should not condone sinfulness, especially among the clergy. For others, though, it is an issue of social justice and Christian compassion.

It is easy to become polarized and reject brothers and sisters who disagree on such a sensitive issue. It is easy to make this a political process where one side pushes for legislation that the other side then works to overturn at the next synod. It is hard to listen and study and think through all of the implications of a very complex matter. It is hard to find what is the uniquely Moravian voice in the midst of all of the shouting we hear in the culture around us, but we must continue to discuss even the hottest issues as brothers and sisters in Christ. We must be ready to listen and to speak.