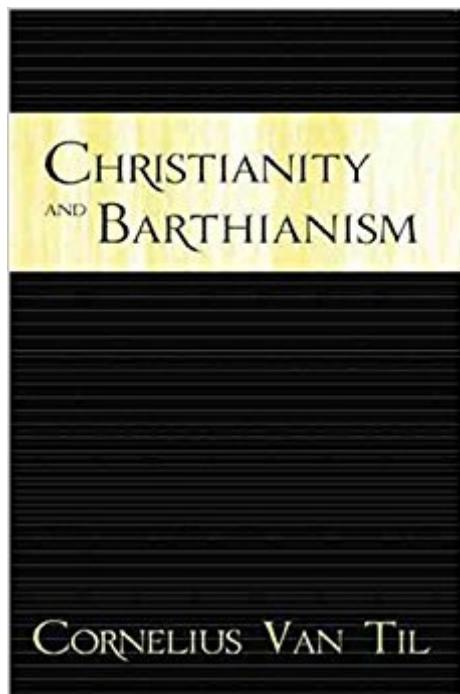


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Christianity And Barthianism



Synopsis

Cornelius Van Til's Christianity and Barthianism continues in the tradition of Machen's Christianity and Liberalism. As the title indicates, Van Til is convinced that Barth's mature theology is as destructive of orthodoxy as early nineteenth and twentieth century Liberalism (or Modernism). In this volume, Van Til analyzes and evaluates Barth's trinitarian theology, christology, notion of time and eternity, his formulation of *Geschichte*, as well as philosophical influences on Barth's thinking. Offering a critique that was years ahead of its time, Van Til's analysis of Barthianism as fundamentally opposed to historic Reformed theology remains as sound today as it was almost fifty years ago. This text is required reading for those interested in a critical analysis of Barth's theology.

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Customer Reviews

Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) was a Calvinist philosopher and theologian, and perhaps the leading Christian exponent of "presuppositional" apologetics. He taught at Westminster Theological Seminary for more than 40 years, and was one of the leaders in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It has been observed that Van Til sometimes seems to reserve his harshest criticism for his fellow Christians, who are not of the same theological and apologetic orientation that he is; he seems to take a particularly strong stand against Karl Barth, of whom he says in the Preface to this 1962 book, "The present writer is of the opinion that, for all its verbal similarity to historic Protestantism, Barth's theology is, in effect, a denial of it." Be that as it may, this book contains the fullest presentation of Van Til's criticisms of Barth---as well as of "Romanism," and also Catholic

theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Hans Kung. After surveying criticisms of Barth made by conservative Reformed theologians, Van Til says, "Barth's theology, together with Roman Catholicism and New Protestantism, is basically informed by dialectical principles that spring from the assumption of human autonomy.... And any theology that assumes human autonomy condemns human predication to the necessity of operation in a vacuum," and adds, "there is only a difference of degree between Barth's own theology and that of the men he describes as on the road to Rome. Their system as well as his allows room for the irrational. Barth's system differs from theirs in allowing MORE room for the irrational." Nevertheless, not all of Van Til's comments are negative: "Our first concern is not with the effects of Barth's writings. Some of these effects have been good. Barth has called attention to some defects in historical Protestant thinking, which has not always been truly Christological and biblical.... Through Barth the Bible has had more influence on at least some (liberal theologians) than it formerly had.... For all this, who can help but be grateful to Barth and to God?" He ends the book on the note, "as in Machen's time 'Liberalism' ... was in reality a man-made religion, so Barthianism, using the language of Reformation theology, is still only a higher humanism." This critical book will not, perhaps, be of interest to even all fans and students of Van Til; but it presents an important aspect of Van Til's philosophy.

Among conservative theologians, no other has understood so well or written so extensively about the man whom many consider to be the top theological mind of the twentieth century. This book is particularly useful for those in the Reformed and Presbyterian community that want to gain a better understanding of Barth and his impact on the modern church. Such an understanding is vitally important for those who hold to the Reformed faith, as Barth more than any other contributed specifically to the modernization movement that dramatically altered the face of the reformed churches in America in the early part of this century. Like most of Van Til's work, the book is somewhat technical and difficult at points to comprehend, but the small amount of effort expended in comprehending this work will yield a substantially greater understanding and appreciation for it in the end.

Van Til tells the story when Karl Barth visited Princeton for a series of lectures. A friend of Van Til's picked Barth up from the airport. It didn't take long before the topic of Van Til came up. "You know Van Til? You know Van Til?" Barth asked his driver, to which the he answered, "Yes, I know Van Til." "Well", replied Barth, "tell him he's a bad boy!" Later on, Van Til and Barth had an opportunity to meet for the first time. "Are you Van Til? Are you Van Til?", Barth asked enthusiastically. "Yes, I

am", replied Van Til. "Well, I know what you've been saying about me and I want you to know, all is forgiven!". Van Til uses the story as an illustration of Barth's dialectical theology, how he was deemed to be reprobate and elect by Barth. I think it also points to something else, perhaps something today's Barthians need to consider. Barth at least interacted with Van Til. Should we not expect a certain level of engagement, some discussion, some debate? It would go a long way towards ameliorating today's climate where debate unfortunately is rare. As far as the book goes, if you want to get up to speed on Barth, and his Reformed Dogmatics (but don't have half of your life left to read it), Van Til does a superb job of systematically reviewing it. You will get your money's worth in this volume.

Van fails. Let me try and count some ways. He sets himself the task of agonizing Barth's ideas. (1) He does so amateurish, like a rushed student paper done as an "all-nighter" with visible chunks of No-Doz caffeine tablets stuck in the pages. (2) He is incestuous in his use of only close-to-hand fellow travellers' work. (3) He has but one basic point, that Barth de-historicizes Scripture b/c of a fix in KB'S on "salvation history."

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