



Christ the Center

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edwin H. Robertson (Translator)

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Christ the Center cogently presents the basis of Bonhoeffer's thinking about Jesus Christ and offers the key to his entire theology. A classic work of Christological thought, both edifying and uplifting, *Christ the Center* is an enlightening guide to faith and action in uncertain times.

Christ the Center Details

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From Reader Review Christ the Center for online ebook

Drew Darby says

Very good. I felt that just by engaging in thinking about christology in such a precise way that I got a lot out of the book. My only complaint is that the editing wasn't too great---some weird alternations between American and British spellings, punctuation oddities, etc...

Alyona says

Well...a tough read, though I wish I could have been among the students of Berlin university in summer 1933 to hear Bonhoeffer deliver the lectures.

What I really liked is that Bonhoeffer, in spite of being a Lutheran, stays unbiased while speaking about different views on crucial points of christology.

The main message of Christ the Centre is that "WHO IS GOD?" is the only appropriate question, not "How can man Jesus be Christ the Saviour?" or "How is the incarnation possible?", etc.

Michael says

This series of lectures given by Dietrich Bonhoeffer early in his career is a mixed bag. His original lecture notes did not survive. The book reproduces the lectures through notes taken by Bonhoeffer's students. The theological content is quite good. It could hardly be otherwise. But the presentation is poor and lacking in clarity. It's obvious that one is reading someone else's notebook.

The gist of Bonhoeffer's lectures is that Jesus, the Christ, is the center of all things: creation, history, theology, the Church and the life of the Christian. That may seem like a given for Christians, but it's important to keep in mind that Bonhoeffer was responding to a German Church that increasingly embraced the ideals of the National Socialist Party. It was necessary to restore an orthodox Christology to the German Evangelical Church. The lectures that form "Christ the Center" were a small part of his efforts to steer the Church back to its origins.

Thought not an easy read, I recommend "Christ the Center" as a reminder to today's Church of who Jesus is. There is a lot of confusion in the world about the Christ, and the Church does not always do a good job of responding to it. In spite of its difficulties, "Christ the Center" is a good antidote. Be prepared to spend a little extra time working through it. The thread of Bonhoeffer's argument is easily lost on occasion and difficult to pick back up. But it will reward your efforts if you stick with it.

Lydia says

This book seeks to answer the questions "Who is Christ" and it is still very relevant in addressing this

question people of faith today. Skim through the first part of Part 2 unless you want a review of ancient Christian heresies, but otherwise a good (and short!) read.

Kelly says

This volume is a compilation of student notes from Bonhoeffer's lectures on christology while teaching at the University of Berlin. While dense and, at times, a mildly laborious read, this collection of notes provides a solid foundation to understanding the great theologian's later writings. Exceptional organization paired with Bonhoeffer's ability to work through metaphysical issues allows the reader to freshly examine faith and one's relationship to Christ.

Overall, thoroughly academic and not as gripping or quotable as his later writings, but necessary for the reader who wants to study Bonhoeffer beyond his usual labels of "radical" and "religionless".

Tim Rippstein says

It's Bonhoeffer... a challenging read. This christocentric focus on asking the right questions when exploring Christ, "Who", not "How" is wonderful. Part one explains this approach. Part two focuses on early trajectories of Christology and their subsequent heresies. Bonhoeffer sees these trajectories today as theologians attempt to relieve the tension present when they seek the answer to "How" in understanding the two natures of Christ. He calls us back to the mystery of "Who".

Dwight Davis says

This is probably the easiest of Bonhoeffer's early theology to read. And it's absolutely brilliant. Bonhoeffer's formulations about the person and work of Christ are incredibly challenging and great. If ever I get to teach a class on Christology, this will be one of the text books.

Nicholas Tangen says

Longer than it seems, but good stuff.

Joe Dantona says

In this collection of notes on Bonhoeffer's christology lectures in Berlin, the reader is taken to "the center and border of his existence" in an encounter with Jesus Christ. The book's purpose is as a summary and introduction to christology (especially Lutheran christology, and its history and interactions with "liberal Christianity"), as well as a summary, defense and exposition of the Chalcedonian definition of the Hypostatic

Union. In its exploration of christology, Chalcedon and the various heresies regarding the natures and person of Christ, this book is largely a success. But, it is not a perfect work.

At various points Bonhoeffer makes odd and frustrating blunders (this is, however, to be taken in the context that these lectures were written early in Bonhoeffer's career). At one point Bonhoeffer says that the Bible is useful with its "flaws," but that it must be informed by scholarship. Now, any sensible Christian will agree that textual criticism has contributed much to our understanding of the Bible and its historical and cultural contexts. But Bonhoeffer seems to be saying-- in the midst of making a statement that we may sometimes have to preach on a text that scholarship has "destroyed"-- that the Bible is secondary to the historical method, as if the analysis were superior to the subject being analysed. Bonhoeffer did not realize, perhaps, the transitory nature of textual criticism (as with all the sciences, what is "fact" this morning is silly fiction by dinnertime), and that what was declared corrupt in the text a hundred years ago has been reaffirmed today. After all, what scholar today seriously contends that Jesus did not really exist? But that argument was extremely popular in Bonhoeffer's day.

Another major stumble comes from Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology, which is quintessentially Lutheran. Bonhoeffer views the Church's authority as inept in the modern era-- he attacks modern "ecumenical councils" as hogwash because of a lack of resolve or definition for orthodoxy and heresy-- and seems to believe that the Church's earlier councils (prior to the Reformation, but especially the first seven or so) were really the only decisive ones. It is unfortunate, this digression, because to answer it properly involves an entire ecclesiastical diatribe which would veer completely off of the current subject. It will suffice to say that this view of ecclesiology is fundamentally inept and naturally leads to a poor state of Christian unity and orthodoxy. An arbiter, a decision-maker-- a pope, a bishopric, a Church with Real Authority-- is necessary to avoid these problems which Bonhoeffer accurately outlines.

A third mistake comes to mind, and that is Bonhoeffer's side-swipe mention of Catholicism as "self-redemption." Very little could be further from the truth. I understand that, as a passionate Lutheran, Bonhoeffer would have to justify his Lutheranism in contrast to the Catholic Church (who was it that said, Every Protestant should ask each day why he is not a Catholic?), but the attack was unwarranted and inaccurate. No serious Catholic, apologist or theologian or layman or priest, would claim that the Church is a method of "self-redemption." From excerpts of his much later work, the "Ethics," it seems Bonhoeffer grew out of this sort of tactic, and that is fortunate.

Most disconcerting is one small passage where Bonhoeffer seems to say that Christ's nature had to have some kind of sinfulness to it in order to be really human. The language is unclear and this I again chock up to the unsure process of piecing the lecture together from students' notes. Nonetheless, this is something to mark.

In all, this book is informative and insightful. Part Two is, in my opinion, vastly superior to Part One, but both have their strong merits. Not all the points hit home and not all the logic is quite so fine-cut (I take this not to be the fault of Bonhoeffer but of the dodgy process of putting together his words from scattered notes), but there is enough material of a spectacular nature to make up for the few significant blunders.

Chris says

This book was an amazing survey of Christology, all the more so because it was not written as a book but was reconstructed from student notes after a series of lectures. I really appreciated the parts of section 2 that

addressed various heresies as they relate to Christology. I'm not sure I understood everything in the book, but it was a fascinating read nonetheless. One of the key points I take away from this book is that it is more to the point to ask "Who is Jesus Christ?" than to ask "How can Jesus Christ be?". Instead of worrying about problems like the dual nature - the humanity of God and the divinity of man - we should try to understand and know the person of Jesus Christ.

Dale says

As the compilation of a series of Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology in 1930 in Berlin, and not a text written by Bonhoeffer for publication, it gives the unique feeling of being able to sit in on those classes. Outlining the heart of Bonhoeffer's theology, Bethge did an amazing job in putting this together from the notes of various students after the war.

Josh says

The text of this book was originally delivered as a series of lectures in Berlin in the summer of '33. It can be found now in Volume 12 of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Series. This is a must-read for anyone interested in the development of the maturing thought of Bonhoeffer and anyone with a healthy interest in a christology that goes beyond liberal theology to reclaim the real historical, actual Jesus of the biblical text as the Christ of faith. Bonhoeffer accomplishes this feat not in a modernistic willful ignoring of historical criticism or an ignorant by-passing of contemporary philosophical developments but by showing that both liberal theology and philosophical approaches are natural dead-ends in asking the 'how' and 'what' question concerning Christ. Rather, we should ask who Christ is. Bonhoeffer collapses the ontological question into the soteriological: Jesus Christ is Christ-pro-me. Nothing more and nothing less can be said about him.

Gary Boschee says

I really liked the first section - The Pro Me. Bonhoeffer can be a bit boring at times, but here he definitely was not. The first part of part two - The Historical Christ, was a real snooze for me, but the last few pages, on Positive Christology, were very powerful, as they absolutely riveted me.

Norman Styers says

This is not a book written by Bonhoeffer, but a reconstruction by one of his students of a course in Christology he gave. The book could benefit from being about twice as long as it is. The text spits out paradoxes faster than G.K. Chesterton, but fails to elucidate them, which makes it hard to grasp just what he is driving at. Still, the book is worthwhile and has some interesting insights.

Kendra Beth says

very much like Mere Christianity, but with a lot more doctrinal rhetoric.
