

Chronology of the life of

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Charles E. Ford

- 1906 born on 4 February in Breslau Germany (now Wroclaw Poland) one of eight children of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer.
- 1912 family moves to Berlin where Karl Bonhoeffer is appointed head of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Berlin, the most prestigious position in psychiatry in Germany.
- 1918 Walter, an older brother, is killed at the front in the First World War.
- 1923 decides to pursue theological studies at the University, thus departing from the religious skepticism and scientific orientation of his family.
- 1928 first pastoral position as an assistant in Barcelona Spain.
- 1930 leaves for New York City to spend a year at Union Theological Seminary.
- 1931 joins the theological faculty at the University of Berlin.
- 1933 in April writes a treatise urging the church to resist the expulsion of pastors of Jewish origin from their pastorates.
- 1933 in August co-authors with Hermann Sasse the Bethel Confession in opposition to the "German Christians," a movement in the Protestant churches of people enthusiastic about Nazism.
- 1933 in September co-authors with Martin Niemoeller a brief declaration founding the Pastor's Emergency League which gains 6,000 signatures by the end of the year.
- 1933 in October, discouraged by the lack of a strong opposition within the church to the German Christians, leaves Germany to accept a pastorate with a German speaking congregation in England.
- 1934 at the Barmen Synod in May the Confessing Church is formed, drawing members out of the Protestant churches in Germany. Bonhoeffer strongly supports it.
- 1935 called to head the seminary in Finkenwalde, one of five small seminaries set up by the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer returns to Germany from England. Here begins his contact with members of the Prussian Junker class who are at the center of the resistance to the Nazis.
- 1937 seminaries are closed by the authorities. Bonhoeffer organizes the underground training of seminarians.
- 1939 in June comes to the United States to escape from Germany. After a short stay he abruptly decides to return to Germany, arriving shortly before the outbreak of war.
- 1940 begins working with his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi in the *Abwehr*, military counterintelligence, in which, under the direction of Admiral Canaris, has been created a center of anti-Nazi resistance.
- 1940 begins work on *Ethics*, which he considers his most important work.
- 1941 in June Germany attacks the Soviet Union and begins the systematic mass murder of Jews. Bonhoeffer presses the urgency of the overthrow and, if necessary, the assassination of Hitler.
- 1943 on 5 April announces his engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer, the seventeen year old granddaughter of Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, a strong supporter of the Confessing Church in Prussia. The same day he is arrested, together with Dohnanyi, for having helped a group of Jewish people escape from Germany.
- 1944 on 20 July the long awaited attempt to kill Hitler fails. Bonhoeffer continues to successfully cover up his anti-Nazi activities until the discovery of materials of Canaris and von Dohnanyi in the spring of 1945.
- 1945 on 9 April Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi are executed on specific orders from Hitler.
- 1945 on 23 April brother Klaus Bonhoeffer and brother-in-law Ruediger Schleicher are executed.
- 1945 on 8 May Germany signs an unconditional surrender.