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Galli's "Karl Barth: An introductory biography for evangelicals" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Galli, M. (2017). *Karl Barth: An introductory biography for evangelicals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 176 pp. \$18.00. ISBN 9780802869395

Mark Galli, current editor of *Christianity Today*, has produced a slim and readable treatment of Karl Barth with a compelling argument for his relevance to contemporary evangelicals. Galli opens with a brief history of Barth's reaction to Pietism, the blood of which "runs thick" in American evangelicalism. Barth was turned off by Pietists who he felt "sniff[ed]" at their fellow human beings to find out if they were converted. The American evangelical reception of Barth was just as warm, with Cornelius Van Til attacking Barth's theology as the "diametric opposite" of a theology based on God's revelation (p. 6). Billy Graham warned Carl Henry, the first editor of *Christianity Today*, against driving a wedge between Barthians and evangelicals. Despite Graham's pleas, strong division would occur and it is no small task that Galli has tackled in seeking to convince evangelicals that Barth has something useful to offer.

Galli summarizes Barth's early years, contextualizing his maturation into the liberal theology against which he would eventually rebel. Non-specialist will especially appreciate the overview of liberal theology in Germany. Galli's exploration of Barth's commentary on Romans, his reaction to National Socialism, and an exploration of two critical themes in *Church Dogmatics* (the Word of God and the doctrine of election) form the core of the book. A biographical thread is skillfully woven through the theological and historical material of the text. Galli ends the book with a chapter that specifically addresses what Barth may offer contemporary evangelicalism, with its inclination to mistakenly equate *experience* with *gospel*. Galli suggests that Barth provides evangelicals a useful corrective in avoiding the temptation to prevent "feeling and mere ethics" from undermining the church's mission of winning the lost to Christ. Recommended for general readers and above.

Reviewer

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