

Great Paragraphs of Protestant Theology

**A Commentary on the 20th Century
Theological Revolution
and its Implications for
21st Century Theology**

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Introduction:

From 20th Century Theology to 21st Century Resurgence

Four theologians of the 20th Century broke open for me the Bible, Christian heritage, and living a Christian life. They were Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and H. Richard Niebuhr. From deep in the 19th Century, Søren Kierkegaard also spoke strongly to me. There were others – Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Otto, Reinhold Niebuhr, and other less well known figures. But the four mentioned above remain the big four for me. I still read their writings with amazement and deep refreshment.

However, today I find that most Christian laity and clergy and many seminary professors have not had my intimate experience with these towering figures. Some have heard of them, but have dismissed them for one reason or another. Some have read them extensively, but have never fully grasped the Spirit essence of what they were saying. This book is an attempt to awaken interest in the writings and the Spirit of these four theologians. This will not be a survey of their works nor a critique of their theology. This book is just a probe into a few paragraphs, which if understood deeply, can change our lives.

To assist the reader to “understand deeply,” I will be making comments and asking questions that are intended to enable connections between our daily experiences and the words of these theologians. Unless theology relates to our life experience, it is just words and quite often confusing words.

I recognize that studying theology of any sort has become questionable for many. The word “God” and other key words of Christian heritage have slipped into meaninglessness and disuse. So I am going to begin with a rather lengthy essay entitled “Three Approaches to Truth” in order to usher the reader into a vision of the sort of truth with which theology deals. In this essay on truth, I assume that most of us are curious about what is true and what is not. I assume that the question of truth is a relevant topic for most of us, even if Christian theology is not. I assume that truth itself has a drawing power for most of us, even when we know that fresh truth can be painful. I assume that we have all been grasped at some time or another by the excitement of scientific discovery and perhaps also interior discovery. I assume that we have intuited that truth is a bigger subject than the scientific method can encompass. I assume that the reader is willing to consider theology afresh as a part of our quest for truth.

Then in Chapter Two of Part One, I will briefly define nine components of Christian theological study, and indicate how these nine components relate to the structure of the whole book.

In Part Two, the main body of this book, I will share selected paragraphs from my four key 20th century theologians and write commentaries on them. I have chosen paragraphs that deal with the nine components of theological study defined in chapter two of Part One.

In Part Three I will reflect further on the task of trinitarian theology as we move forward with radical forms of Christian renewal in the 21st century.

This brief book has a simple structure, but beneath the surface of these explorations lie some explosive awarenesses, some Spirit dynamite, some revelations of the majestic and awesome possibilities for participation in a vital Christian resurgence in century twenty-one.

Part One

The Magic of Three

1. Three Approaches to Truth
2. Three Times Three is ONE