

Who Is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for Us, Today? A Survey of Recent Studies of Bonhoeffer

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Books Reviewed:

Politics in Friendship: A Theological Account. By Guido de Graaff. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014. 240 pp. \$104.00 (cloth).

Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology. By Michael P. DeJonge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 208 pp. \$95.00 (cloth).

Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. By Charles Marsh. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. 528 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness. By Jennifer M. McBride. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 320 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. By Eric Metaxas. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2010. 608 pp. \$29.99 (cloth).

Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking. By Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013. 272 pp. \$30.00 (paper).

Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance. By Reggie L. Williams. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2014. 196 pp. \$39.95 (paper).

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer holds an unusual place in Christian theology. It is difficult to name another modern theologian who is claimed by as many different Christians. A survey of recent Bonhoeffer publications is a case in point: what other theologian has been fruitfully engaged by liberationist Baptists, conservative American evangelicals, Anabaptists, and mainline liberal Protestants? There are certainly other major theologians who have been influential within many different denominations and churches. But with Bonhoeffer, it is not simply a matter of influence. There is also a desire to say, "He was a lot like us." Among these different borrowings, Bonhoeffer can be read faithfully, and applied and reinterpreted contextually. At worst, however, Bonhoeffer is a cypher, an empty vessel for an interpreter, and wielded like a weapon in conflicts both cultural and theological.

The reason Bonhoeffer can be claimed by so many has to do with a quality that makes him, and his theology, easily recontextualized. A great deal of his most interesting work is found in exploratory letters and unfinished manuscripts. His work on Christian life and community tapped into a deep root of Christian experience. He wrote for audiences both popular and academic. The form of his work was myriad, including doctoral theses, sermons, addresses, and letters never intended for public consumption. Most importantly, he drank deeply from a variety of theological streams. The diversity of form, audience, context, and content leads Bonhoeffer's work to be a theological conversation within itself, a conversation that is open at the edges and thus available for different points of entry by any number of different interpreters. Bonhoeffer has, in the past, been appropriated to American theological movements like the death of God theology, to Marxist East German theology, and to English liberal Christianity. These were early, if not very sophisticated, recontextualizations of Bonhoeffer, largely (except for Hanfried Müller's Marxist reading) outside Germany's postwar renegotiation of its own past and identity.¹ Recent volumes are a continuation of this trend.

This is not to say, however, that all interpretations of Bonhoeffer should be treated equally, and with the work of Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's friend and theological conversation partner, a major

¹ Stephen R. Haynes's *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2004) is the most comprehensive overview of different approaches to Bonhoeffer, though his work is oriented around content, listing topical approaches such as "radical," "conservative," "liberal," and so on. In comparison, my schema is oriented around methodological use of Bonhoeffer.

corrective took place. With his biography, published in 1967, Bethge made use of his status as Bonhoeffer's friend.² Bethge, as he reminds us elsewhere, was there. He knew what Bonhoeffer meant.³ One of Bethge's aims was to redirect the course on Bonhoeffer toward a more comprehensive reading, seeing Bonhoeffer as a theologian whose core concerns were consistent from his earliest work as a doctoral student to his last letters from prison. Many of Bethge's opponents were theologians who took Bonhoeffer's work out of its theological and historical context, and Bethge was successful in his task to put Bonhoeffer into historical and contextual perspective. This trend of understanding Bonhoeffer as a theologian with consistent concerns, and whose historical context cannot be overlooked if one is to get Bonhoeffer "right," is, as we will see, still an active mode of Bonhoeffer scholarship.

Bethge, however, did more than make sure that Bonhoeffer was well understood on historical-critical terms. Along with the death of God theologians, the Marxist theologians, and the English liberal theologians (among many others), Bethge did his own recontextualizing work on Bonhoeffer. As early as 1967, in his biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge was rereading Bonhoeffer's legacy on the "Jewish Question."⁴ Later, in the 1980s, he began refining earlier assumptions about Bonhoeffer's record on the topic,⁵ and developed his own post-Shoah Christian theology.⁶ Bethge's work is certainly better than many of the Bonhoeffer popularizers. He had a much stronger historical sense, and a comprehensive knowledge of Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole. What he does, in recontextualizing Bonhoeffer, is different in quality from the other contextualizers, but not different in kind. Along with the others, Bethge read Bonhoeffer in order to navigate a postwar theological context that Bonhoeffer did not share.

As we look to more recent publications, trends, and interpretations of Bonhoeffer, these categories offer a good critical framework. Some studies are limited to historical investigations of Bonhoeffer's thought and influence; some are constructive uses of Bonhoeffer's

² Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al., revised edition (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2000).

³ Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr* (London: Collins, 1975), 140.

⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 271–276.

⁵ See Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 7.

⁶ For example, Bethge was a primary contributor to the statement of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, Germany, in 1980, titled "Towards Renovation of the Relationship of Christians and Jews."

thought. The negotiation between the historical Bonhoeffer and the constructive use of Bonhoeffer, however, is sometimes made strange by a third critical category: appropriations of Bonhoeffer. These three categories will act as touch-points in my survey.

The survey that follows is certainly not exhaustive. One self-imposed limitation was to exclude any work that was not originally written in English, or any volumes of collected essays. There were other exclusions based on the particular argument I am making here, but the exclusions were not arbitrary. Rather, I have chosen to look at books that represent certain trends, though this has meant overlooking other important publications. I have not, for example, included highly worthwhile essay collections such as Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen's *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) and Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter's *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues* (Fortress Press, 2013), or Stephen Plant's *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer: Studies in Biblical Interpretation and Ethics* (Ashgate, 2014).

Between Barth and Berlin: Bonhoeffer's Constructive and Historical Impulses

Michael P. DeJonge's *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* is a welcome examination of Bonhoeffer's habilitation thesis, *Act and Being*. Before this slim volume was published in 2012, no thorough reading and interpretation of this piece of Bonhoeffer's oeuvre had appeared. Most of the interest in Bonhoeffer has not been in his early academic work, in part because his dissertations are difficult and technical. A volume tackling *Act and Being* has therefore been much needed, and DeJonge successfully makes his case about why this is so. Clifford Green, some forty years ago, made the argument that Bonhoeffer's first doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, was foundational to Bonhoeffer's later thought; DeJonge points out that this is also true of Bonhoeffer's second habilitation thesis, written in order to qualify him as a university lecturer in the German academic system of his time.

DeJonge has two core theses. First, Bonhoeffer was not simply a Barthian, but rather brought the liberal and historical tradition of Berlin—exemplified in Harnack, for example—into a critical conversation with Barth. Second, in DeJonge's reading, Bonhoeffer's concern for the historical, as well as the influence of Barth, are both controlled by Bonhoeffer's commitment to a Lutheran Christology. This pair

of theses is illuminating, and its contribution to the understanding of Bonhoeffer's own thought places DeJonge's text in a small canon of historical studies of Bonhoeffer, along with Clifford Green's *A Theology of Sociality*, Ernst Feil's *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Charles Marsh's *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, and Bethge's biography. For students of Bonhoeffer's place in intellectual history, this volume is necessary reading.

Considering our terms, however, one irony needs to be pointed out, although it is an irony with which DeJonge is perfectly comfortable. Arguing for more use of the tools of intellectual history in studies of Bonhoeffer, DeJonge has himself written a book of intellectual historiography, showing that Bonhoeffer was a theologian who married historical concerns with constructive ones (DeJonge, 142–143). In order to get Bonhoeffer right, he eschews any attempt at constructive application or use of Bonhoeffer, and is careful to situate Bonhoeffer correctly, both historically and intellectually. Situating Bonhoeffer in this way leads DeJonge to point out that Bonhoeffer did theology through interrogating a tradition, with the resources of that tradition, in order to develop new constructive insights. Bonhoeffer is, for DeJonge, “no slavish adherent of the Lutheran Christological tradition” while remaining consistent with Lutheran theology’s “best impulse” (DeJonge, 91). Bonhoeffer, in this way, was not himself strictly an intellectual historian. This incisive insight about how Bonhoeffer approached the theological task helps us understand the ways in which other theologians, through an improvisation on Bonhoeffer’s own methodological impulses, approach and use Bonhoeffer. Most uses of Bonhoeffer are constructive, and the constructive theologians who use Bonhoeffer tend to read him much like he himself read his tradition: not slavishly, but according to a “best impulse,” with present-day concerns in mind (DeJonge, 143).

*One Mennonite and Three American Portraits of Bonhoeffer:
Mistaken and Constructive Histories*

Reggie L. Williams’s *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* offers a good example of how a particular contextual reading can lead to some interesting insights into Bonhoeffer. In this case, Williams’s location within the Black Baptist church, and his interest in the racialization of Jesus and how that affects race relations, led him to work on the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Bonhoeffer’s theological development

(Williams, x–xi). For Williams, Bonhoeffer encountered systemic injustices and violence in Harlem, which led him to identify this racial injustice with similar kinds of injustice suffered by German Jews (Williams, 4). Williams’s work does suffer from a focus on *Discipleship*, and as a result obedience comes to the fore in his reading of Bonhoeffer; a larger conversation with Bonhoeffer would have led Williams to temper obedience dialectically with freedom (Williams, 26, 31). Bonhoeffer is in conversation with himself on this point, and a more comprehensive reading of Bonhoeffer would have brought some needed subtlety on how to best articulate Bonhoeffer’s understanding of obedience (Williams, 109–110). But in the big picture, Williams accomplishes two important things. First, he fills a gap in the secondary literature. Second, he leverages Bonhoeffer to analyze the connection between theology and race for an America that continues to confront racially motivated violence and injustice.

Where Williams’s self-consciously contextual reading succeeds, Eric Metaxas, in his bestselling biography *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, shows very little of the same self-awareness. Metaxas’s biography is aimed at a popular audience, which is not a fatal fault, but his use of contemporary theological positions and language makes for some misleading prose. In his attempt to explain Bonhoeffer and his contemporaries to an American audience, Metaxas misdirects as much as he illuminates. For example, it is odd to call Bonhoeffer “born again” (Metaxas, 124). The most comical attempt is Metaxas’s description of Barth’s theology as something like intelligent design, and Harnack’s theology as something like evolutionary Darwinianism. (Metaxas also calls Harnack and the Berlin theology faculty “foxes” and Barth a “hedgehog” [Metaxas, 61], analogies far too tortured to even begin to explain here.) But there are other associations that are less comical. Both “liberals” and Nazis are “Darwinians.” This is troublesome because Metaxas’s categories are historically untethered and monolithic. The Darwinian liberals of yesteryear are, for him, made of the same cloth as contemporary ones (see, for example, Metaxas, 124). Are we to infer that the contemporary “liberal” enemies of some American evangelicals are to be associated with the Third Reich? I am left with the impression that this conclusion is one that Metaxas would be very comfortable leaving open as a possibility. A closer reading of Bonhoeffer would have shown that Bonhoeffer was far from allergic to the term “liberal,” and a better sense of Weimar Lutheranism would have certainly helped Metaxas negotiate the

important subtleties and differences between what “liberal” means now and what it meant then.⁷

While my criticisms of Metaxas’s biography are serious, I do not intend to dismiss it outright. There is good reason for its success. It is readable. Further, despite its theological flat-footedness and its historically questionable categories, Metaxas does find a place in the trajectory of Bonhoeffer interpretation, even if it is without the sophistication it would need to be taken seriously as an academic work. Metaxas sees Bonhoeffer’s value to a Christianity looking for ways to cope with an encroaching and sometimes illiberal secularity. Can we fault him for that, just because he places Bonhoeffer on one side of the “culture wars,” his only mistake being that it is not the side of the majority, mainline, and liberal-minded American interpreters of Bonhoeffer? Metaxas’s biography is a low-brow, popular, American evangelical portrait. This is not bad in and of itself. It would be a serious mistake, however, to read Metaxas’s account as historically accurate.

When a book is not obviously a popular portrait, however, the problem of the relationship between the historical and the constructive use of Bonhoeffer becomes problematic in a different way. Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel’s book *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*? is a good example of how the confusion of these two trends in Bonhoeffer studies can be a disservice to both. Written by three people associated with the Anabaptist peace tradition, the main argument of the book is that Bonhoeffer’s theology can find a much more comfortable place in the peace tradition than has been allowed. As a topic within Bonhoeffer studies, it certainly has a place. Bonhoeffer thought he belonged, as the book reminds us, somewhere within the peace tradition. But in order to make the claim that Bonhoeffer’s life and work is, if not reconcilable with Anabaptist traditions, then certainly very near to Anabaptist traditions, the authors attempt the impossible and over-reach.

The first issue is how the authors treat Bonhoeffer’s objection to war as though it were a principle in Bonhoeffer’s thought (Nation, 119), thus misunderstanding how concrete commands work in Bonhoeffer’s ethics. The concrete ethical command, for Bonhoeffer,

⁷ This is particularly true of Metaxas’s reading of Bonhoeffer’s first trip to New York. Why Bonhoeffer was attracted to certain churches and not others has more to do with his German Lutheranism than it does with which churches were considered fundamentalist or liberal at the time in New York. See Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 333–334.

could never function as a principle, because an ethic based on principle would serve the principle rather than the God who commands. The concrete command of peace cannot operate as a principle that governs all ethical action. The argument, then, that Bonhoeffer spoke about a concrete command of peace does not mean he would have applied such a command during his involvement in the conspiracy to kill Hitler, as though it were an ethical principle to be applied in a new situation.

The authors are, however, right to point to the most recent historiographies of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy, where he has been correctly recast as a minor player. He was not nearly as central and important as he is sometimes made out to be. But to claim that his only interest in being in the Abwehr was to avoid conscription would be to disregard Bethge's biography. Bethge was present for many of the conspiratorial conversations, and was involved in the conspiracy himself. Bethge is as reliable a witness to Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy as one could imagine. The fact that participation in conspiracy, even after the war, was frowned upon by a Germany that valued good order and obedience to the state only gives more credence to Bethge because there would have been an interest in underplaying Bonhoeffer's role in the conspiracy rather than overplaying it.

My point here, however, is not to vindicate Bethge over and against Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel. It is to point out how the attempt to claim Bonhoeffer for a particular theological or ecclesiological project can lead to bad history. But why do the authors of *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*?² feel the need to claim the historical Bonhoeffer for their project? The perceived need to articulate what Bonhoeffer himself "really meant" led the authors into bad history, despite the fact that a constructive conversation about peace in Bonhoeffer's work does not need to rely on a revisionist argument about what Bonhoeffer really thought or did during the conspiracy. When this revision takes place in the way it does here, we end up with a possible constructive conversation badly disguised as history.⁸

⁸ In fairness to Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel, they recognize that interpretation is self-involving (see *Bonhoeffer the Assassin*?², 101–102). But the presentation of their work, in the end, is not so easily recognized as interpretation when the claims are consistently about what Bonhoeffer really thought and did.

Charles Marsh's Bonhoeffer biography, *Strange Glory*, is vastly different in quality from the works of Metaxas and Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel. Admittedly there are factual errors in Marsh's account of Bonhoeffer's life, though many of these are being corrected for a German edition and second English edition. But to dwell on the factual errors is a distraction from Marsh's contribution. In Marsh, we have someone who is in the upper echelon of Bonhoeffer scholars, as well as a theologian in his own right. Where these qualifications do us great service is in his chapters on Bonhoeffer's first sojourn in New York, and the continuing influence of that period on Bonhoeffer's life and work. It takes a scholar like Marsh to point out that Bonhoeffer's largely negative comments about American social theology stand in contrast to the traceable influence of that theology on Bonhoeffer over the long run (Marsh, 134–135).

It is not Marsh's work on Bonhoeffer's American influences, however, that raises the most questions. That distinction is reserved for Marsh's theory about Bonhoeffer's sexual orientation. I would like to tackle this issue from two directions. First, there is the historical question. In contrast to Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel's rereading of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy, Marsh's claim about Bonhoeffer's affection toward Bethge is plausible. Marsh is not the first to ask the question about the nature of Bonhoeffer's affection for Bethge. The earliest clue I can find dates from June 1946, when Gerhard Vibrans compared the loneliness that would be caused by the departure of Bethge from Bonhoeffer's life to Vibrans's own unmarried existence.⁹ And, even though he denied this possibility whenever he was asked, Bethge did not always tell the entire truth about other things, particularly when the truth might affect the lives of others. For example, Bethge said very little about the unsavory military decisions and Nationalist Socialist company kept by Bonhoeffer's cousin, Paul von Hase, who was Commandant of Berlin.¹⁰ In the case of Bonhoeffer, to call into question his sexual orientation would have led to even more unwanted attention paid to Maria von Wedemeyer, Bonhoeffer's one-time fiancée. In the end, however, I find the claim unlikely. For me to be convinced that Bonhoeffer was sexually

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 14 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013), 195.

¹⁰ Victoria Barnett, "The New Era of Bonhoeffer Interpretation," recorded lecture, March 4, 2014; www.livedtheology.org/new-era-bonhoeffer-interpretation/.

attracted to Bethge would require an analysis of sexuality and same-sex affection in aristocratic Wilhelminian and Weimar Republic Germany, and an argument that Bonhoeffer recognizably fits that pattern. This would help mitigate the possibility that the great affection and attachment that Bonhoeffer had for Bethge was different in kind from other heterosexual friendships of the time.

If we approach Marsh's assertions from a constructive angle, however, the claim comes into a very different light. I would suggest restraint, and would limit myself to the term "friendship." This is, after all, how Bonhoeffer and Bethge described their relationship. But to call the relationship a friendship (as I would suggest) or an unrequited sexual attraction (as Marsh does) is to read Bonhoeffer in order to find resources for a church working on ways to express and articulate the theological contours of intimacy, and doing something similar to what Bethge did after the Shoah. We could criticize Bethge's reading of Bonhoeffer after the Shoah for not understanding Bonhoeffer's historical location, but Bethge's work on Bonhoeffer proved, nevertheless, to be a valuable resource for postwar German reflection on Jewish-Christian relations. Marsh's work is valuable in this same way.

Doing Theology with Bonhoeffer

A third way of engaging with Bonhoeffer is to employ his life and work as a resource for a constructive project, rather than for an historical retrieval with contemporary significance, and without making (sometimes dubious) historical claims for the sake of a constructive project. Guido de Graaff's *Politics in Friendship: A Theological Account*, for example, puts Bonhoeffer's friendship with Bishop George Bell to good use as a case study in political friendship. Curiously, de Graaff does not look to Bonhoeffer's own theology of friendship in order to make his argument, despite looking to Bonhoeffer for theological direction on other questions. Bonhoeffer serves de Graaff's larger argument, which is controlled by the political and ethical categories of Oliver O'Donovan, and can be best understood as an extension of O'Donovan's categories rather than a work whose theology is primarily controlled by Bonhoeffer's habits of thought. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to political theology and a theology of friendship, but does not move Bonhoeffer scholarship forward. The irony here is that Bonhoeffer's own thoughts on friendship would help de Graaff's argument, despite the fact that he shows little interest in Bonhoeffer

on this point. It turns into a missed opportunity to have a richer and more deeply textured reading of political friendship, through a conversation with Bonhoeffer, his work, and the disruptions this engagement would provide. De Graaff's use of Bonhoeffer as a biographical exemplar of a particular way of thinking about a topic, however, does offer one possibility for the use of Bonhoeffer in a constructive work of theology.

Jennifer McBride's *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* is a self-consciously constructive reading of Bonhoeffer's theology of repentance. McBride finds herself in a particular tradition of "thinking alongside Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (McBride, 6), locating herself in the methodological company of Bonhoeffer scholars like Larry Rasmussen, whose work intentionally interpreted Bonhoeffer in and for an American context, and John de Gruchy, who interpreted Bonhoeffer in and for South Africa (McBride, 11). At its heart, this work is exemplary of a good and appropriate reading of Bonhoeffer, according to his own best impulses. In this case, McBride's Bonhoeffer is disruptive. As McBride puts it, when "taken as a whole . . . Bonhoeffer's work challenges commonly held theological assumptions" (McBride, 6). This plays out in her Christological understanding of repentance as a public act of witness that does not easily find a home in either American political camp, which, through the categories of sociologist Robert Wuthnow, McBride sees as inhabited by either "inclusive" or "exclusive" Christians (McBride, 29–36). She sees the good, and the not-so-good, in either camp, arriving at a synthetic, critical, and constructive proposal, unslavishly building on Bonhoeffer's own ecclesiological, Christological, and political work. For McBride, the church is not a moral exemplar or judge; nor is it set aside as a dispenser of truth. Instead it takes the form of Christ, and witnesses to the work of Christ, through solidarity with humanity. It accepts God's judgment, and demonstrates God's reconciliation of the world, through acts of redemption and repentance (McBride, 206–207). The argument hinges on the idea that Christ himself is repentant, and the church, which is Christ existing as community, makes God's redemption concrete in the world through the church's repentance. Repentance, in this work, as its overarching conceptual category, ends up carrying more weight than it is able to bear. Reconciliation, as a more comprehensive way to describe God's work in Christ—and one well within Bonhoeffer's own theological imagination—might be a better conceptual cornerstone. But this is a minor quibble with a book

that demonstrates the best kind of constructive use of Bonhoeffer. Its methodology is synthetic. There is no need to simply tell us “what Bonhoeffer thinks,” though a close reading does form the foundation of the argument. It is also a deployment of Bonhoeffer recontextualized to a particular time and place. It asks disparate parties to offer one another what is good, while leaving behind what is not so good, in the way they perform their own kinds of public witness. In this sense, it is very much in the spirit of Bonhoeffer’s reading of his sources. McBride rereads Bonhoeffer not in order to be slavish to Bonhoeffer, but to discover and construct an argument with Bonhoeffer’s best theological self, for the sake of an American church that is politically divided and, as a result, largely ineffective in its public witness.

Conclusion

Keeping one eye on the historical Bonhoeffer is certainly a good idea, because it keeps us from making false claims about Bonhoeffer, his work, and his theology. A good first task is to understand what someone like Bonhoeffer “really meant” as best we can, as a safeguard from seeing and finding what we would like to see. This is why work like DeJonge’s is so important. It keeps us close to the sources. But, with Bonhoeffer, the nature of the sources leads us to discover that there are conversations to be had within the corpus. Recognizing this would lead to more subtle readings, and allow these inconsistencies to be capitalized upon for a constructive project. Williams’s work would benefit from a closer reading of texts other than *Discipleship*, and would allow Bonhoeffer’s understanding of freedom, as a correlate to obedience, to disrupt Bonhoeffer on obedience. Nation, Siegrist, and Umbel would benefit from a closer reading of Bonhoeffer on ethical principles, which would give them room to argue with Bonhoeffer, on his own terms, about peace and conspiracy. De Graaff, too, would benefit from looking to Bonhoeffer himself for some conceptual possibilities for political friendship, rather than simply using the Bonhoeffer–Bell friendship as an illustration. These three examples show us that constructive resources lie within Bonhoeffer’s own corpus, giving room for a kind of argument with Bonhoeffer about Bonhoeffer. In order to do constructive theology with Bonhoeffer, a theologian can rely on the seams and folds within Bonhoeffer’s own thought. Through careful reading, the historical Bonhoeffer is already a Bonhoeffer that lends himself to constructive possibilities,

and where new theological patterns can emerge even before we put him in conversation with resources that lie outside his own patterns of thought.

DeJonge's work also reminds us that Bonhoeffer was not slavish in his use of his own resources, and offers another methodological point of entry for Bonhoeffer scholarship. When a theologian works with Bonhoeffer and does theology like Bonhoeffer, the theologian will inevitably move beyond the historical as a singular criterion for assessing Bonhoeffer's continuing significance, just as Bonhoeffer himself was not slavish to his own resources. To think with Bonhoeffer is to allow that strict historical readings are not always the right contextual ones, and to ask whether the division between them is always good and necessary. And if we think the division between strict historicism and constructive use was a disservice for the very theologian we are interpreting, the foundations of our own critical evaluations begin to change shape, and the ground shifts underneath us. Critical assessment of Bonhoeffer in scholarship, in this sense, can extend beyond a question of historical verifiability of the Bonhoeffer portraits like the ones already written by Metaxas and Marsh. Assessment can also look at the way that Bonhoeffer portraits engage the theological, social, and political landscape that we are currently inheriting. The peace tradition, liberationists, conservative evangelicals, and mainline Protestants are finding different resources in Bonhoeffer, and resourcing each of their projects differently. If we are to be faithful to Bonhoeffer's way of using his sources, and if historicity loses its traction as an isolated criterion, how then can we be critical of other appropriations of Bonhoeffer? Why not think through conservative Evangelicalism with Bonhoeffer? Or human sexuality? Or the peace tradition?

Not all readings are of equal value. Simple relativism will not do, any more than Bonhoeffer thought the German Christian reading of the Lutheran tradition was legitimate. But putting aside the most obviously dangerous and corrosive readings of a tradition, there is certainly good reason to think that the disruption of our habitual theological readings is salutary, and well within the spirit of Bonhoeffer's work. Deep readings of Bonhoeffer lead to interrogation of norms rather than their domestication. Bonhoeffer, because he drank from so many streams—Luther and the Lutheran reformation, Barth, liberal Berlin, the social gospels of both Union and Harlem, to name a few—both appropriates and disrupts all of them. As McBride points out, Bonhoeffer is a theological presence disruptive to our own most

comfortable categories and distinctions. Allowing for our own contextual readings of Bonhoeffer to be interrupted by unfamiliar contextual readings of Bonhoeffer, even those which are very different from our own, is entirely in order because it leads us to call into question what is not salutary in our own traditions and to embrace what is salutary in the traditions of others.