

# Gordon Clark and Other Reformed Critics of Karl Barth

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## Introduction

Proponents of the Reformed Faith—Calvinism—have long contended that it is a uniquely logical faith. To the critics who have said that it is in some sense “too logical,” the Presbyterian philosopher Gordon H. Clark (1902–1985) once responded that such is “a fear without a corresponding danger.”<sup>1</sup> Clark, perhaps more so than any other Reformed theologian, emphasized the importance of logic in theology. Thus it should be no surprise then that when he critiqued the writings of Karl Barth his arguments were as much on logical grounds as on biblical grounds.

Various Reformed theologians have argued that Barth’s theology is incompatible with the orthodox Reformed faith. But while Clark, too, critiqued Barth’s views as non-Reformed, he also emphasized the logical failures in Barth’s theological method. The main source of this criticism is Clark’s 1963 book *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*. Each of Clark’s two major contentions in the book are logical criticisms. First, he contended that Barth’s theology is irrational or, at best, variously rational and irrational; and second, Clark posited that Barth’s theory of language and knowledge results in skepticism. In comparing Clark’s critique of Barth with those made by other Reformed theologians, especially Cornelius Van Til, I intend to demonstrate (1) that Clark’s critique can be differentiated from the others in the importance he places on proper logic, (2) that despite Van Til’s opposition to Barth’s theology, Clark had good reasons to contend that Van Til, in fact, fell into some of the same errors, and (3) that the Westminster Confession of Faith, which Clark subscribed to as an ordained Presbyterian minister, has proven to be a considerable bulwark against Barthianism.

First, it is worthwhile to recount some of the pertinent history of Karl Barth himself, of the various Reformed critiques of him, and of Clark’s interactions with Barth’s thought prior to the writing of his own critique.

## Karl Barth

We start with Karl Barth himself. Barth (1886–1968), one of the best known theologians of the 20th century, was the son of a professor-pastor. Like his father, he followed a route to a ministerial vocation. He was trained in the theology of Protestant Liberalism in a number of German universities and included among his professors two prominent Liberal theologians, Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann. But while working as a pastor in the years after he graduated, Barth came to reject Liberalism in part because of the shock of hearing of his former professors’ allegiance to the German government’s war plans at the start of World War I. Ultimately Barth came to believe that Liberalism (a.k.a. Modernism) substituted man for God—that it deified man by supposing that man

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon H. Clark, “The Wheaton Lectures,” in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, A Festschrift*, ed. Ronald Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968), 26.

has the ability to find God rather than be dependent on God's revelation for knowledge of Him. The publication of Barth's *Römerbrief* (Letter to the Romans) in 1919 (but especially his second edition in 1922) brought widespread attention to his views. Barth also garnered recognition for his role in authoring the Barmen Declaration against Nazi ideology in 1934 and most of all for his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Church Dogmatics) which came out in fourteen volumes from 1932 to 1967.

As Barth's works were first published in Europe and in the German language, American theologians were not immediately aware of his views. As his influence grew, however, Reformed theologians began to take note, with some expressing concerns. The earliest critiques of Karl Barth from American Reformed theologians came in the late 1920s and early 1930s from, among others, J. Gresham Machen, Caspar Wistar Hodge, Alvin Sylvester Zerbe, and Cornelius Van Til.

## Reformed Critics on Barth

### *J. Gresham Machen*

Perhaps the earliest American theologian to critique Karl Barth's views was the then Princeton professor and leader of the Fundamentalist movement within American Presbyterianism, J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937). On April 23, 1928, Machen spoke to a group of pastors on "Karl Barth and the 'Theology of Crisis.'"<sup>2</sup> The paper he read, however, remained unpublished until 1991.<sup>3</sup> Though Machen was critical of Barth, he believed, in D. G. Hart's words, "It was too early to render a definitive judgment because Barth was so difficult to understand." Machen wrote of his own "uneasy feeling" with regard to the Barthian epistemology and objected to "the attitudes of Barth and his associates toward the historical information that the Bible contains."<sup>4</sup> Machen concluded, "The truth is that the radicalism of Barth and Brunner errs by not being radical enough."<sup>5</sup> That is, Machen held that Barth and Emil Brunner (1889–1966, an early proponent of Barth's theology who later went his own separate way) had not distanced themselves enough from the Modernist schools in which they were taught. Machen continued, "What we need is a more consistent Barthian than Barth; we need a man who will approach the NT [New Testament] documents with presuppositions that are true instead of false, with presuppositions that enable him to accept at its face value the testimony of salvation that the NT contains."<sup>6</sup> And furthermore, he wrote, "In their effort to make the Christian message independent of historical criticism, one has the disturbing feeling that Barth and his associates are depriving the church of one of its

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "Karl Barth and 'The Theology of Crisis,'" *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1991): 197–207.

<sup>3</sup> D. G. Hart, "Machen on Barth: Introduction to a Recently Uncovered Paper," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 189–96.

<sup>4</sup> Machen, "Karl Barth," 202.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

most precious possessions—the concrete picture of Jesus of Nazareth as he walked and talked upon this earth.”<sup>7</sup>

Though Machen’s 1928 speech on Barth remained unpublished for many years, he did critique Barth in a published article in 1929. In this article, “Forty Years of New Testament Research,” Machen referred to Barth’s commentary on Romans as a “strange exposition” in which “many readers hold up their hands in horror.” And, he concluded, “It would indeed be a great mistake to regard the Barthian teaching as a real return to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

### **C. W. Hodge**

Machen’s Princeton Seminary colleague Professor Caspar Wistar Hodge Jr. (1870–1937) was the next American Reformed theologian to critique Barth. Hodge, a grandson of the prominent nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge, had conversed with Machen about Barth in 1928 and published his own criticism of Barth in an article on “The Reformed Faith” in the *Evangelical Quarterly* in 1929.<sup>9</sup> There, aligned with Machen’s contention, Hodge noted a “fundamental difference” between Barth and the Reformed Faith—namely, that Barth denies any innate knowledge in man and so makes “the idea of Redemption swallow up that of Creation, that all knowledge of God is through the Word of God.”<sup>10</sup>

Like Machen, Hodge had conducted some of his theological studies in Germany. English translations of Barth’s books did not appear until 1933, but as both Machen and Hodge, along with A. S. Zerbe, were able to read German, they would have had earlier access to Barth’s writings than most American theologians.

### **A. S. Zerbe**

Though not well known today, Alvin Sylvester Zerbe (1847–1935) was once the president of the Ohio Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States and a professor at Central Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. While Machen and Hodge’s articles predate Zerbe’s writing, Zerbe was the first American Reformed theologian to publish a book-length critique of Barth with his 1930 work, *The Karl Barth Theology or the New Transcendentalism*. Dennis Voskuil notes in his essay “Neo-orthodoxy” that Zerbe “concluded that Barth’s theology was ‘but a cosmic philosophy in which the fundamental doctrines of God, man, sin, redemption, the Bible, time and eternity are in a new setting and have a meaning entirely different from the old creeds and confessions.’”<sup>11</sup> So while Machen and Hodge had contended that Barth’s teaching itself

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<sup>7</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Karl Barth and ‘The Theology of Crisis,’” *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1991): 205.

<sup>8</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Forty Years of New Testament Research,” *Union Seminary Review* 40 (1929): 9–11. Machen’s original piece was later reproduced as “Karl Barth and ‘The Theology of Crisis,’” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 197.

<sup>9</sup> C. W. Hodge, “The Reformed Faith,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1929): 3–24.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Voskuil, “Neo-orthodoxy,” in *Reformed Theology in America, A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 252.

was a deviation from the Reformed Faith, Zerbe warned that Barth had redefined the very terms used in historic Christian theology.

### **Cornelius Van Til**

While Machen, Hodge, and Zerbe were the earliest American Reformed critics of Karl Barth, not far after them came Westminster Theological Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), who would prove to be far more influential in his critique of Barth. Though Van Til is best known for his distinctive apologetics, he probably wrote more pages on the theology of Karl Barth than on any other topic. His writings on Barth span the years 1931–1964 and include two books, two pamphlets, and fifteen published articles.<sup>12</sup>

Though Van Til's criticism of Barth was voluminous, his major contentions might be narrowed down to three regular themes or key points: (1) Barthianism is a form of Modernism, (2) Barth lacks a transcendence theory whereby God is to be distinguished as transcendent above his creation, including man, and (3) Barth's view of Scripture is unorthodox.

Van Til's first major contention, that Barthianism (a.k.a. "the Theology of Crisis") is a form of Modernism, is made in a number of places. For example, in 1931, in his earliest writing against Barth, Van Til commented,

Professor McGiffert of Chicago predicted last summer that Barthianism would not last because it was really a recrudescence of Calvinism. If we might venture a prediction it would be that Barthianism may last a long time because it is really Modernism, but that neither Barthianism nor Modernism will last in the end because they are not Calvinism, that is, consistent Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

Van Til continued the same contention in his book on Barth in 1946, saying,

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<sup>12</sup> Cornelius Van Til, review of *The Karl Barth Theology or The New Transcendentalism*, by Alvin S. Zerbe, *Christianity Today*, February 1931, 13–14; Van Til, "Karl Barth on Scripture," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3, no. 7 (January 1937): 137ff.; Van Til, "Karl Barth on Creation," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3, no. 7 (January 1937): 204ff.; Van Til, "Karl Barth and Historic Christianity," *Presbyterian Guardian* 4, no. 7 (July 1937): 108ff.; Van Til, "Seeking for Similarities in Theology," *The Banner* 72, no. 2076 (January 1937): 75, 99; Van Til, "More Barthianism in Princeton," *Presbyterian Guardian* 5, no. 2 (February 1938): 26–27; Van Til, "Changes in Barth's Theology," *Presbyterian Guardian* 5, no. 2 (February 1938): 221ff.; Van Til, "Kant or Christ," *Calvin Forum* 7, no. 7 (February 1942): 133–35; Van Til, review of *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, by Karl Barth, 1946, <https://hopecollege.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/12/1940-1949-Reviews.pdf>; Van Til, review of *Karl Barth en de Kinderdoop*, by G. C. Berkouwer, 1948, <https://hopecollege.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/12/1940-1949-Reviews.pdf>; Van Til, "Christianity and Crisis Theology," *Presbyterian Guardian* 17, no. 16 (December 1948): 69ff.; Van Til, "More New Modernism at Old Princeton," *Presbyterian Guardian* 18, no. 9 (September 1949): 166ff.; Van Til, "Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?," *Westminster Journal* 16, no. 2 (May 1954); Van Til, "What About Karl Barth?," *Eternity* 10, no. 9 (September 1959): 19–21; Van Til, "Karl Barth on Chalcedon," *Westminster Theological Journal* 22, no. 2 (May 1960): 147–66.

<sup>13</sup> Van Til, review of *New Transcendentalism*, 14.

Taking a survey of the main argument we conclude that the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner is built on one principle [the “freedom of God”] and that this principle is to all intents and purposes the same as that which controls Modernism. The Theology of Crisis may therefore be properly designated as “the New Modernism.” The new Modernism and the old are alike destructive of historic Christian theism and with it of the significant meaning of human experience.<sup>14</sup>

Even the titles of each of Van Til’s two books on Barth are designed to further this claim. It is direct in the title of first book, *The New Modernism*, and less obvious, but just as surely noted, in the title of his second book on Barth, *Christianity and Barthianism*, a play on J. Gresham Machen’s famous book *Christianity and Liberalism* (Liberalism being another name for Modernism).<sup>15</sup>

Van Til’s second major contention—that in Barth’s theology God is not rightly seen to transcend man—is also found in a number of places in his writings. For example, in his review of Zerbe’s book on Barth in 1931, Van Til held that because Barth both “exalts God above time” and “exalts man above time,” God is not seen to be qualitatively distinct from man. Thus, for Van Til, Barth “neutralized the exaltation of God.” And, by doing so, “this God is no longer qualitatively distinct from man.” Van Til explained, “Modern theology holds that both God and man are temporal. Barth holds that both God and man are eternal. The results are identical.”<sup>16</sup> Later, in *The New Modernism*, he wrote,

In his *Dogmatik* Barth argues at length against the “consciousness theologians.” These “consciousness theologians,” following Schleiermacher and Ritschl, have ignored or denied the transcendent God. Barth wants to call them back to the “wholly other” God. But Barth’s “wholly other” God appears to be virtually identical with the wholly immanent God of the “consciousness theologians.” His own critical principles do not permit him to presuppose a triune God who exists prior to and independently of man.<sup>17</sup>

Like the first two major contentions here identified, Van Til’s third major contention—that Barth’s view of Scripture is not orthodox—is found in various places. For instance, in *The New Modernism* Van Til wrote,

As far as *Romans* [Barth’s commentary on Romans] is concerned, Barth plainly rejects the whole of Scripture in the sense in which orthodoxy believes in

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<sup>14</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “The Argument in Brief,” in *The New Modernism*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947), xx.

<sup>15</sup> “As the title [*The New Modernism*] suggested, Van Til’s strategy was to link in the reader’s mind the ‘new modernism’ with the old, that is, the liberal that J. Gresham Machen had exposed in his 1923 book *Christianity and Liberalism*.” John Muether, *Cornelius Van Til, Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 124.

<sup>16</sup> Van Til, review of *New Transcendentalism*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Van Til, *New Modernism*, xv.

Scripture. Historic Christianity maintains that by His counsel God has planned the whole course of created historic reality and that He directly reveals Himself in it. The orthodox doctrine of Scripture is based upon the idea that there is an existential system. For Barth to accept the orthodox view of Scripture would, accordingly, imply his giving up one of the main principles, if not the main principle, of his thought.<sup>18</sup>

And in an article titled “Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?,” Van Til wrote,

Enough has now been said to indicate the fact that Barth’s christological principle requires him to reject the orthodox doctrine of Scripture in its entirety. It is not a question of his rejecting the doctrine of plenary inspiration while holding on to the idea of the general trustworthiness of God’s revelation in Scripture. It is not a question of his making minor or even major concessions to negative biblical criticism. It is not a question of his being unable to believe in some of the recorded miracles of Scripture. On Barth’s view the orthodox doctrine of Scripture is inherently destructive of the gospel of the saving grace of God to man.<sup>19</sup>

Barth would probably agree with part of this critique, since Barth did not claim to hold the traditional Reformed view of Scripture.

Van Til’s critiques of Barth address no minor points but relate to critical doctrines of the nature of God (and metaphysics) and the nature of Scripture (and epistemology). Since Barth rejects the Reformed approach to these doctrines, Van Til argued, Barthianism is essentially Modernism, giving priority to experience over the Scripture and leaving one asking, “Did God really say?”

Van Til identified the root of Barth’s troubles in his acceptance of the basic principles of various “modern critical” philosophers, such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, Kant, and Heidegger. For example, Van Til wrote,

When we hear Barth advocate his christological principle as over against the idea of a God who reveals himself directly and finally in Scripture we know what we have to deal with, a secularization of historic Christianity in terms of modern existential philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

It is because of following such leading principles—rather than biblical principles—Van Til contended, that Barth created views at such great divergence from Reformed theologians.

Van Til has frequently been criticized as not having understood Barth. But much of his criticism matches those already made by Machen, Hodge, and Zerbe, who each influenced him. Yet it wasn’t only these American theologians who influenced Van Til’s criticism of Barth. Perhaps Van Til’s greatest anti-Barth influence came through his connection with Klaas Schilder (1890–1952), whom he met in the Netherlands.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?” *Westminster Journal* 16, no. 2 (May 1954).

<sup>20</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 30.

## **Klaas Schilder**

A fascinating account of Cornelius Van Til's 1927 travels to the Netherlands, where he first learned of Barth's work and Schilder's criticisms of Barth, is found in an essay by George Harinck, subtitled "The Dutch Origins of Cornelius Van Til's Appraisal of Karl Barth." Harinck wrote,

After thirteen years of study and college life, Van Til was free of duties and made a vacation trip to his native country, to meet family and to learn about the present state of the vast Reformed community in the Netherlands. Van Til had not known anything about Karl Barth up until this point. But that would change soon. When he arrived in the Netherlands in the summer of 1927, Karl Barth had recently made two trips to the Netherlands, one in May and June of 1926 and another in March and April of 1927. ... When Van Til arrived three months later, Barth was in the air in Holland. ... Van Til visited his uncle and aunt in the village of Oegstgeest and also called on their pastor, Klaas Schilder. Schilder was not at home, but later that year they corresponded. Schilder was a young minister in the Reformed Churches, and he was intrigued with Karl Barth. Barth had been known by the neo-Calvinists since his appointment as a professor of Reformed Theology at Göttingen University in 1921. ... Schilder had read Barth's *Römerbrief* and several other publications, but he hesitated to call Barth a Reformed theologian. ... Van Til was impressed by the vivid debates on Barth in the Netherlands and tried to visit him in the summer of 1927 in his hometown of Münster—situated close to the Dutch border—but he did not succeed. Barth was also the reason why Van Til wanted to meet Schilder. Schilder was the first neo-Calvinist to pay serious attention to Barth's theology, and his interpretation would dominate the neo-Calvinist appreciation of Barth for almost twenty years. He had published his first essay on Karl Barth half a year before Van Til arrived, titled "The Paradox in Religion," and published his next one, "In the Crisis," in September 1927. In these two essays Schilder analyzed the theology of Karl Barth and concluded that it would not stop secularization, but on the contrary would support it. ...Van Til adopted Schilder's point of view regarding Barth.<sup>21</sup>

## **G. C. Berkouwer**

While Schilder was strongly critical of Barth, the criticisms of another Dutchman, Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer (1903–1996) were more measured and mild in his 1954 book *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*.<sup>22</sup> Though Berkouwer's book is largely descriptive of Barth's theology and not often evaluative, his lack of strong criticism

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<sup>21</sup> George Harinck, "How Can an Elephant Understand a Whale and Vice Versa?, The Dutch Origins of Cornelius Van Til's Appraisal of Karl Barth," in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 19–23.

<sup>22</sup> The original Dutch language version came out in 1954. Eerdmans Publishing released the English version in 1956.

coupled with his appendix rebutting Van Til's work on Barth evidences his relative appreciation of Barth's theology. Berkouwer's position on Barth along with his later theological drift might make one hesitate to call him a Reformed theologian. Though he was a member of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and taught at the historically Reformed Free University, he disagreed with some fundamental Reformed doctrines like the inerrancy of Scripture. Gordon Clark noted this himself, saying, "The difference between [Reformed theologian, Benjamin Breckinridge] Warfield and Berkouwer is that the former believes the Bible to be true and the latter does not."<sup>23</sup> And in a letter to R. J. Rushdoony in 1960, Clark agreed with Rushdoony, who had previously mentioned Berkouwer's "departure from the faith."<sup>24</sup>

### **The History of Gordon Clark's Knowledge of Karl Barth**

Like these other theologians, Clark was aware of Barth by the 1930s. Part of his knowledge of Barth came from Van Til's critiques.<sup>25</sup> This is seen in the earliest notes about Barth in Clark's papers, particularly in two letters between J. Oliver Buswell (1895–1977), then President of Wheaton College, and Clark in 1938. Buswell first wrote to Clark on December 9, 1938:

Have you kept track of the Barth-Brunner battlefield? I am ashamed to say I have not. I wonder if you can give me a brief comment on the material in the attached copy of the article in the *Presbyterian*. I am surprised to find Barth even this near to the orthodox position. My last information about Barth of any consequence was in Van Til's lecture which he delivered in New York several years ago. He was splendid on the subject, but I have not kept up with it since then.<sup>26</sup>

And Clark responded to Buswell on December 12, 1938:

My father sent me the copy of the *Presbyterian* containing the interview with Barth. I read it very carefully. Van Til has an article on Barth in the last issue of the *Guardian*, largely devoted to Barth's conception of time by which Barth

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Concept of Biblical Authority* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), 5. The full text of this was later reprinted in *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1982), 132. See also Henry Krabbendam, "B. B. Warfield Versus G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 413–46.

<sup>24</sup> "You also suggest that I put some emphasis on Berkouwer's departure from the faith. This sounds good to me. My chapter on Evil is not too up to date. This would make a good paragraph. Do you know whether Berkouwer explicitly rejects the Scripture, as Dooyeweerd does? I took part in a discussion at Calvin Seminary, arranged by Henry Van Til. The purpose was to call attention to the Christian Reformed people that the Free University of Amsterdam had abandoned the basis of the faith. The immediate occasion was the publication of a student's paper which seemed to attack infallibility. I hope we made some impression." Gordon H. Clark, letter to R. J. Rushdoony, June 18, 1960, Chalcedon Foundation.

<sup>25</sup> Of note is that among Dr. Clark's personal papers is a 79-page mimeographed copy of an unpublished Van Til syllabus entitled "Theology of Crisis," from c. 1937.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas J. Douma and Tom Juodaitis, *Clark and His Correspondents: Selected Letters of Gordon H. Clark* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2017), 80.

removes the incarnation, etc. from calendar time. What Van Til did not mention, but what struck me about the interview is Robinson's inexplicable omission of the question: Do you believe the Bible to be infallible throughout? The phrase "Word of God" is as you well know ambiguous, but to ask if the sixty-six books contain any error is not ambiguous—yet.<sup>27</sup>

Soon thereafter Clark sent Buswell a copy of that interview ("An Interview With Prof. Karl Barth, July 2, 1938, By the Rev. Prof. W. Childs Robinson, D.D.," printed in the *Presbyterian* on October 27, 1938) and wrote, "I should greatly appreciate all the criticism you can find time to give on this paper."<sup>28</sup>

That Clark's father, David S. Clark, first sent Gordon a copy of the article shows his own awareness of Barth's work. The elder Clark, in fact, wrote against Barth in a December 2, 1937 article titled "Barthian Fog" in the *Presbyterian*, making David (though not Gordon) one of Barth's earliest American Reformed critics. David noted, "The Achilles heel of Barthian Theology is his doctrine of Scripture, especially of Inspiration."<sup>29</sup> Thus David was in agreement with Cornelius Van Til, who had critiqued Barth's view of Scripture along the same lines earlier that same year in the January 9, 1937 issue of the *Presbyterian Guardian*.

Following these letters in the late 1930s, a silence regarding Karl Barth fell on Gordon Clark's pen for over twenty years. Then in the early 1960s, Clark wrote numerous articles on Barth while preparing his main work on Barth, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, which was published in 1963. In all, Clark had thirteen articles published on Barth's theology, all between 1960 and 1964.<sup>30</sup>

Clark's work on Barth began anew in 1959 when he decided to write on Barth and indicated as such in a grant application to the Volker Fund.<sup>31</sup> Receiving the grant, Clark took a sabbatical from his regular teaching at Butler University during the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon H. Clark, letter to J. Oliver Buswell, undated, Wheaton Archives. Clark sent "An Interview with Prof. Karl Barth, July 2, 1938, by the Rev. Prof. W. Childs Robinson, D.D.," *Presbyterian*, October 27, 1938, 3, 6-10.

<sup>29</sup> David S. Clark, "Barthian Fog," *Presbyterian* 107, no. 48 (December 1937): 11.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, review of *The Humanity of God*, by Karl Barth, *Christianity Today*, April 25, 1960; Clark, review of *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, by Karl Barth, *Presbyterian Journal* 20, no. 1 (May 1961): 20; Clark, review of *Deliverance to the Captives*, by Karl Barth, *Christianity Today*, June 5, 1961; Gordon Clark, Cornelius Van Til, and Fred Klooster, "Questions on Barth's Theology," ed. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christianity Today*, July 3, 1961; Clark, "Barth's Critique of Modernism," *Christianity Today*, January 5, 1962; Gordon Clark, Cornelius Van Til, Fred Klooster, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "More Questions on Barth's Views," ed. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christianity Today*, January 5, 1962; Clark, "Special Report: Encountering Barth in Chicago," *Christianity Today*, May 11, 1962, 35-36; Clark, review of *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, by Klaas Runia, *Christianity Today*, July 6, 1962; Clark, "Barth's Turnabout from the Biblical Norm," excerpt from *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, *Christianity Today*, January 4, 1963; Clark, review of *Karl Barth on God*, by Sebastian A. Matczak, *Christianity Today*, March 1, 1963; Clark, review of *Evangelical Theology*, by Karl Barth, *Presbyterian Journal* 8 (May 1963): 21; Clark, review of *Portrait of Karl Barth*, by George Casilas, *Presbyterian Journal* 30 (September 1964): 18; Clark, "A Heritage of Irrationalism," excerpt from *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, *Christianity Today*, October 9, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon H. Clark, letter to Carl F. H. Henry, November 24, 1959, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

1960–1961 school year to write what became *Karl Barth's Theological Method*.<sup>32</sup> He chose this project without any knowledge that Barth would come to America three years later to give speeches, one of which Clark would attend. It probably wasn't until Carl Henry wrote to Clark in December of 1961 that Clark knew of Barth's coming to the United States the following year.<sup>33</sup>

Clark was well positioned to write on Karl Barth. He had known of Barth's work and influence for many years, and with the sabbatical, he was able to dedicate a greater proportion of his time to the work than with any other previous book he wrote.<sup>34</sup> Though Clark was capable of reading German (he learned German in high school, and studied for a semester in 1927 in Heidelberg, Germany), the translation of most of Barth's *Dogmatics* into English in the early 1960s would have made Clark's task easier. Any contention therefore that Clark didn't understand Barth perhaps speaks more to the confusion of the object of study than of the mind of the student. That is, if Clark misunderstood Barth, it certainly wasn't for lack of time, effort, or ability; it is more likely, as Clark later contended, that the subject matter itself is confused or even irrational. Furthermore, having had his own conflict with Van Til, Clark would not too easily be swayed by Van Til's criticism of Barth.

By the time Clark wrote on Barth, Carl Henry was telling Clark that it might be better to focus his attention on Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) who “has already taken the initiative on the Continent.”<sup>35</sup> Clark responded to Henry saying, “You are most discouraging (!) in your letter and in the lead editorial of Nov. 21, just when I am going full blast on Barth, to report that Barth is dead and Bultmann reigns.”<sup>36</sup> Clark continued his work on Barth nevertheless.

Though Clark was never able to have direct conversation with Barth, he had a couple of indirect interactions. The first was by means of a public dialogue printed in

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<sup>32</sup> Clark received a “first installment” of \$4,500 of the grant on September 6, 1960. H. W. Lunhow of the Volker Fund, letter to Gordon H. Clark, September 6, 1960. Clark's work continued through the school year. He also received an “extra \$2,000” from the Volker Fund for the summer of 1961. Gordon H. Clark, letter to Carl F. H. Henry, April 8, 1961. (Note: I erred in *The Presbyterian Philosopher*—on pages 180 and 224—noting that Dr. Clark's sabbatical was from 1961 to 1962, when it was in fact from 1960 to 1961.)

<sup>33</sup> “Do you know that Barth will be coming to the States during the Easter season for a week of lectures at the University of Chicago, beginning Monday, April 23? He is to present five lectures, one daily, Monday through Friday, and will participate in two public panel discussions on Wednesday and Thursday, April 25 and 26. His subject will be ‘Introduction to Theology.’ At that time I shall be in Canada or I would be tempted to go and cover the discussions.” Carl F. H. Henry, letter to Gordon H. Clark, December 11, 1961, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

<sup>34</sup> Due to this fact, Clark noted, “Of course, many others have carefully expounded and criticized his ideas until the public may wonder whether there remains anything further to say.” Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963; Hobbs, NM: Trinity Foundation, 1997), 1. Citations refer to the Trinity edition.

<sup>35</sup> “I trust your work on Karl Barth is proceeding smoothly. The next man at whom to get for a major project, after Barth, is Bultmann. Your contribution on Barth will be strategic because he will continue to be a force in America for fifteen or twenty years, but my present series in *Christianity Today* will indicate that Bultmann has already taken the initiative on the Continent.” Carl F. H. Henry, letter to Gordon H. Clark, November 22, 1960, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon H. Clark, letter to Carl F. H. Henry, November 26, 1960, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

*Christianity Today*. Clark, Professor Fred H. Klooster (1922–2003) of Calvin Seminary, and Van Til each submitted questions directed to Barth, which were printed in the July 3, 1961 issue. Dr. Clark's two questions were as follows:

Was it reasonable for Paul to endure suffering in his ministry (or is it reasonable for us) if all are in Christ and will perhaps be saved anyhow, and if, as you once said, [Ludwig] Feuerbach and secular science are already in the Church?

In your Anselm (English Translation, p. 70) we are told that we can never see clearly whether any statement of any theologian is on one side or the other of the border between divine simplicity and incredible deception. Does not this make theology—your own included—a waste of time?

In the January 5, 1962 issue of *Christianity Today*, it was noted that owing to the pressure of work, Barth was unable to answer the questions put to him by Clark, Van Til, and Klooster. And so one of the translators of Karl Barth's writings, Geoffrey Bromiley (1915–2009), suggested some answers from Barth's *Dogmatics*. Then the original questioners were given the opportunity to annotate and respond to Dr. Bromiley's replies. To the first question, Dr. Bromiley commented:

The answer is twofold. First, Barth does not hold it as authoritative or certain that all will enjoy the benefits of the salvation sufficiently attained for all in Christ. Secondly, knowledge and faith are necessary for this enjoyment, and these come through the ministry of Christians in the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence Christians have a necessary part to play in the prophetic aspect of the work of reconciliation, and no sense of futility need hang over their work and warfare.

And Clark's response was printed:

Barth is not altogether clear on the matter of universalism. In some places he seems to say that all are saved, whether they know it or not. In this case, a Christian message might comfort some troubled souls for the time being, but inasmuch as it does not determine their future bliss, a missionary is hardly called on to suffer very much in proclaiming a comforting but unessential message.

To the second question Dr. Bromiley commented:

The statement would seem to demand rather than to refute the work of the dogmatician. Dogmatics is necessary in order that we may make sure that our own statements are on the right side of the border, and in order that we may develop a critical discernment in relation to those of others.

And to this, another annotation of Clark was printed as follows:

It still seems to me that if we can never distinguish between truth and deception, dogmatics by Barth, Bromiley, or myself is useless.

This dialogue evidenced the theological distance between Clark and Barth.

The second of Clark's interactions with Barth was in some ways more indirect, even though both were physically present in the same space. When Clark attended Barth's speech in Chicago in 1962—one of two places Barth spoke in America—he did not have the privilege to ask any questions. Only an indirect connection with Barth might be noted in that Clark's former student, Edward J. Carnell (1912–1972), did ask questions of Barth as a member of the panel.<sup>37</sup>

Thus Clark's sabbatical year, his reviews of some of Barth's works, the brief dialogue he had with Bromiley, and his attendance at the Barth event in Chicago prepared Clark to write and publish his *Karl Barth's Theological Method*. Clark noted Barth in some other writings, but the aforementioned book is the primary source for the following analysis.

## **Gordon Clark's Critique of Karl Barth**

### ***Critique I: Barth Is Irrational or, At Best, Variousy Rational and Irrational***

Clark's overriding critique in *Karl Barth's Theological Method* is that Barth's thought is irrational or, at best, variousy rational and irrational. Not only is it Clark's conclusion that Barth's theology results in irrationalism, but he also contends that Barth actually embraces that conclusion himself. Such an embrace, Clark argues, defeats Barth's own position. Clark explained,

Barth asserts that the concept of theology cannot be systematically connected, a systematic conspectus is an impossibility, and the name of Jesus Christ as used by Paul does not represent a unified thought. Barth's point is not merely that the Bible is inconsistent. He indeed holds that it is; he accepts only its main teaching and rejects the doctrine of infallible inspiration. But here he is talking about theology, his own theology, and it is his own theology that he now says is illogical, unsystematic, and self-contradictory.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Douglas J. Douma, *The Presbyterian Philosopher, The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 208–9.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963; Hobbs, NM: Trinity Foundation, 1997), 63–64. Citations refer to the Trinity edition. See also Gordon H. Clark, "Introductory Remarks," in *First Lessons in Theology* (unpublished manuscript, Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library, c. 1977). The introduction of Clark's unpublished systematic theology is available online: <https://douglasdouma.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/unpublished-151-introduction-typed.pdf>. In the first pages of *First Lessons in Theology*, Clark wrote, "After World War I Karl Barth introduced a theological method that captured many seminaries and produced a voluminous literature. The method may be somewhat difficult to describe, but Barth unequivocally states what it is not: 'In dogmatics it can never be a question of the mere combination, repetition, and summarizing of Biblical doctrine' (Church Dogmatics, I, 1, p. 16; Thomson tr.). ... For an evangelical, in the historical sense of the word, theology is—of course

Despite the irrationalism he saw in Barth, Clark held that at times Barth accepts logic and cannot therefore be seen as consistently irrational. Clark noted, “It is not only Barth’s irrationalistic paragraphs that need emphasis,”<sup>39</sup> and, “Although Barth here and there decries systematizing theology, his actual practice is often systematic. He is well aware, for example, that the doctrine of baptism is related to the Nicene Creed as parts of a comprehensive revelation.”<sup>40</sup> Clark continued, “It is abundantly clear, therefore, that Barth in many passages accepts and uses the law of contradiction. He makes unmistakable claims to intelligibility and rationality. But there were also the other passages in which he belittled systematic thought and accepted mutually incompatible ideas.”<sup>41</sup> A consistent use of the law of contradiction, however, would defeat any embracing of irrationalism.

Clark regularly used *reductio ad absurdum* (“reduction to absurdity”), to highlight the absurdities and contradictions—and therefore the falsity of various philosophies. This form of argument temporarily assumes the position’s premise or premises and then deduces propositions from those premises, looking for ones that are absurd in themselves or are contradictory with other deduced propositions (or contradictory with the assumed axiom itself).<sup>42</sup> Thus, always keen to emphasize logic, Clark wrote, “Freedom from internal self-contradiction is the *sine qua non* of all intelligibility.”<sup>43</sup>

In a section titled “Has God Spoken,” Clark again concludes that Barth is variously rational and irrational. Clark first quotes various statements of Barth’s that “would ordinarily be understood in a sense agreeable to the orthodox Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration.”<sup>44</sup> That is, it is ordinarily understood that when man repeats the words of Scripture, he repeats the Word of God. But Barth does not agree with this view. Clark wrote, “When Barth replies to [theologian Paul] Tillich, he is on the side of language and intelligibility,”<sup>45</sup> but at other times has expressions that “are nothing

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not ‘the mere combination, repetition’ of Biblical texts, but—certainly a summarizing and especially a logical arranging of the main Scriptural doctrines.”

<sup>39</sup> Clark, *Barth’s Theological Method*, 65.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> “Nearly all discussions among men are thought to proceed on common presuppositions. This is normally expected. And when a discussion does not so proceed, when it deliberately rejects common axioms, the one party may indeed be confused. But he need not be deceived. He must be given a lesson in geometry. The process of the *reductio* must be explained to him. There are two parts to this process. First, the apologetic must show that the axioms of secularism result in self-contradiction. On a previous page Logical Positivism’s principle of verification was given as an example. Then, second, the apology must exhibit the internal consistency of the Christian system. When these two points have been made clear, the Christian will urge the unbeliever to repudiate the axioms of secularism and accept God’s revelation. That is, the unbeliever will be asked to change his mind completely, to repent. This type of apologetic argument neither intends deception nor does it deny that in fact repentance comes only as gift from God.” Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963; Hobbs, NM: Trinity Foundation, 1997), 109–10. Citations refer to the Trinity edition.

<sup>43</sup> Clark, *Barth’s Theological Method*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

other than the negative theology of the impossible mystics.”<sup>46</sup> And so Clark concluded that Barth proposes two incompatible types of theology, “one is rational; the other is irrational skepticism.”<sup>47</sup>

Clark traced the root of irrationalism in Barth’s thought to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). In *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*, Clark noted that “his [Barth’s] early works echo the ideas of Kierkegaard—Paradox, Eternity and Time, Infinite Qualitative Difference, Totally Other.”<sup>48</sup> And later Clark explained further:

One thing is clear, however. In his various writings Barth made use of Kierkegaard’s Paradox, Eternity versus Time, Infinite Qualitative Difference, and Totally Other. Now, when Barth shows so much dependence on Kierkegaard, one would normally suppose that he remains basically irrationalistic, unless he clearly and emphatically rejects the irrationalism of these terms. But by ambiguous or indefinite language he avoids both outright assertion and outright denial of contradiction.<sup>49</sup>

Despite linking Barth to Kierkegaard, Clark acknowledged that Barth’s irrationalism was more prominent in his early works. And, in fact, he saw that Barth must have at some point become dissatisfied with Kierkegaard. Clark wrote,

Naturally no one expects Barth to be an Hegelian, but then neither would anyone expect this Hegelian phrase [“All is rational”] to be acknowledge by a thoroughly faithful disciple of Kierkegaard. Its occurrence therefore indicates a dissatisfaction with the Danish theologian’s irrationalism.<sup>50</sup>

It is apparent that Clark viewed Barth’s theology as forming three distinct periods: first, Barth’s training as a Liberal or Modernist until about the time of World War I; second, a period of his early irrationalistic works until some unspecified later date; and third, a final period in which Barth rejected irrationalism but had an “unwillingness to follow through” with the consequences of taking that position.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>49</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1989), 109. See also Gordon H. Clark, *In Defense of Theology* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984), 47. In this text, Clark says that, “Despairing of intellectual solutions in a world of insane chaos, the theologians of the twentieth century remembered the iconoclastic Dane. The first of these was Karl Barth, who seized upon the notion of paradox and emphasized the opposition between time and eternity, but whose later writings toned down these themes.” In *God’s Hammer*, Clark stated that “Neo-orthodox theology, or rather the neo-orthodox lack of theology, though initiated by Kierkegaard about 1850, and brilliantly abetted by Martin Kahler just before 1900 and also by Martin Buber, was not widely accepted here until Karl Barth’s writings became popular at the end of World War I.” See Gordon H. Clark, *God’s Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, ed. John Robbins, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1982), 96.

<sup>50</sup> Clark, *Barth’s Theological Method*, 125.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 125.

Clark's critique mostly focuses on that second period of Barth but also notes that Barth had rejected some of his former irrationalism. Clark thus shows that he was aware of Barth's third period position. He noted, for example, "Although Barth had early been influenced by Kierkegaard, he has changed and now is not so fond of the idea of paradox."<sup>52</sup>

One might argue that Clark's critique of Barth missed the mark because it focused on Barth's second period, which contained views he no longer held at the time of Clark's critique. But Barth scholar Bruce McCormack holds that there was little substantial change in Barth between the supposed second and third periods. McCormack, in fact, denies the very distinction between a second and a third Barthian period.<sup>53</sup> If McCormack is right on this point and Barth's views after his conversion away from Liberalism are harmonious, then Clark's criticisms of Barth would retain against Barth's later writings whatever validity and force they had against Barth's earlier works.

Though Barth may have distanced himself from the irrationalism of Kierkegaard, Clark found remaining vestiges of irrationalism in Barth's rejection of the Reformed view of man being made in the "image of God." Barth held that the concept of the image of God relates not to mankind's rationality but to the distinction between male and female. Clark wrote of this as "a highly imaginative interpretation"<sup>54</sup> and later called it a "bizarre interpretation that hardly needs to be refuted," asking, "What characteristics of male and female are to be found in God, of which our distinctions in sex could be the image?"<sup>55</sup> Later, in an article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Clark explained the situation in more detail.

Karl Barth originally denied that God created man in his own image. God was "totally Other." There is no similarity whatever between God and man. But if God's knowledge and our "knowledge" do not coincide at least in one

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 125–26.

<sup>53</sup> "Barth never departed from this fundamental viewpoint. That fact is concealed by the paradigm currently used by scholars in interpreting Barth's theological development between *Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics*. According to this paradigm, Barth's development in the twenties is best understood in terms of a turn from dialectic to analogy, which most scholars associate with the book which Barth wrote on Anselm in 1931. In truth, such a paradigm is deeply flawed. It overlooks the fact that a form of analogy was already at work in *Romans* and co-existed with dialectic throughout the twenties. Thus, all talk of a turn from ... to ... is seriously misleading. Even more important, however, is the fact that this paradigm fails to recognize that analogy as Barth understood it in the *Church Dogmatics* is an inherently dialectical concept. For Barth, an analogy between God's knowledge of himself (the divine self-speaking) and our knowledge of him (theology) only arises as the result of a dialectical movement in which God takes up the language in which humans seek to bear witness to him—a language which in itself is inadequate to bear witness to God—and gives to it, by grace, an adequacy which it would not otherwise possess. In the revelation event, a relationship of correspondence is actualized between the word and human words. That is Barth's doctrine of analogy. The first moment of this conception of analogy, the motor which drives it, is the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of *Romans*." Bruce McCormack, "The Unheard Message of Karl Barth," *Word & World* 14, no. 1 (1994): 64.

<sup>54</sup> Clark, *Barth's Theological Method*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> Gordon H. Clark, "The Wheaton Lectures," in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, A Festschrift*, ed. Ronald Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968), 73–74. This material was later reproduced in *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1993), 73–74.

proposition, we can know nothing about God at all. For this reason revelation cannot be a communication of truth, and although Barth is tremendously interested in theology, it is hard to find any rational motivation for it in dialectical theology. Barth's later publications acknowledge a divine image in man. However, he continues strenuously to deny that the image is rationality. Therefore theology as knowledge of God remains impossible. Emil Brunner puts it perhaps even more pointedly: not merely words but their conceptual content itself has only instrumental significance; God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive; in fact God can speak his word to man even through false doctrine. Strictly, Neo-orthodoxy makes all doctrine false. Barth's image turns out to be, most remarkably, the sexual distinction between man and woman. Since this distinction occurs in animals also, one wonders how it can be the image that sets man apart from the lower creation. And since there are no sexual distinctions in the Godhead, one wonders how this can be an image of God at all.

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This view, Clark argued, has consequences. Without rationality as a common ground among all people created in the image of God, evangelism and apologetics are impossible. Clark wrote,

Barth denies a common ground between believer and unbeliever and therefore also a point of contact between the unbeliever and the Gospel. The only point of contact that he allows is one which occurs at or after the moment of conversion. Because of this he repudiates apagogic argument, excludes all independent apologetics without specifying any definite place for a dependent apologetics, and has virtually nothing to say to the outside world, if there is one.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Critique II: Barth's Theory of Language and Knowledge Results in Skepticism***

Clark held that the irrationalism remaining in Barth's views not only impacted evangelism and apologetics but also led Barth's theory of language and knowledge into skepticism—the view that no knowledge is possible. Though Clark applauded Barth for various good elements of his theory of language and knowledge, he argued that Barth often did not follow through with them.<sup>58</sup> This, Clark argued, causes Barth's theory to fall into the category of skepticism.

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<sup>56</sup> Gordon H. Clark, "The Image of God in Man," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 215–22.

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *Barth's Theological Method*, 124. Note: When Clark here says, "if there is one," he is not questioning Barth's belief in the existence of the world itself; rather, based on earlier statements in the book, he is questioning whether Barth believes there is anyone outside of the Church. That is, Barth includes virtual heretics like Schleiermacher and Feuerbach as "of the church."

<sup>58</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Barth's Theological Method*. See page 132: "Barth will soon hesitate to carry through with this emphasis on rational communication." See also page 135: "Most unfortunately [Barth] does not follow through with the theme of words, propositions, language, subjects and predicates, and intelligibility."

Perhaps the central fault that Clark saw in Barth's theory of language was the division Barth created between regular concepts and concepts about God. Clark held that Barth "separates between the truth of God's revelation and the truth of proposition."<sup>59</sup> But, as Clark noted, if "our concepts apply only to created objects," then "it is impossible to attempt to talk about God."<sup>60</sup> In such a case, nothing can be known about God. Similar argumentation continues in a subsection titled "Skepticism" in a chapter on "Language and Theology" where Clark addresses Barth's contention that "God is not similar to anything and therefore cannot be known through our ordinary and only categories."<sup>61</sup> To this contention Clark wrote, "A blank denial of similarity between God and men is unbiblical,"<sup>62</sup> and, "This denial of similarity, like the idea of the Totally Other, makes knowledge of God impossible."<sup>63</sup>

Barth's theory of knowledge, Clark argued, is in fact shown to concern something other than knowledge. Clark wrote, "Possibly the skepticism of this position is somewhat hidden from its advocates by their substitution for knowledge of something that is not knowledge."<sup>64</sup> Barth is seen to limit knowledge to man's "offering of thanks" to God. To this point, Clark wrote, "How can knowledge, i.e. belief in or acceptance of a true proposition, depend on giving thanks or feeling awe? This is not true in mathematics. Nor can it be true in theology."<sup>65</sup> And, "Barth does not want to tie down the word knowledge, when used in a religious context, to anything resembling the ordinary meaning of the word."<sup>66</sup> Clark concluded, "Therefore the line of criticism has been that skepticism lurks behind Barth's many assertions of the possibility of knowledge because he is not really talking about knowledge."<sup>67</sup>

Clark noted additional logical problems in Barth's view of language and knowledge. For instance, if, as in Barth's view and words, the Scriptures "become the word of God," then there is a time when the Scriptures are not the word of God. From this Clark concluded that "if unambiguous sentences can become true and then become false, if they are true only from time to time, there is no defense against skepticism."<sup>68</sup> Clark also held that skepticism is a result of Barth's subjectivism. He wrote, "If, however, the words of the Bible are not revelation, what is the latter? Can it be a communication of truth? Can it be objective? Can it save Barth from skepticism? The suspicion that Barth does not escape subjectivism is reinforced rather than allayed by his explanations."<sup>69</sup> To Barth's explanation that "direct identification of revelation and the Bible ... takes place as an event ... when and where the word of the Bible functions as the word of a witness ... when and where by means of its word we also succeed in seeing and hearing what he saw and heard," Clark sees only subjectivity, arguing, "In

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 194–95.

the case of two people hearing them, they may at the same time both be and not be the words of God. This is not true of other words. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address remains the words of Lincoln no matter who hears them or does not hear them. Why should God's words be different in this respect?"<sup>70</sup> Clark's use of *reductio ad absurdum* here results in showing that Barth's view has words of the Bible "both be and not be the words of God," a contradiction proving the falsity of the underlying philosophy.

### Clark's Critique Compared to Those of Other Reformed Theologians

Seeing that the particulars of Barth's thought had been thoroughly discussed, Clark centered his critique on logical problems in Barth's method.<sup>71</sup> In fact, in *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, Clark held that some of Barth's particular positions are quite acceptable. For example, he noted that Barth (unlike the Modernists) accepted that Jesus was born of a virgin.<sup>72</sup> Also, pointing out a positive point of Barth's apologetics, Clark wrote, "Appreciative mention ought to be made of Barth's constant denial of a common platform with other types of thought. ... On this account Calvinistic theologians will for all future time be indebted to Karl Barth."<sup>73</sup> Clark, in fact, included a whole chapter on Modernism in which he often noted agreement with Barth's views. In that chapter, Clark wrote, "They [Calvinists and Lutherans] would ... agree in the main Barth's analysis of the liberal conception of God is accurate and devastating. Modernism substitutes man for God."<sup>74</sup> Also, throughout the last few chapters of his monograph, Clark gives Barth the benefit of the doubt and seeks ways whereby Barth's thought might avoid skepticism. Even though Clark concludes that this attempt to avoid skepticism in Barth is to no avail, his attempt at fairness is notable. This is in stark contrast to the more polemic writings on Barth by Cornelius Van Til.

In agreement with most of the other Reformed theologians noted above, Clark viewed Barth's doctrine of Scripture to be erroneous (since Barth didn't hold to inerrancy) and his theology to be non-Reformed. Clark, in fact, likely agreed with most of the Barthian critiques of Machen, Hodge, Zerbe, and Van Til.

As for Van Til's critique that Barthianism is a form of Modernism, it is possible that Clark would have agreed that there is significant overlap. However, serious differences between Barthianism and Modernism would likely have prevented Clark from making that exact connection. Clark might agree more with Protestant Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965), who wrote contrary to Van Til's assertion that Barthianism is Modernism. Hoeksema said, "If I try to conceive of Barth as a modernist pure and simple, too many elements of his theology will not fit into that concept."<sup>75</sup> As evidence of this, one might look to Clark's statement, "That the Word is a

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>71</sup> That this was Clark's intention is affirmed in a letter of his to Carl Henry, in which Clark wrote, "My MS [manuscript] attempts to convict him [Barth] of inconsistency." Gordon H. Clark, letter to Carl F. H. Henry, April 8 1961, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

<sup>72</sup> Clark, *Barth's Theological Method*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>75</sup> Herman Hoeksema, review of *The New Modernism*, by Cornelius Van Til, *Standard Bearer* 22 (1946).

divine act occurring from time to time sharply distinguishes Barth's view from modernism."<sup>76</sup>

### **Going Barthian**

Barthian influence grew throughout much of the twentieth century, even into former strongholds of Reformed and Presbyterian thought. In European universities, significant elements of Barthianism were promoted by, among others, T. L. Haitjema (1888–1972) at the University of Groningen, G. C. Berkouwer (1903–1996) at the Free University of Amsterdam, and T. F. Torrance (1913–2007) at the University of Edinburgh. In fact, George Harinck has noted that by the time of Van Til's *The New Modernism*, which came out in 1946, "nearly all of the theology professors in the Netherlands Reformed Church—the largest Dutch Protestant denomination—sympathized in one way or another with Barth and opposed neo-Calvinism."<sup>77</sup> In the United States, the formerly Reformed bastions of Princeton Seminary and Calvin Seminary and the once-Fundamentalist Fuller Seminary moved in Barthian directions. At Princeton Seminary, Barth's friend John Mackay (1889–1983) was hired as president in 1936 and summarily brought in neo-orthodox professors, including Emil Brunner as a visiting professor in 1938; E. G. Homrighausen (1900–1982), who worked at the seminary from 1938 to 1964;<sup>78</sup> Otto A. Piper (1891–1982), who taught at Princeton from 1941 to 1962;<sup>79</sup> and George Stuart Hendry (1904–1993), who taught for 19 years at Princeton starting in 1949.<sup>80</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, professors at Calvin Seminary, including Louis Berkhof (1873–1957),<sup>81</sup> Diedrich H. Kromminga (1879–1947),<sup>82</sup> and Clarence Bouma (1891–1962), all were critical of Barth. But the tide at Calvin Seminary began to turn to Barthianism following World War II when a new wave of Dutch immigrants came to America and military chaplains influenced by Barthianism returned from the war.<sup>83</sup> After Calvin Seminary fired all but one of its professors in 1952, Henry

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<sup>76</sup> Clark, *Barth's Theological Method*, 210.

<sup>77</sup> Harinck, "Dutch Origins," 29.

<sup>78</sup> James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 424–29.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 437–41.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>81</sup> Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 42. Thorne notes that the first edition (1932) of Berkhof's well-known systematic theology "contained no interaction with Barth," but that based on added comments in the second edition (1938), it is clear that Barth did not influence Berkhof. Rather, Thorne notes, Berkhof's "basic orientation was critical." See also Louis Berkhof, "What is the Word of God?," in *The Word of God and the Reformed Faith*, ed. Clarence Bouma (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1943).

<sup>82</sup> See Diedrich H. Kromminga, "The Theology of Karl Barth, A Critical Evaluation," *Calvin Forum* 4, no. 6 (1939): 130–33.

<sup>83</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, "Burn the Wooden Shoes: Modernity and Division in the Christian Reformed Church in North America" (conference paper presented to the International Society for the Study of Reformed Communities, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, June 2000), [http://www.swierenga.com/Africa\\_pap.html](http://www.swierenga.com/Africa_pap.html). See endnote 7 of the Swierenga paper, where it is noted, "Dr. P. Y. De Jong, a leader in the United Reformed Church, believes that the decline in the CRCNA began in

Stob (1908–1996) was hired as a professor and taught from an often Barthian perspective until his retirement in 1975.<sup>84</sup> Calvin Seminary professor Harold Dekker’s article “God So Loved—All Men,” which departed from the traditional Calvinist understanding of limited atonement, perhaps best indicates the extent to which the seminary had moved in Barthian and Liberal directions.<sup>85</sup> Barthian views may have first come to Fuller Seminary through the founder’s son, Daniel P. Fuller (b. 1925), who, having studied under neo-orthodox professors at Princeton and under Barth himself in Basel, began his tenure at Fuller Seminary in 1953. Further Barthian influence came there in Geoffrey Bromiley (1915–2009), an Anglican who taught at Fuller from 1958 to 1987. With these influences, Fuller professors James Daane (1914–1983),<sup>86</sup> E. J. Carnell (1919–1967), and Paul Jewett (1920–1991), followed at least in part.<sup>87</sup> From these universities and seminaries, the Barthians’ teachings found widespread acceptance, particularly in the so-called “mainline” denominations like the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church USA.

While much of the Reformed world “went Barthian,” Westminster Theological Seminary faculty, including Van Til, remained resolutely opposed to Barthian theology. However, when Clark published his book on Barth, there was no acknowledgement of it from the seminary in its theological journal or anywhere else. Perhaps this was because the faculty had had a contest with Clark in the 1940s following his ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It’s also possible that Clark’s book was too much of a late-comer to the field to get much notice. Or perhaps Van Til and his seminary colleagues noticed that Clark’s critique of Barth also applied in part to themselves.

### ***Van Til and Barthianism***

That Clark was writing his critique of Barth with an eye on his long-term adversary Van Til is a conclusion that has merit. In *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*, when Clark referred to “clear-thinking theologians who must be grateful for Barth’s emphasis on language,” he may have been subtly critiquing Van Til, who never wrote a treatise on language.<sup>88</sup> And Clark almost certainly had Van Til (and his [Clark’s] ordination

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1945. Up until then, he noted, the church was solid, but then the ‘wrong kind of people came to positions of power and authority.’ Chaplains who went overseas came back influenced by Barthianism.”

<sup>84</sup> The influence of Barth on Henry Stob can be seen, among other places, in Stob’s memoir, *Summoning Up Remembrance*, where he wrote, “When I read what Barth had to say, my spirits rose. I sensed that here was a man who, affirming a transcendent God and a veritable supernatural revelation, expressed my own deepest sentiments and afforded me a contemporary reference point from which to engage my mentors and fellow students in relevant discussion. During that year I went on to read in Barth’s *Römerbrief* and in his *Dogmatics*, and also in Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith*. Before the semester ended, I presented to Prof. Johanson a lengthy paper entitled ‘The Doctrine of Revelation in Barthian Theology.’ I can fairly say it was Karl Barth, who even in his Kierkegaardian existentialist phase, helped to establish me more firmly in the Reformed Faith.” Henry Stob, *Summoning Up Remembrance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 139.

<sup>85</sup> Harold Dekker, “God So Loved—ALL Men!,” in *Reformed Journal* 12, no. 11 (December 1962): 5–7.

<sup>86</sup> Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 116.

<sup>87</sup> “Most likely he [Carnell] had been influenced by Bromiley and Berkouwer.” Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 102. See also Harold Lindsell, *The Battle For the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106–21.

<sup>88</sup> Clark, *Barth’s Theological Method*, 129.

controversy) in mind when he wrote of some “contemporary theologians” who “deny that God has given any information to man.” The same conclusion, Clark argued, was the result of Van Til’s views.<sup>89</sup>

On the face of it, it seems absurd to say that Barth’s most vocal critic, Van Til, had significant elements in common with Barth theologically.. And, it seems, Clark is unique in making this connection (although Robert L. Reymond and David Engelsma later repeated Clark’s assertion).<sup>90</sup> But what exactly are the points of similarity according to Clark, and why are they troubling?<sup>91</sup>

Clark first noted a Van Til-Barth connection to one of his publishers in 1951, saying,

[Van Til] is an excellent example of how neo-orthodoxy has permeated contemporary thinking. Dr. Van Til “adores paradox,” he holds that man’s mind is incapable of knowing any truth, that the Bible from cover to cover is not the truth, and that theological formulations, creeds, and so on are only “pointers” to something unknowable. The dependence on Brunner, even the wording, makes Dr. Van Til an admirable example.<sup>92</sup>

And in a published article in 1957, Clark wrote,

To avoid doing an injustice to Van Til and his associates it must be stated that sometimes they seem to make contradictory assertions. In the course of their papers, one can find a paragraph in which they seem to accept the position they are attacking, and then they proceed with the attack. What can the explanation be except that they are confused and are attempting to combine two incompatible positions? The objectionable one is in substantial harmony with existentialism or neo-orthodoxy. But the discussion of the noetic effects of sin in the unregenerate mind need not further be continued because a more serious

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<sup>89</sup> See Douglas J. Douma, *The Presbyterian Philosopher, The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 260.

<sup>90</sup> “Exceedingly strange it is that as ardent a foe of Barthian irrationalism as is Van Til comes nevertheless to the same conclusion concerning the nature of truth for man as does Barth. The only difference in this connection between Van Til and Barth is that Van Til insists that truth is objectively present in biblical propositions while for Barth truth is essentially existential. But for both religious truths can appear, at least at times, paradoxical.” Robert Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 105. And, “It is not clear to me what the difference might be between the paradoxical nature of truth as espoused by Van Til and his disciples and the “theology of paradox” of Kierkegaard and his pupil, Karl Barth. To the same proposition in the same sense at the same time, both Van Til and Barth say ‘yes and no.’” David Engelsma, “Hoeksema on a Controversy in the OPC,” *Standard Bearer* 72, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>91</sup> Clark was not the only theologian to notice a similarity between Van Til and Barth. J. Oliver Buswell, for one, wrote of Van Til, “He is a well-informed and deeply zealous anti-Barthian; but I have sometimes wondered whether the zeal of his anti-Barthianism is not in part derived from the bitterness of close similarity in certain aspects of his Philosophy.” - “The Fountainhead of Presuppositionalism,” *The Bible Today* 42.2 (November 1948): 48.

<sup>92</sup> Gordon H. Clark, letter to Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., October 15, 1951, Clark Library, Sangre de Cristo Seminary.

matter usurps attention. The neo-orthodox influence seems to produce the result that even the regenerate man cannot know the truth.<sup>93</sup>

So the two major Van Til-Barth theological connections, according to Clark, are similarities in the doctrine of paradox and in epistemology. Clark saw that there were both similarities and differences between Van Til's and Barth's views of paradox. In a recorded lecture in 1981, a student asked Gordon Clark, "How does Van Til's concept of paradox differ from Kierkegaard here?" Clark, who had previously equated Barth's view of paradox with that of Kierkegaard, responded,

I hope to talk about Van Til before the semester is over. Let me say this: my impression is—I could mention some differences between the two—but my impression is that in spite of the fact that Van Til denies he is a neo-orthodox apologete, I think he has been very deeply influenced by neo-orthodoxy and unwittingly supports their position.<sup>94</sup>

In the same lecture, Clark noted a similarity and hinted at a difference, saying,

Kierkegaard alters linguistic usage and speaks of paradox as inexplicable. The definition of paradox that appeals to me the most is that paradox is a "charlie horse between the ears." But that's not what Kierkegaard meant. For Kierkegaard, a paradox is a complete contradiction. We'll talk about what Van Til or what Frame thinks a paradox is. But at any rate they both think that it is impossible to harmonize, at least by us. Maybe it can be harmonized by God; we'll see.<sup>95</sup>

The similarity Clark saw in the paradox doctrines of Van Til and Barth is that they both hold that the supposed paradoxical passages of Scripture are impossible for man to harmonize. Though for Van Til—but not for Barth—these paradoxes can be harmonized by God, the result is the same: the exegete, regardless of his efforts, will be, in some places at least, unable to sort out or solve that which he finds to be conflicting doctrines in Scripture. Little good does it do to say that these conflicting doctrines are solvable by God, when to man they remain a mystery, as unresolvable for Van Til as they are for Barth. The problems here, as much for Van Til's view as for Barth's, include (1) the inability to distinguish between apparent contradictions caused by exegetical mistakes and apparent contradictions supposedly inherent in the Scriptures, (2) the destruction of any claim of Christianity's superiority to other systems based on its demonstrated consistency, and (3) the destruction of the central biblical hermeneutical principle of comparing Scripture passages with other Scripture passages

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<sup>93</sup> Gordon H. Clark, "The Bible as Truth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114, no. 454 (April 1957), 157. This text was also reprinted in *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, ed. John Robbins, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1982), 29.

<sup>94</sup> Clark, "Irrationalism," lecture, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 1981, South Hamilton, MA, mp3, <http://www.trinitylectures.org/MP3/Irrationalism.mp3>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

based on the assumption of non-contradiction. Van Til's doctrine of paradox, like Barth's, is destructive to the entire enterprise of exegesis and Christian doctrine.

A similarity can also be seen in the defense of paradox in Van Til and Barth. George Harinck wrote, "[Klaas] Schilder ... 'disqualified Barth's use of paradox in religion as a revolution in theology. Barth, and Haitjema in his footsteps, seemed to have given up the classic aim to resolve discord in thinking. Instead Barth labeled this aim a sin.'<sup>96</sup> Similarly, in *The Complaint*—written in opposition to Gordon Clark's ordination and signed by Van Til and others who supported Van Til's views—it is written that Dr. Clark's unwillingness to let two particular doctrines "stand unreconciled alongside each other" amounts to "rationalism."<sup>97</sup>

On the second point of connection between the theologies of Van Til and Barth, there is a similarity on the doctrines of God and knowledge. Karl Barth explains his doctrine of God—the "wholly other"—as "an infinite qualitative difference between God and man." As such, man is "incapable of knowing Him."<sup>98</sup> This makes for an unbridgeable gap between God's knowledge and man's knowledge and so results in skepticism. Van Til's Creator-creature distinction, when used to argue against any coincidence in man's knowledge and God's knowledge, also makes for an unbridgeable gap between God's knowledge and man's knowledge and so also ends in skepticism. Different doctrines, same result. Though Van Til backpedaled from his view<sup>99</sup> and Barth stopped saying "wholly other," they each continued to have in their theology an impassable divide between God's knowledge and man's knowledge. In that way, Van Til's view resulted in skepticism as clearly as did Barth's.

### ***Confessionalism as a Bulwark***

Though there are dangerous similarities to Barth in Van Til's theology, Van Til and other theologians at Westminster Theological Seminary were able to avoid the vast majority of Barth's novelties (and their respective errors). At least part of the reason they were able to do so was because of their confessionalism—their adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

A more consistent reading of that confession, however, would lead one to also reject the paradox doctrine of Van Til, which is at odds with the position of the Westminster Confession that the Scriptures have a "consent of all the parts." And this "consent of all the parts," for the writers of the confession, was not merely that the parts consented in the mind of God, but also that the "consent of all the parts" is given as a reason that we humans are to find evidence of the Scripture being the word of God.

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<sup>96</sup> Harinck, "Dutch Origins," 21.

<sup>97</sup> John Wistar Betzold et al., "The Text of a Complaint Against Actions of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in the Matter of the Licensure and Ordination of Dr. Gordon H. Clark" (filed with the Presbytery on October 6, 1944; presented at Eastlake Church, Wilmington, DE, November 20, 1944) PCA Archives, 309/10. This document is often referred to simply as *The Complaint*.

<sup>98</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 28.

<sup>99</sup> Douma, *Presbyterian Philosopher*, 157–162.

Many authors have written about Barth's influence on evangelicals. Books on this topic almost exhaust the possible permutations of "Barth" and "Evangelical." Examples include *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth* by Phillip R. Thorne, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* by Sung Wook Chung, and *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* edited by Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson. These authors list the evangelicals who have "gone Barthian." Included in this list are G. C. Berkouwer, Geoffrey Bromiley, Paul Jewett, Bernard Ramm, E. J. Carnell, and Colin Brown among others.<sup>100</sup>

But these books perhaps do not differentiate strongly enough between the non-confessional evangelicals (including Baptists and Pentecostals) and the confessional Reformed and Presbyterians. The confessionally Reformed have been almost uniformly critical of Barth. The confessions, particularly the Westminster Confession of Faith but also the *Three Forms of Unity*, have functioned as a bulwark against the inroads of Barthianism and other doctrines. These confessionally Reformed critics include the previously mentioned A. S. Zerbe, J. Gresham Machen, C. W. Hodge Jr., Cornelius Van Til, Louis Berkhof, Herman Hoeksema, Fred H. Klooster, Diedrich H. Kromminga, J. Oliver Buswell, and Gordon Clark, as well as Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984), John Gerstner (1914–1996), and R. C. Sproul (1939–2017). Even the confessionalism (on the Book of Concord) of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, as evidenced by John Warwick Montgomery, and also of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has functioned to abate Barthianism, as these denominations have retained the doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>101</sup>

Confessionalism, though, has not always been sufficient to prevent Barthian inroads. Among the Dutch Reformed, G. C. Berkouwer, James Daane, Henry Stob, and Lewis Smedes went Barthian.<sup>102</sup> And though confessionalism might have been the most successful bulwark against Barthianism, some Fundamentalist-evangelicals like Kenneth Kantzer and Charles C. Ryrie also rejected Barth.<sup>103</sup>

In Clark's case, the Westminster Confession of Faith was the system of belief which he supported. Unlike Barth, who denied the desirability of a system, Clark saw systematizing as necessary and unavoidable. The question wasn't so much "What is one's system?" (for all theologians naturally strive for some systematizing), but rather, "How consistent is one's system?" A system is to be judged on its consistency, and Barth's was lacking.

## Conclusion

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<sup>100</sup> Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 86–107.

<sup>101</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1966). In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Hoeksema critiques Barth's eschatology as using "entirely different language from that which the church has always spoken and from that which Scripture speaks" (vol. 2, page 434), his soteriology as necessarily leading to universalism (vol. 2, page 479), and his conception of the word of God as "leaving us without an objective criterion of the knowledge of God" and as being "pure subjectivism" (vol. 1, page 6–7). See also J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 123. See also Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 43–49, 63–66.

<sup>102</sup> Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 112–16. See also Swierenga, "Wooden Shoes."

<sup>103</sup> Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, 67–70.

Clark's critique in *Karl Barth's Theological Method* has never, as far as this author can tell, been rebutted by any Barthian. This probably speaks to its obscurity more than to its paucity. The closest thing to a rebuttal of Clark's book is a review of the second edition (1997) by John C. McDowell in *Evangelical Quarterly* in 2002. But McDowell's critique is limited to the refrain that Clark "misunderstands Barth."<sup>104</sup>

It is apparent from Clark's critique that accepting Barth would require the wholesale rejection of the Reformed faith. Barth's connection with Reformed thought is distant and distorted. His view is something wholly other and lacks much to be commended. It seems that those who followed Barthianism were those who wanted something new but didn't consider the full ramifications of that newness. They often left Schleiermacher for Barth, but later some of the same people left Barth for Brunner or for Bultmann or their own constructions. Fortunately, for Christians, the Bible is unchanging and its message eternal. The clarity of the Reformed faith and its stability in the confessions is a welcome relief from the irrationalistic oddities and ever-changing scene of Barthianism and its neo-orthodox offshoots.

There is little trouble understanding what Clark believes—that is, what historic Christianity holds. Many certainly disagree with it, but they understand it. In the opposite direction, Clark and other Reformed theologians certainly disagree with Barth, whatever their understanding of Barth is. Maybe they don't understand Barth, or maybe Barth ultimately cannot be understood because his views are inherently irrational.

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<sup>104</sup> John C. McDowell, review of *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, by Gordon H. Clark, *Evangelical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (July 2004), 272–75.