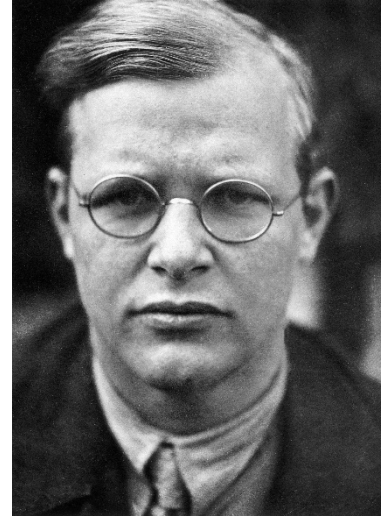


DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Theologian & Martyr, 1906-1945

Feast Day: 9 April

Collect: Gracious God, the Beyond in the midst of our life, you gave grace to your servant Dietrich Bonhoeffer to know and to teach the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and to bear the cost of following him: Grant that we, strengthened by his teaching and example, may receive your word and embrace its call with an undivided heart; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- German theologian, pastor, spy, anti-Nazi dissident, and key founding member of the Confessing Church
- Spent time in America at Union Seminary in New York, attended worship in the black church tradition for the first time, and was deeply affected by it—later influenced his thought on the oppression of the Jews in Germany
- In April 1933, was first clergyman to call for the Church to resist Hitler and the persecution of the Jews
- Founded an underground seminary/intentional community
- *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and *Ethics* are his most famous works
- Took part in a plot to assassinate Hitler, was a double agent as a spy against the Nazis
- Wrestled with whether it was just to commit violence to end the regime
- Captured and convicted for his role in the assassination conspiracy, imprisoned in 1943, later transferred to a concentration camp
- Executed by hanging on 9 April 1945 as the Nazi regime collapsed

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- With regard to the Nazi state, Bonhoeffer said the Church must not simply “bandage the victims under the wheel, but jam a spoke in the wheel itself.”
- Believed Christian life and community should be based on living as literally as possible according to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, includes the Beatitudes, love your enemy and turn the other cheek, the lilies of the field, you cannot serve both God and wealth, do not judge lest you be judged, the Golden Rule, the Lord's Prayer, etc.)
- Came to believe in a sort of situational ethics that veered away from hard and fast principles and more toward trying to discern the will of God in each moment and follow it
- Believed the Body of Christ had a collective responsibility to resist oppression, injustice, and genocide
- Christocentric suffering God, who is manifest in this world

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- Was Bonhoeffer right to plot the assassination of a democratically elected head of state? When (if ever) is violence justified to resist tyranny or protect the weak?
- What is the relationship of the believer to the state?
- Is it possible to fulfill Jesus' commands in the Sermon on the Mount? Are they an outline for Christian community?
- What is the value of the Beatitudes as guidelines for living?
- How are we to make ethical decisions? According to principles determined ahead of time, or in the moment, according to the situation and our discernment of the will of God?

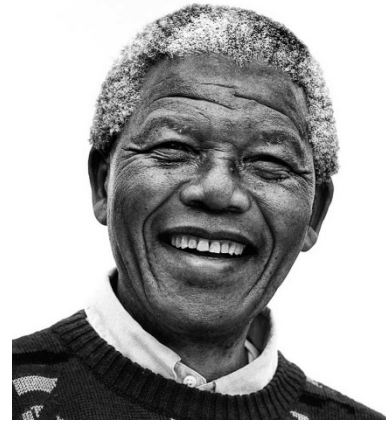
My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

NELSON MANDELA

Anti-Apartheid Leader, 1918-2013

Feast Day: (unofficial) 5 December

Collect: (unofficial) Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



Facts:

- South African anti-apartheid freedom fighter, President of South Africa from 1994-1999, nation's first black head of state
- Joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1943 and became involved in anti-colonialist politics
- Imprisoned first in 1956 for treason, then in 1962 for conspiring to overthrow the state and received a life sentence
- Served 27 years in prison, became a focal point of resistance to apartheid
- Apartheid was a legally codified, government implemented system of privilege to whites and discrimination against and oppression of blacks
- President F.W. de Clerk released Mandela from prison in 1990 under international pressure
- Created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address human rights abuses in the apartheid era
- Received Nobel Peace Prize
- As President, introduced measures for land reform, combating poverty, and expanding health care
- Worked in HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness post-presidency

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission was revolutionary in its design and purpose. Victims of human rights abuses were given public space to tell their stories. Perpetrators were granted amnesty if they fully disclosed their abuses. This was a completely different approach to healing the nation compared to the Nuremburg Trials, and is widely viewed as having achieved significant successes
- Similar to some other figures we have studied, Mandela vacillated between a commitment to non-violent resistance and encouraging and participating in violence
- Some of his most important work was done in prison: creating community and resistance against brutal conditions among the prisoners, continuing to work with those on the outside against apartheid, and serving as a symbol of the imprisoned soul of black South Africa

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is racial reconciliation? What makes it possible? When have we tried as a nation to rush to reconciliation without fully exploring truth?
- What is our role as Christians in the work of racial justice?
- Consider Mandela's experience in prison. When has your suffering forged you into a new person? What does it take for suffering to make someone a better, more visionary person rather than bitter and angrier than ever?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

MOTHER TERESA

Servant of the Poor, 1910-1997

Feast Day: (unofficial) 5 September

Collect: (Roman Catholic) Holy God, who called blessed Teresa to respond to the love of your Son thirsting on the cross with outstanding charity to the poorest of the poor, grant us, we beseech you to minister to Christ in our suffering brothers and sisters; through Jesus Christ your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Facts:

- Founded Missionaries of Charity, Roman Catholic women's religious order now with over 4,500 members in 133 countries
- Along with the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, members vow to give "wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor."
- Chose "Teresa" as her religious name after Therese of Lisieux
- In 1946 while on retreat, received what she called "the call within the call:" "I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. To fail would have been to break the faith."
- Focused on direct service to and care of starving, ill, and dying people in Kolkata (Calcutta)
- Had no income or supplies when she began her order, had to beg for food, just like the people she was seeking to serve
- Controversial for her opposition to birth control
- Today, Missionaries of Charity operate orphanages, AIDS hospices and charity centers worldwide, caring for refugees, the blind, disabled, aged, alcoholics, the poor and homeless and victims of floods, epidemics and famine
- Received Nobel Peace Prize in 1979

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Experienced grave doubts and severe spiritual deserts for over fifty years, to the end of her life: “Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing but emptiness and darkness ... If there be God—please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul.”
- Was the heir to many saints, especially St. Francis, who emphasized Jesus’ love for the poor, and the importance of spiritual poverty and even literal poverty for disciples of Jesus
- Led to criticism that she did not do enough to address the systemic barriers keeping poor people trapped in generational poverty and suffering
- Radiant example of religious work and service almost totally unrewarded by emotional experiences of God

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- What is the relationship between working toward ending the systemic causes of poverty, and direct relief and aid to those suffering right now? Where are you called to serve?
- What does it take for a person to immerse himself/herself in direct service to the poor?
- Do you believe Jesus had what scholars call “the preferential option for the poor”? Why or why not?
- What do you do when you can’t feel God at all? How do you navigate the spiritual desert?
- What is the value of spiritual poverty and the desert of the soul?
- What is the “call within the call” for you? Do you have one? Have you looked for one?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: