

PAUL T. NIMMO. *BARTH: A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED*. LONDON: BLOOMSBURY T&T CLARK, 2017. (224 PP) [ISBN 9780567032645]

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Paul Nimmo, King's Chair of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen, has written a detailed and articulate introduction to the life and thought of the 20th-century Swiss theologian, Karl Barth. Nimmo does a marvelous job accomplishing his goal to "introduce readers to the theology of Karl Barth" (xii). The book comprises eight chapters.

Chapter one captures the life and work of Barth in fourteen easy to read pages. Nimmo captures the shift in Barth's theology, largely due to World War I, from Barth's earlier focus on "the human experience of God" (p. 2) to his later understanding that "theology can only ever move from and return to the Self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ which is never under human control or command" (p. 13).

Barth's life work culminated in what could be considered his magnum opus, the four-volume Church Dogmatics. Since Barth requested his theology be analyzed and understood through his Church Dogmatics, Nimmo uses the format of Church Dogmatics to structure chapters two through six of his book: 2- The Doctrine of the Word of God, 3- The Doctrine of God, 4- The Doctrine of Creation, 5- The Doctrine of Reconciliation I, 6- The Doctrine of Reconciliation II.

In chapter two, the author explores Barth's theology concerning the doctrine of the Word of God in its three forms in the Trinity, Scripture, and proclamation of the Church, acting as Barth's Prolegomena. In its first form, Barth's focus is on the "Trinitarian account of Word and Spirit which enables our present knowledge of God" (p. 37). As Nimmo continues to explore the doctrine of the Word of God in Barth in its second and third forms, he clearly and fairly discusses Barth's innovative, yet controversial position. While the author points out Barth's divergence from the classical Protestant tradition he helpfully responds that Barth insists that the Word of God "which speaks in and through Scripture" (p. 43) is without error and Nimmo points out that Barth never once calls out any supposed errors in the text of Scripture.

Chapter three moves from Barth's Prolegomena to theology proper. Barth's doctrine of God begins with his denial of natural theology and belief that knowledge of God only comes from God's self-revelation to us. Thus, it is no surprise that Nimmo argues the most important thing we must recognize in Barth's belief concerning the reality of God is the way in which it represents the living God. It is in this section of Barth's dogmatics that Barth provides one of his most significant contributions to modern theology, his doctrine of election. Nimmo deals with Barth's theology here with charity and seeks to give Barth a fair presentation pointing out two possible readings of Barth while speaking to the ongoing debate surrounding Barth's doctrine of election.

Chapter four deals with Barth's doctrine of creation. Nimmo is careful here to understand Barth's thought within its historical context. This section of his *Church Dogmatics* was written in the wake of World War II and even while much of Europe was in ruins Barth "unremittingly affirms the goodness of creation, the love of God for it, and the potential of humanity within it" (p. 75). Barth explores this by, first, looking at the work of creation theologically while remaining unhindered by attempts to give scientific explanations of the universe's origins. Second, he gives a Christological anthropology arguing that a true understanding of humanity can only be gained as humanity is considered in relation to God. Third, he concludes his doctrine of creation by examining the relationship between the Creator and the creature.

Chapter five and six seek to help the reader gain an understanding of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation. Nimmo very skillfully turns almost 3,000 pages of Barth's work on reconciliation into 58 readable and well-summarized pages. It is in this section of Barth's *Dogmatics* that we get his mature work on Christology, hamartiology, soteriology, and pneumatology and the author points the reader to see Barth's consistent underlying methodological principle to derive knowledge of God and humanity only through Jesus. While Barth's method has been and continues to be controversial his work here continues to be an "important voice in theological conversation" (p. 138).

Chapter seven explores and consolidates the theme of ethics that is woven throughout Barth's *Dogmatics*. Nimmo helpfully breaks his ethics down into three sections; general ethics, special ethics the doctrine of creation, and special ethics the doctrine of reconciliation. Nimmo helps the reader see how, for Barth, ethics is the result of dogmatics done properly. It is clear from Nimmo's articulation of Barth's ethics that it is directly grounded not only in his theological method and denial of natural theology but also in his understanding of the Creator-creature relationship.

Nimmo concludes his book with five helpful pages which lay out Barth's legacy and his continued significance in dogmatics today. Nimmo gives two possible reasons for continued interest in Barth's theology. The first is ongoing issues of how to interpret what Barth is arguing. The second is to continue to explore the extent of Barth's influence on modern theology.

Nimmo has given us an extremely well written and scholarly book in order to help us to understand a theologian of great magnitude. As a short book, it provides one of the best-summarized treatments of Barth and his thought that is currently published. Nimmo is careful to ground his explanation of Barth's theology in its proper historical context. The controversy surrounding Barth is handled with extreme care by the author as well. The various sides and critiques are met with charity giving each side an equal hearing while attempting to provide a response from Barth to those critiques. Another helpful aspect of this book is that as Nimmo unpacks the difficult box of Barth's theology, the author takes time to pause and provide helpful reflection on the material that has been unpacked. Barth's theology is so dense it is easy to get bogged down in the details, however Nimmo is careful to draw out the main themes of Barth's thought in order to provide a simple introduction to Barth's theology. I applaud Dr. Nimmo and his work on this book and I hope that it is used by all who are attempting to understand the theological giant of Karl Barth.