



Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation (Princeton Theological Monograph Series)

Lisa E. Dahill

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Description: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's example of self-sacrificing discipleship has for over fifty years inspired Christians around the world in both their resistance to evil and their devotion to Jesus Christ. Yet for some readers--particularly those who suffer trauma, abuse, and other forms of violence--Bonhoeffer's insistence on self-sacrifice, on becoming a "person for others," may prove more harmful than liberating. For those already socialized into self-abnegation, uncritical applications of Bonhoeffer's teachings may reinforce submission, rather than resistance, to evil. This study explores Bonhoeffer's understandings of selfhood and spiritual formation, both in his own experience and writings and in light of the role of gender in psycho-spiritual development. The central constructive chapter creates a mediated conversation between Bonhoeffer and these feminist psychologists on the spiritual formation of survivors of trauma and abuse, including not only dimensions of his thinking to be critiqued from this perspective but also important resources he contributes toward a truly liberating Christian spirituality for those on the underside of selfhood. The book concludes with suggestions regarding the broader relevance of this study and implications for ministry. The insights for spiritual formation developed here provide powerful proof of Bonhoeffer's continuing and concretely contextualized relevance for readers across the full spectrum of human selfhood. Endorsements: "In light of the nearly legendary stature that Dietrich Bonhoeffer . . . has attained in our time, it is a daunting challenge to tackle the thorny issue of the way his theology can be, and at times has been, employed to further abuse and oppression rather than liberation by a facile confusion of submission to the needs of others with authentic Christian discipleship. Lisa Dahill, herself a Lutheran theologian, has addressed this problem with courage and balance. . . . May this excellent study be read by many." -Han van den Blink, Professor Emeritus of Ascetical and Pastoral Theology, Bexley Hall Episcopal Seminary "Lisa Dahill's study of the spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in relation to the experience of women victims of gender-based abuse is a remarkable combination of unflinching academically-based criticism and deeply appreciative appropriation of Bonhoeffer's challenging and inspiring spirituality. It also offers a highly original theoretical approach to the study of spirituality as a rich and demanding resource for those who deal pastorally with abuse victims in a faith context as well as for all of us who, in one way or another, deal with the "underside" of our own selfhood. Her conclusions about both the value of particular spiritualities for the universal church and the non-universality of particular spiritualities themselves demonstrate precisely the specific contribution of the scholarly study of spirituality in itself rather than as a subset or offshoot of theology, ethics, or the personal or social sciences." -Sandra M. Schneiders, Professor of New Testament and Christian Spirituality, Jesuit School of Theology About the Contributor(s): Lisa E. Dahill is Assistant Professor of Worship and Christian Spirituality at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, OH. She is co-chair of the Bonhoeffer: Theology and Social Analysis Group of the American Academy of Religion and a scholar and translator of Bonhoeffer's works for the DBWE series from Fortress Press (Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945, DBWE 16, published in 2006; and Resistance and Surrender: Letters and Papers from Prison, DBWE 8, in process). In addition, she is author of Truly Present: Practicing Prayer in the Liturgy (2006).

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