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### Review Of "The Unreal God Of Modern Theology: Bultmann, Barth, And The Theology Of Atheism: A Call To Recovering The Truth Of Gods Reality" By K. Bockmuehl

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tion in certain geopolitical affairs on behalf of the U.S. government, recommend it as a major contribution to the study of American Catholic history.

SCOTT APPLEBY, *University of Chicago*.

BOCKMUEHL, KLAUS. *The Unreal God of Modern Theology: Bultmann, Barth, and the Theology of Atheism: A Call to Recovering the Truth of God's Reality*. Translated by G. W. BROMILEY. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Helters & Howard, 1988. 183 pp.

This translation of a 1985 German volume is a critical study of the implicit "atheism" within the theologies of Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. Klaus Bockmuehl argues that both thinkers disallow the concrete presence of God in the world because they define revelation as a factor within salvation history, not the world history of everyday experience. When God is removed from common, everyday experience, theology loses its *raison d'être* as a defense and explication of divine work in human history and instead finds itself captive to extrabiblical worldviews (like scientism, humanism, atheism, Marxism, etc.) that make theology irrelevant to the Christian church and its belief in a God who is alive and active within human affairs.

Bockmuehl begins with a clear analysis of Bultmann's argument for an existential, demythologized interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. The conflict between the Bible's mythical worldview and the scientific self-understanding of the modern person necessitates demythologization, that is, the reinterpretation of the Bible in terms of the demand for authentic human existence. Since the true meaning of the New Testament is its existential message and not its depiction of miracles and other events within ordinary history, the everyday world of the believer is eviscerated of spiritual content. Bockmuehl writes that "Bultmann can no longer unite *the reality of meaning . . . and the reality of corporeality*" (p. 55; italics in original). Here I think Bockmuehl's criticisms are telling because the consequence for Bultmann is that my life in the physical world, my relations with other embodied persons, even my own identity as a corporeal being is not spiritually significant because it is the private world of authentic encounter, not the public world of historical objects and events, that is religiously meaningful.

The author sees the same spirit at work in much of Barth's thought. Barth's early dialectical stress on the utter transcendence of God and the qualitative difference between God and humanity so divorced God from the world that God became "unreal" (so the book's English title). And as the Christian community lost contact with the radically "other" God of crisis theology, a host of voices clamored to claim the attention of churchgoers, including Dorothee Soelle's earlier "Christian atheism" and death-of-God theology. Yet in spite of this criticism the author does concede that Barth is not responsible for all these developments even as he notes that Barth in his later work (e.g., *The Humanity of God* [English, Atlanta: John Knox, 1960]) stressed the immanence, rather than the alterity, of the divine presence.

Even though Bockmuehl's account is sometimes accurate (especially with respect to Bultmann), his argument that dialectical theology is a *de facto* "atheism" is not persuasive. Bultmann, Barth, et al. sought to preserve the integrity of the biblical witness by making that witness invulnerable to the criticisms of crude, empirical science. At times they overstated their case, but it does not appear that such overstatement leads to the type of "atheism" Bockmuehl now sees everywhere in contemporary theology.

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