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Dogmatics In Outline (SCM Classics)



Synopsis

Barth stands before us as the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, yet the massive corpus of work which he left behind, the multi volume Church Dogmatics, can seem daunting and formidable to readers today. Fortunately his Dogmatics in Outline first published in English in 1949, contains in brilliantly concentrated form even in shorthand, the essential tenets of his thinking. Built around the assertions made in the Apostles Creed the book consists of a series of reflections on the foundation stones of Christian doctrine. Because Dogmatics in Outline derives from very particular circumstances namely the lectures Barth gave in war-shattered Germany in 1946, it has an urgency and a compassion which lend the text a powerful simplicity. Despite its brevity the book makes a tremendous impact, which in this new edition will now be felt by a fresh generation of readers.

Book Information

File Size: 699 KB

Print Length: 162 pages

Publisher: SCM Press (November 9, 2011)

Publication Date: November 9, 2011

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00653OXZY

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #266,485 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #121

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Customer Reviews

Author: Karl Barth
Publisher: Harper & Row Publishing
Reading Level: Moderate
Pages: 155
"Where the life of the church is exhausted in self-serving, it smacks of death." (146)
Karl Barth's Dogmatics

in Outline is a summary of the Apostle's Creed from 1946. Barth calls them "merely an outline of the multi-volume Dogmatik" (6). This is to sell them short. Anyone who can state, as Barth did of the concluding lectures, that "now they are published, I notice their weak points and will not grumble at any reviewer who brings them to my attention" (8) deserves to be read as one who is critical of all words "including their own." Dogmatics in Outline is not without fault. Nor will any reader walk away without disagreements (apparently even Barth). Yet still, Barth is a masterful guide through the Apostle's Creed from the Reformed tradition providing insights and thoughts that the modern church needs to hear. His usage of the Heidelberg Catechism throughout his exposition provides great historical light and reveals that many of his insights are not novel. Yet, he would still call these lectures "a document of our time" (8). Though the setting is formal, Barth's teaching is quite straightforward. While a general knowledge of the Apostle's Creed will help a reader, Barth expounds upon the creed without any presuppositions. In many cases, his challenges to liberal theology remind of modern problems the church still faces. Any Christian seeking an introduction "or refresher" on Karl Barth will benefit from the reading of Dogmatics in Outline. "Where God's grace is rejected, man rushes into his own mischief." (106)

I finally finished this book, my first by Barth - it took me months to read this short (155 pages) series of lectures delivered to a group of dedicated students at Kurfürstentum Schloss in Bonn in 1959. Despite the fact that each section is at most about five pages, Barth is deceptively easy to read and thus I spent a great deal of time poring over what had been transcribed in each lecture. He seemingly wastes no words, hardly repeats himself and is almost never recorded delivering anything but the highest level of discourse. Many do not write as clearly as Barth spoke extemporaneously. In particular, the three chapters on the structure of faith (Faith as Trust, Faith as Knowledge, and Faith as Confession) are particularly useful. The contrast between faith as trust and as knowledge was and is still difficult for me to totally understand in the context of this discussion. If reading the chapter on trust, one might accuse Barth (as some have) of fideism, but then taken as a pill with the chapter on knowledge, the waters are muddied. Knowledge rightly understood, knowledge as wisdom or Sophia rather than Scientia, Barth argues, is the sort of Christian knowledge that is related to faith (and encompasses the entire existence of man). Finally the church's job, in faith, is to confess its faith. It must proclaim, even in 'unedifying language' familiar to those 'out there'. Christian faith does not happen in a 'snail's shell' or in a comfortable dualism. Confession is not a weak thing that happens weekly in a church service, but in our every involvement outside of life Barth calls the Christian to confess in love, in ways that 'Mr. Everyman'

can understand. To paraphrase St. Francis, spread the Gospel, and use words only if necessary. By far the most moving chapter is on the coming judgment of Christ. Judgment never seems to be a fun topic, but in this case Barth points us to Christ as the one who will create order and restore what has been destroyed. (The particular university was apparently in near ruins in the post-war landscape, perhaps making this a particularly poignant point for many students as well as Barth himself). At judgment all tears will be wiped away. It won't be a question of our faith or lack of faith - but it will be the point where "it is finished" comes into full view. Christ has done his work on earth, which holds for all, Christian and non-Christian alike. An amazing lecture that truly challenges any sort of knee-jerk reaction against Christ the Judge. This was for me a book to savor and delight in, and it is one that I shall revisit again and again throughout my life.

If you want a nice summary of the basic themes of Church Dogmatics, this is it. I have read the entire Church Dogmatics, and this book provides many of the key positions we find there. It does not replace the reading of Church Dogmatics, but for those who have no interest in going that far with Barth, this is a good place to be. It is a set of lectures Barth offered, without notes, in Germany soon after World War II. It is an exposition of the Apostles' Creed. It provides some good insight into the direction Barth was headed had he completed Church Dogmatics.

This is an excellent short and (relatively) accessible work by Barth. Delivered as a lecture in the year just after WWII, Barth is speaking to students about the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. His combativeness, intellect, and humor are on display here in a book full of vivid metaphors and surprising turns of thought. If you want to read Barth himself but don't want to tackle the Church Dogmatics yet, this is a great choice.

Barth is neo-orthodox in his theology and does a good job describing that viewpoint. This is a short book packed with solid theology that is more attuned to traditional main-line protestant or catholics. Barth focuses on the incarnation as the primary means by which we know God (as opposed to Evangelicals who focus on the death and resurrection).

A very concise and informative book that I greatly enjoy that is easily readable and understood by a novice such as myself. If one is new to Karl Barth, this is a book to begin with and an outstanding introduction to many of his profound insights and thoughts. The book encourages one to explore topics that one decides to pursue with great references.

This is a condensed series of lectures that Barth gave standing in rubble after World War II. Very interesting. Not aimed at any denomination (he was Evangelical Reformed) but speaks of the true Church worldwide that only God knows. I bought his Church Dogmatics series because he interested me and has a new way of looking at God's Word.

Barth and his declarations ring true while provocative.

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