

In Defense of Scripturalism

[Miscellaneous Essays]

Collated by H.R.Diaz III

AN INTRODUCTION TO GORDON H. CLARK

Dr. John W. Robbins

I.

Carl Henry thinks Clark is “one of the profoundest evangelical Protestant philosophers of our time.” Ronald Nash has praised him as “one of the greatest Christian thinkers of our century.” He is a prolific author, having written more than 40 books during his long academic career. His philosophy is the most consistently Christian philosophy yet published, yet few seminary students hear his name even mentioned in their classes, much less are required to read his books. If I might draw a comparison, it is as though theological students in the mid-sixteenth century never heard their teachers mention Martin Luther or John Calvin. There has been a great educational and ecclesiastical blackout. Both churches and educators have gone out of their way to avoid Clark. They have cheated a generation of students and church-goers. As theological students at the end of the twentieth century, you ought not consider yourself well educated until you are familiar with the philosophy of Gordon Haddon Clark.

A Brief Biography

Clark’s life was one of controversy - theological and philosophical. He was a brilliant mind, and his philosophy continues to be a challenge to the prevailing notions of our day. It is his philosophy that makes his biography both interesting and important, for his battles were intellectual battles.

Clark was a Presbyterian minister, and his father was a Presbyterian minister before him. Born in urban Philadelphia in the summer of 1902, he died in rural Colorado in the spring of 1985. Clark was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and the Sorbonne. His undergraduate degree was in French; his graduate work was in ancient philosophy. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Aristotle. He quickly earned the respect of fellow professional philosophers by publishing a series of articles in academic journals, translating and editing philosophical texts from the Greek, and editing two standard texts, *Readings in Ethics* and *Selections from Hellenistic Philosophy*. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Reformed Episcopal Seminary, Wheaton College, Butler University, Covenant College, and Sangre de Cristo Seminary. Over the course of his 60-year teaching career, he wrote more than 40 books, including a history of philosophy, *Thales to Dewey*, which remains the best one-volume history of philosophy in English. He also lectured widely, pastored a church, raised a family, and played chess. For the past 15 years I have been the publisher of his books and essays. More of his books are in print today than at any time during his life on Earth, yet few seminary students know anything about him.

Throughout his life Clark was enmeshed in controversy: First, as a young man in the old Presbyterian Church of Warfield and Machen, where as a ruling elder at age 27 he first fought the modernists and then helped J. Gresham Machen organize the Presbyterian Church of America, later known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Those ecclesiastical activities cost him the chairmanship of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania.

Clark’s second major controversy was at Wheaton College in Illinois, where he taught from 1936 to 1943 after leaving the University of Pennsylvania. There his Calvinism brought him into conflict with the Arminianism of some faculty members and the administration, and he was forced to resign in 1943. Wheaton College has never been the same since, declining into a sort of vague, lukewarm, and trendy neo-evangelicalism.

From 1945 to 1973 Clark was Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Butler University in Indianapolis, where he enjoyed relative academic peace and freedom. But within his denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a third major controversy arose, and there was no peace.

In 1944, at age 43, Clark was ordained a teaching elder by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. A faction led by Cornelius Van Til and composed largely of the faculty of Westminster Seminary quickly challenged his ordination. The battle over Clark's ordination, which became known as the Clark-Van Til controversy, raged for years. In 1948 the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church finally vindicated Clark. His ordination stood; the effort to defrock him had failed. Yet this failure of the Van Tilians to defrock Clark has been falsified by at least one biographer of Van Til, the late William White, and that falsification of history has become the stock in trade of some proponents of Van Til and Westminster Seminary.

Unfortunately, the defeat of the Van Til/Westminster Seminary faction did not end the matter. Those who had unsuccessfully targeted Clark for removal next leveled similar charges against one of Clark's defenders. At that point, rather than spend another three years fighting a faction which had already been defeated once, Clark's defenders left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Clark reluctantly went with them. Years later he told me that he would have liked to have stayed in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but felt a sense of loyalty to those who had defended him. After he left, the Van Tilians had no serious intellectual opposition within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Clark entered the United Presbyterian Church -- not the large denomination, which was not called the United Presbyterian Church at that time - but a small, more conservative, denomination. There he fought another battle about both doctrine and church property. When the United Presbyterian denomination joined the mainline church in the 1950s, Clark left that church and joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which later merged with the Evangelical Synod to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. He remained a part of that Church until it merged with the Presbyterian Church in America in 1983. Clark refused to join the Presbyterian Church in America on doctrinal grounds, and for about a year he *was* the RPCES. Some months before his death in April 1985 he affiliated with Covenant Presbytery.

During his lifetime Clark never settled on a name for his philosophy. At times he called it *presuppositionalism*; at other times *dogmatism*; at still other times *Christian rationalism* or *Christian intellectualism*. None of these names, I fear, catches the correct meaning. Let me explain why: Every philosophy, as I will explain in a moment, has presuppositions; some philosophers just won't admit it. All philosophies, for the same reason, are dogmatic, though some pretend to be open-minded. And the phrase "Christian rationalism" is an awkward and misleading way of describing Clark's views, since Clark spends a great deal of time refuting rationalism in his books. Nevertheless, one can see why Clark used the terms: *Presuppositionalism* was the term he used to distinguish his views from evidentialism; *dogmatism* was the term he used to distinguish his views from both evidentialism and rationalism; and *rationalism* and *intellectualism* were the terms he used to distinguish his views from religious irrationalism and anti-intellectualism. Clark, of course, maintained that his philosophy was Christianity, rightly understood. But since there are so many views claiming to be Christianity, it is useful to name Clark's philosophy and thus easily distinguish it from the rest.

Therefore, I would like to begin my talk this evening by naming his philosophy - and rather than calling it Dogmatic Presuppositional Rationalism, or Rational Dogmatic Presuppositionalism, or Presuppositional Rational Dogmatism - rather than letting its title be determined by its theological opposite - I shall give it a name that discloses what it stands for: *Scripturalism*. It avoids all the defects of the other names, and it names what makes Clark's philosophy unique: an uncompromising devotion to Scripture alone. Clark did not try to combine secular and Christian notions, but to derive all of his ideas from the Bible alone. He was intransigent in his devotion to Scripture: All our thoughts -- there are no exceptions -- are to be brought into conformity to Scripture, for all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are contained in Scripture. Scripturalism is the logically consistent application of Christian -- that is, Scriptural -- ideas to all fields of thought. One day, God

willing, it will not be necessary to call this philosophy Scripturalism, for it will prevail under its original and most appropriate name, *Christianity*.

The Philosophy of Scripturalism

If I was to summarize Clark's philosophy of Scripturalism, I would say something like this:

1. Epistemology: Propositional Revelation
2. Soteriology: Faith Alone
3. Metaphysics: Theism
4. Ethics: Divine Law
5. Politics: Constitutional Republic

Translating those ideas into more familiar language, we might say:

1. Epistemology: The Bible tells me so.
2. Soteriology: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.
3. Metaphysics: In him we live and move and have our being.
4. Ethics: We ought to obey God rather than men.
5. Politics: Proclaim liberty throughout the land.

Clark developed this philosophy in more than 40 books, many of which were published during his lifetime, most of which are now in print, and a few of which have not been published yet. Let us first consider the foundational branch of philosophy, epistemology, the theory of knowledge.

Epistemology

Scripturalism holds that God reveals truth. Christianity is propositional truth revealed by God, propositions that have been written in the 66 books that we call the Bible. Revelation is the starting point of Christianity, its axiom. The axiom, the first principle, of Christianity is this: "The Bible alone is the Word of God."

I must interject a few words here about axioms, for some persons, as I mentioned a few paragraphs ago, insist that they do not have any. That is like saying one does not speak prose. Any system of thought, whether it be called philosophy or theology or geometry must begin somewhere. Even empiricism or evidentialism begins with axioms. That beginning, by definition, is just that, a beginning. Nothing comes before it. It is an axiom, a first principle. That means that those who start with sensation rather than revelation, in a misguided effort to avoid axioms, have not avoided axioms at all: They have merely traded the Christian axiom for a secular axiom. They have exchanged infallible propositional revelation, their birthright as Christians, for fallible sense experience. All empiricists, let me emphasize, since it sounds paradoxical to those accustomed to thinking otherwise, are presuppositionalists: They presuppose the reliability of sensation. They do not presuppose the reliability of revelation. That is something they attempt to prove. Such an attempt is doomed.

Thomas Aquinas, the great thirteenth-century Roman Catholic theologian, tried to combine two axioms in his system: the secular axiom of sense experience, which he obtained from Aristotle, and the Christian axiom of revelation, which he obtained from the Bible. His synthesis was unsuccessful. The subsequent career of western philosophy is the story of the collapse of Thomas' unstable Aristotelian-Christian condominium. Today the dominant form of epistemology in putatively Christian circles, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, is empiricism. Apparently today's theologians have learned little from Thomas' failure. If Thomas Aquinas failed, one doubts that Norman Geisler can succeed.

The lesson of the failure of Thomism was not lost on Clark. Clark did not accept sensation as his axiom. He denied that sense experience furnishes us with knowledge at all. Clark understood the necessity of refuting all competing axioms, including the axiom of sensation. His method was to eliminate all intellectual opposition to Christianity at its root. In his books - such as *A Christian View of Men and Things*, *Thales to Dewey*, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, and *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* - he pointed out the problems, failures, deceptions, and logical fallacies involved in believing that sense experience provides us with knowledge.

Clark's consistently Christian rejection of sense experience as the way to knowledge has many consequences, one of which is that the traditional proofs for the existence of God are all logical fallacies. David Hume and Immanuel Kant were right: Sensation cannot prove God, not merely because God cannot be sensed or validly inferred from sensation, but because no knowledge at all can be validly inferred from sensation. The arguments for the existence of God fail because both the axiom and method are wrong - the axiom of sensation and the method of induction - not because God is a fairy tale. The correct Christian axiom is not sensation, but revelation. The correct Christian method is deduction, not induction.

Another implication of the axiom of revelation is that those historians of thought who divide epistemologies into two types of philosophy, empiricist and rationalist, as though there were only two possible choices -- sensation and logic - are ignoring the Christian philosophy, Scripturalism. There are not only two general views in epistemology; there are at least three, and we must be careful not to omit Christianity from consideration simply by the scheme we choose for studying philosophy.

Another implication of the axiom of revelation is this: Rather than accepting the secular view that man discovers truth and knowledge on his own power using his own resources, Clark asserted that truth is a gift of God, who graciously reveals it to men. Clark's epistemology is consistent with his soteriology: Just as men do not attain salvation themselves, on their own power, but are saved by divine grace, so men do not gain knowledge on their own power, but receive knowledge as a gift from God. Knowledge of the truth is a gift from God. Man can do nothing apart from the will of God, and man can know nothing part from the revelation of God. We do not obtain salvation by exercising our free wills; we do not obtain knowledge by exercising our free intellects. Clark's epistemology is a Reformed epistemology. All other epistemologies are inconsistent and ultimately derived from non-Christian premises. No starting point, no proposition, no experience, no observation, can be more truthful than a word from God: "Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself," the author of *Hebrews* says. If we are to be saved, we must be saved by the words that come out of the mouth of God, words whose truth and authority are derived from God alone.

Scripturalism does not mean, as some have objected, that we can know only the propositions of the Bible. We can know their logical implications as well. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which is a Scripturalist document, says that "The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends *not* upon the testimony of *any* man or church, but *wholly* upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, *because it is the word of God*" (emphasis added). By these words, and by the fact that the *Confession* begins with the doctrine of Scripture, not with the doctrine of God, and certainly not with proofs for the existence of God, the *Confession* shows itself to be a Scripturalist document.

Continuing with the idea of logical deduction, the *Confession* says: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men."

Notice the claim of the *Confession*: "The *whole* counsel of God" is either expressly set down in Scripture or may be deduced from it. *Everything* we need for faith and life is found in the propositions of the Bible, either explicitly or implicitly. *Nothing* is to be added to the revelation at any time. Only logical deduction from the

propositions of Scripture is permitted. No synthesis, no combination with unscriptural ideas is either necessary or permissible.

Logic -- reasoning by good and necessary consequence -- is not a secular principle not found in Scripture and added to the Scriptural axiom; it is contained in the axiom itself. The first verse of John's Gospel may be translated, "In the beginning was the Logic, and the Logic was with God and the Logic was God." Every word of the Bible, from *Beresbith* in *Genesis* 1 to *Amen* in *Revelation* 22, exemplifies the law of contradiction. "In the beginning" means in the beginning, not a hundred years or even one second after the beginning. "Amen" expresses agreement, not dissent. The laws of logic are embedded in every word of Scripture. Only deductive inference is valid, and deductive inference - using the laws of logic -- is the principal tool of hermeneutics. Sound exegesis of Scripture is making valid deductions from the statements of Scripture. If your pastor is not making valid deductions from Scripture in his sermons, then he is not preaching God's Word. It is in the conclusions of such arguments, as well as in the Biblical statements themselves, that our knowledge consists.

Some will object, "But don't we know that we are in this room, or that 2 plus 2 equals four, or that grass is green?" To answer that objection, we must define the words "know" and "knowledge."

There are three sorts of cognitive states: knowledge, opinion, and ignorance. Ignorance is simply the lack of ideas. Complete ignorance is the state of mind that empiricists say we are born with: We are all born with blank minds, *tabula rasa*, to use John Locke's phrase. (Incidentally, a *tabula rasa* mind - a blank mind - is an impossibility. A consciousness conscious of nothing is a contradiction in terms. Empiricism rests on a contradiction.) At the other extreme from ignorance is knowledge. Knowledge is not simply possessing thoughts or ideas, as some think. Knowledge is possessing true ideas and knowing them to be true. Knowledge is, by definition, knowledge of the truth. We do not say that a person "knows" that 2 plus 2 is 5. We may say he thinks it, but he does not know it. It would be better to say that he opines it.

Now, most of what we colloquially call knowledge is actually opinion: We "know" that we are in Pennsylvania; we "know" that Clinton - either Bill or Hillary - is President of the United States, and so forth. Opinions can be true or false; we just don't know which. History, except for revealed history, is opinion. Science is opinion. Archaeology is opinion. John Calvin said, "I call that knowledge, not what is innate in man, nor what is by diligence acquired, but what is revealed to us in the Law and the Prophets." Knowledge is true opinion with an account of its truth.

It may very well be that William Clinton is President of the United States, but I do not know how to prove it, nor, I suspect, do you. In truth, I do not know that he is President, I opine it. I can, however, prove that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That information is revealed to me, not by the dubious daily newspaper or the evening news, but by the infallible Word of God. The resurrection of Christ is deduced by good and necessary consequence from the axiom of revelation.

II.

Any view of knowledge that makes no distinction between the cognitive standing of Biblical propositions and statements found in the daily paper does three things: First, it equivocates by applying one word, "knowledge," to two quite different sorts of statements: statements infallibly revealed by the God who can neither lie nor make a mistake, and statements made by men who both lie and make mistakes; second, by its empiricism, it actually makes the Biblical statements less reliable than those in the daily paper, for at least some statements in the paper are subject to empirical investigation and Biblical statements are not; and third, it thereby undermines Christianity.

Revelation is our only source of truth and knowledge. Neither science, nor history, nor archaeology, nor philosophy can furnish us with truth and knowledge. Scripturalism takes seriously Paul's warning to the

Colossians: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in him...."

One naive objection to the axiom of revelation crops up repeatedly: Don't I have to read the Bible? Don't I have to know that I have a book in my hands and that that book is the Bible? Don't I have to rely on the senses to obtain revelation?

First, this objection begs the epistemological question, How does one know, by assuming that one knows by means of the senses. But that is the conclusion that ought to be proved. The proper response to these questions is another series of questions: How do you know you have a book in your hands? How do you know that you are reading it? What is sensation? What are perceptions? What is abstraction? Tell us how some things called sensations become the idea of God. The naive question - Don't you have to read the Bible? - assumes that empiricism is true. It ignores all the arguments demonstrating the cognitive failure of empiricism. An acceptable account of epistemology, however, must begin at the beginning, not in the middle. Few theologians, and even fewer philosophers, however, want to start at the beginning.

But there is another confusion in this question: It assumes that revelation is not a distinct means of gaining knowledge, but that even revealed information has to be funneled through or derived from the senses. A conversation between Peter and Christ will indicate how far this assumption is from the Scriptural view of epistemology:

"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

"And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.' "

Presumably Peter had "heard" with his ears and "seen" with his eyes, but Christ says that his knowledge did not come by flesh and blood - it did not come by the senses; it came by revelation from the Father. That is why Christ forbids Christians to be called teacher, "for one is your Teacher, the Christ" (*Matthew 23*). It is in God, not matter, that we live and move, and have our being.

Soteriology

Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, is a branch of epistemology, the theory of knowledge. Soteriology is not a branch of metaphysics, for men did not cease to be men when they fell, nor are they deified when they are saved; saved men, even in Heaven, remain temporal and limited creatures. Only God is eternal; only God is omniscient; only God is omnipresent.

Nor is soteriology a branch of ethics, for men are not saved by works. We are saved in spite of our works, not because of them.

Nor is soteriology a branch of politics, for the notion that salvation, either temporal or eternal, can be achieved by political means is an illusion. Attempts to immanentize the eschaton have brought nothing but blood and death to Earth.

Salvation is by faith alone. Faith is belief of the truth. God reveals truth. Faith, the act of believing, is a gift of God. "By his knowledge, my righteous servant shall justify many."

Clark's view of salvation, reflected in the *Westminster Confession's* chapter on justification, is at odds with most of what passes for Christianity today. Popular Christianity decries knowledge. Clark points out that Peter says that we have received everything we need for life and godliness through knowledge. James says the Word of Truth regenerates us. Paul says we are justified through belief of the truth. Christ says we are sanctified by truth.

There are three popular theories of sanctification today: sanctification by works, sanctification by emotions, sanctification by sacraments. The first, sanctification by works, is sometimes expressed by those who claim to be Reformed or Calvinist: They teach that we are justified by faith, but we are sanctified by works. Calvin had no such view, and the *Westminster Confession* refutes it. The second view, sanctification by emotions, is the view of the Pentecostal, charismatic, and holiness groups. Roman Catholic and other churches that believe in the magical power of sacraments to regenerate or sanctify hold the third view, sanctification by sacraments. But just as we are regenerated by truth alone, and justified through belief of the truth alone, we are sanctified by truth alone as well.

Metaphysics

Let us turn briefly to metaphysics. Clark wrote relatively little on the subject of metaphysics in the narrow philosophical sense. Clark was, obviously, a theist. God, revealed in the Bible, is spirit and truth. Since truth always comes in propositions, the mind of God, that is, God himself, is propositional. Clark wrote a book called *The Johannine Logos*, in which he explained how Christ could identify himself with his words: "I am the Truth." "I am the Life." "The words that I speak to you are truth and life." Clark, like Augustine, was accused of "reducing" God to a proposition. Rather than fleeing from such an accusation, Clark astonished some of his readers by insisting that persons are indeed propositions. Some have been so confused by his statement that they think he said that propositions are persons, and so they wonder whether a declarative sentence, The cat is black, is really a person.

Knowledge is knowledge of the truth, and truth is unchanging. Truth is eternal. We know David was King of Israel and that Jesus rose from the dead, not because we saw them, but because God has revealed those truths to us. They are knowledge because they are revealed as truth. Because we all live and move and have our being in God, both thought and communication are possible. Communication is not based on having the same sensations, as empiricists think, but on having the same ideas. We can never have the same sensations as another person - you cannot have my toothache, and I cannot see your color blue - but we can both think that justification is by faith alone. Empiricism, which promises us an objective reality - the reality it calls matter -- delivers only solipsism. In the material world the empiricists describe, each of us - if indeed I am more than one of your headaches or nightmares - is shut inside our own sensations, and there is no escape. Science, however, is an attempt to escape the solipsism of sensation.

Those Christians who put their trust in science as the key to understanding the material universe should be embarrassed by the fact that science never discovers truth. One of the insuperable problems of science is the fallacy of induction; indeed, induction is an insuperable problem for all forms of empiricism. The problem is simply this: Induction, arguing from the particular to the general, is always a fallacy. No matter how many white swans one observes, one never has sufficient reason to say all swans are white. There is another fatal fallacy in the scientific method as well: asserting the consequent. Bertrand Russell put the matter this way:

All inductive arguments in the last resort reduce themselves to the following form: "If this is true, that is true: now that is true, therefore this is true." This argument is, of course, formally fallacious. [It is the fallacy of asserting the consequent.] Suppose I were to say: "If bread is a stone and stones are nourishing, then this bread will nourish me; now this bread does nourish me; therefore it is a stone and stones are nourishing." If I were to

advance such an argument, I should certainly be thought foolish, yet *it would not be fundamentally different from the argument upon which all scientific laws are based* (emphasis added).

Recognizing that the problem of induction is insoluble, and that asserting the consequent is a logical fallacy, philosophers of science in the twentieth century, in an effort to justify science, developed the notion that science does not rely on induction at all. Instead, it consists of conjectures and refutations. That is the title of a book by Karl Popper, one of the leading philosophers of science in this century. But in their attempt to save science from epistemological disgrace, the philosophers of science had to abandon any claim to knowledge: Science is nothing but conjectures and refutations of conjectures. Popper wrote:

First, although in science we do our best to find the truth, we are conscious of the fact that we can *never* be sure whether we have got it.... [W]e know that our scientific theories *always* remain hypotheses.... [I]n science there is *no* “knowledge” in the sense in which Plato and Aristotle understood the word, in the sense which implies finality; in science, we *never* have sufficient reason for the belief that we have attained the truth.... Einstein declared that his theory was *false*: he said that it would be a better approximation to the truth than Newton’s, but he gave reasons why he would not, even if all predictions came out right, regard it as a true theory.... Our attempts to see and to find the truth are not final, but open to improvement;... our knowledge, our doctrine is conjectural;... it consist of guesses, of hypotheses, rather than of final and certain truths.

Those theologians who accept observation and science as the basis for arguing for the truth of Christianity are attempting the impossible. Science cannot furnish us with truth about the material universe that it purports to describe, let alone truth about God. The empirical worldview, which begins with a metaphysics of matter, knowledge of which we obtain from sensation, cannot furnish us with knowledge at all. In *him* - not in matter - we live and move and have our being.

Ethics

Clark’s ethical philosophy is also derived from the axiom of revelation. The distinction between right and wrong depends entirely upon the commands of God. There is no natural law that makes some actions right and others wrong. In the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Were there no law of God, there would be no right or wrong.

This may be seen very clearly in God’s command to Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Only the command of God made eating the fruit sin. It may also be seen in God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God’s command alone made the sacrifice right, and Abraham hastened to obey. Strange as it may sound to modern ears used to hearing so much about the right to life, or the right to decent housing, or the right to choose, the Bible says that natural rights and wrongs do not exist: Only God’s commands make some things right and other things wrong.

In the Old Testament, it was a sin for the Jews to eat pork. Today, we can all enjoy bacon and eggs for breakfast, although Theonomists, Reconstructionists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Judaizers might choke. And it may bother some who are not Theonomists to learn that God might have made the killing of a human being or the taking of property a virtue, not a sin. That is one of the lessons of the story of Abraham. But in fact God made killing an innocent man a sin. In this world God commands, “You shall not murder.” What makes murder wrong is not some presumed or pre-existing right to life, but the divine command itself.

If we possessed rights because we are men - if our rights were natural and inalienable - then God himself would have to respect them. But God is sovereign. He is free to do with his creatures as he sees fit. One need read only *Isaiah* 40. So we do not have natural rights. That is good, for natural and inalienable rights are logically incompatible with punishment of any sort. Fines, for example, violate the inalienable right to property. Imprisonment violates the inalienable right to liberty. Execution violates the inalienable right to life. Natural right theory is logically incoherent at its foundation. Natural rights are logically incompatible with justice. The Biblical idea is not natural rights, but imputed rights. Only imputed rights, not intrinsic rights - natural and inalienable rights -- are compatible with liberty and justice. And those rights are imputed by God.

Furthermore, Clark demonstrates, all attempts to base ethics on some foundation other than revelation fail. Natural law is a failure, as David Hume so obligingly pointed out, because "oughts" cannot be derived from "ises." In more formal language, the conclusion of an argument can contain no terms that are not found in its premises. Natural lawyers, who begin their arguments with statements about man and the universe, statements in the indicative mood, cannot end their arguments with statements in the imperative mood.

The major ethical theory competing with natural law theory today is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism tells us that a moral action is one that results in the greatest good for the greatest number. It furnishes an elaborate method for calculating the effects of choices. Unfortunately, utilitarianism is also a failure, for it not only commits the naturalistic fallacy of the natural lawyers, it requires a calculus that cannot be executed as well. We cannot know what is the greatest good for the greatest number.

The only logical basis for ethics is the revealed commands of God. They furnish us not only with the basic distinction between right and wrong, but with detailed instructions and practical examples of right and wrong. They actually assist us in living our daily lives. Secular attempts to provide an ethical system fail on both counts.

Politics

Clark did not write a great deal about politics either, but it is clear from what he did write that he grounded his political theory on revelation, not on natural law, nor on the consent of the governed, nor on the exercise of mere force.

In a long chapter in *A Christian View of Men and Things*, he argues that attempts to base a theory of politics on secular axioms result in either anarchy or totalitarianism. He argues that only Christianity, which grounds the legitimate powers of government not in the consent of the governed but in the delegation of power by God, avoids the twin evils of anarchy and totalitarianism.

Government has a legitimate role in society: the punishment of evildoers and the praise of the good, as Paul put it in *Romans* 13. Education, welfare, housing, parks, retirement income, health care, the exploration of space, and most of the thousands of other programs in which government is involved today are illegitimate. The fact that government is involved in all these activities is a primary reason why government is not doing its legitimate job well: Crime is rising, and the criminal justice system is a growing threat to freedom. People are tried twice for the same crime, their property is taken without due process of law or just compensation, innocent persons are punished and guilty persons released.

Clark believed that the Bible teaches a distinctly limited role for government. The current activities of many Christians in politics would have been foreign to his thinking. The Biblical goal is not a large bureaucracy staffed by Christians, but virtually no bureaucracy. There should be no Christian Department of Education, no Christian Housing Department, no Christian Agriculture Department, simply because there should be no Departments of Education, Housing, and Agriculture, period. We do not need and should oppose a Christian Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms or a Christian Internal Revenue Service. So-called evangelical

Christians are engaged in a pursuit of political power that makes their activities almost indistinguishable from the activities of the social gospelers in the early and mid-twentieth century. This sort of political action has nothing to do with Scripture.

The System

Each of the parts of this philosophical system -- epistemology, soteriology, metaphysics, ethics, and politics -- is important, and the ideas gain strength from being arranged in a logical system. In such a system, where propositions are logically dependent on or logically imply other propositions, each part mutually reinforces the others. Historically - though not in this decadent century - Calvinists have been criticized for being too logical. But if we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, if we are to bring all our thoughts into conformity with Christ, we must learn to think as Christ does, logically and systematically.

Gordon Clark elaborated a complete philosophical system that proceeds by rigorous deduction from one axiom to thousands of theorems. Each of the theorems fits into the whole system. If you accept one of the theorems, you must, on pain of contradiction, accept the whole. But many leaders in the professing church feel no pain, and some even glory in contradiction. They are utterly confused and are thwarting the advance of the kingdom of God.

Scripturalism - Christianity - is a whole view of things thought out together. It engages non-Christian philosophies on every field of intellectual endeavor. It furnishes a coherent theory of knowledge, an infallible salvation, a refutation of science, a theory of the world, a coherent and practical system of ethics, and the principles required for political liberty and justice. No other philosophy does. All parts of the system can be further developed; some parts have been barely touched at all. It is my hope and prayer that the philosophy of Scripturalism will conquer the Christian world in the next century. If it does not, if the church continues to decline in confusion and unbelief, at least a few Christians can take refuge in the impregnable intellectual fortress that God has given us in his Word. May you be among those few.

Scripturalism a Christian Worldview

DR. GARY W. CRAMPTON

Introduction¹

Scripturalism is a world and life view. A worldview is a set of beliefs about the various issues of life. All persons have worldviews; they are inescapable. One's worldview will determine how he views the entirety of life, the decisions he makes, why he does what he does, and so forth. And all worldviews have presuppositions which govern their system of belief; these presuppositions function as axioms from which all decisions are deduced. Scripturalism is that system of belief in which the Word of God is foundational in the entirety of one's philosophical and theological dealings². This system of thought avers that Christians should never try to combine secular and Christian notions. Rather, all thoughts are to be brought into captivity to the Word of God (*2 Corinthians 10:5*), which is (a part of) the mind of Christ (*1 Corinthians 2:16*). Our minds must be transformed "to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God," as found in Scripture (*Romans 12:2*), *i.e.*, our thoughts must progressively become God's thoughts (*Isaiah 55:6-9*), which divine thoughts are only known by the Word of God. Scripturalism, then, teaches that all of our knowledge is to be derived from the Bible, which has a systematic monopoly on truth.

This approach to a Christian worldview is taught by the Apostle Paul and is confirmed by the teachings of the Westminster Standards³. In the words of the apostle: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*). And in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6) we read: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added."

Notice the universals in these two statements: "all," "complete," "thoroughly," "every," "whole," "all," "nothing," "at any time." The Bible, infallibly, and the Westminster Assembly, in compliance with the Bible, both teach the all-sufficiency of Scripture. According to the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, neither science, nor history, nor philosophy is needed to give truth. According to the Scripturalist, there is no "two-source" theory of truth taught in the Word of God. As Paul clearly states in the first two chapters of *1 Corinthians*, the wisdom of the world is foolishness, and man is not able to come to the knowledge of the truth apart from the Spirit-revealed propositions of Scripture. In *1 Corinthians 2:9-10*, for example, Paul writes: "But as it is written, 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit." The Bible is sufficient for all the truth we need. In Scripture alone do we find "the certainty of the words of truth" (*Proverbs 22:17-21*; see also *Luke 1:4*). This is Scripturalism.

Epistemology

A Scripturalist maintains that epistemology (the theory of knowledge) is the key tenet of any theological or philosophical system. Gordon Clark stated it this way:

While the question of how we can know God is the fundamental question in the philosophy of religion, there lies behind it in general philosophy the ultimate question, How can we know anything at all? If we cannot talk intelligently about God, can we talk intelligently about morality, about our own ideas, about art, politics—can we even talk about science? How can we know anything? The answer to this question, technically called the theory of epistemology, controls all subject matter claiming to be intelligible or cognitive.⁴

Aurelius Augustine, John Calvin, Gordon Clark, and the Westminster Assembly all began their systematic approach to the study of God and His creation with epistemology, and they all believed that Scripture was the epistemological foundation for a true theory of knowledge. Revelation is the *sine qua non* of knowledge. Even before the Fall, man was dependent on propositional revelation for knowledge. God had to reveal information to him then, and the present situation, aggravated by sin, makes the necessity of revelation even greater.

Christian Epistemology

First, it is important to understand that all philosophies (or worldviews) necessarily begin with an indemonstrable first principle or starting point, i.e., an axiom from which all else is deduced. A consistent Christian worldview avers that the epistemological starting point is that the Bible alone is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, and it has a monopoly on truth (*John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 6:3-5*). The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are self-attesting and self-authenticating. Scripture stands in judgment over all books and ideas, and it is to be judged by no person or thing. The Bible alone is the Word of God. This is the Reformed principle of *sola Scriptura*.

A Christian epistemology does not begin its systematic approach to theology and philosophy with a discussion of whether there is a god or how we know there is a god, and then seek to prove that this is the God of Scripture. The starting point in a genuine Christian epistemology is revelation. The doctrine of God follows epistemology. This is why the Westminster Assembly began its study of systematic theology with the doctrine of revelation. Chapter 1 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* has to do with our source of knowledge: "Of the Holy Scripture." The following 32 chapters are erected upon the axiom of Biblical revelation.

This was also Calvin's view. He began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the following statement: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern." According to Calvin, without knowledge of one's self, there is no knowledge of God. But to know one's self (and the whole world in general), there must first be a knowledge of God. God is known both better, and before, oneself or anything else.(5) Calvin too began his systematic theology with epistemology. His starting point was revelation.

Critics of this Scripturalist view often claim that this is little more than question begging; that is, it assumes what ought to be proved. How can we say that we believe the Bible to be inspired, and therefore true, because it makes the claim to be inspired and true, and then go on to say that we are to believe the claim because the Bible is inspired and true? Don't we first have to prove that the Bible is the Word of God?

It is, of course, the case, that not every claim is true. There are numerous false witnesses. But it can hardly be denied that the Bible does claim to be the inspired Word of God (see *John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21*). And this is significant. It is certainly a claim that very few writings attribute to themselves. Likewise, it would be far from justifiable to say that the Bible was the Word of God if it denied inspiration, or perhaps even if it were silent on the subject. But it is a very plausible position to take to insist the first and foremost reason that we believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God is that it claims to be just that.(6)

Second, the *ad hominem* reply to the critic is that all systems must begin with an indemonstrable axiom. Without such a postulate no system could ever get started. "Question-begging," in this loose or broad sense of the phrase, is not an idiosyncrasy of Christianity. It is the situation in which all philosophies and theologies find themselves.

If one could prove the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God, then the proposition would not be the starting point. There would be something even before Scripture. According to Scripture, however, there is no

higher source of truth than God's own self-disclosure. As stated by the author of *Hebrews*, "because He [God] could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (6:13). The Scriptures, therefore, cannot possibly be deduced from any superior principle. They are, as Calvin taught, self-authenticating and self-attesting. He wrote:

For they mock the Holy Spirit when they ask: Who can convince us that these writings come from God? Who can assure us that Scripture has come down whole and intact even to our day? ... Thus the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit from them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God's holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to Him.(7)

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:4) says it this way:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

And Jonathan Edwards commented that the Word of God does not "go about begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has the highest and most proper evidence in itself."(8) One, then, must accept God's special revelation as axiomatic, or there is no knowledge possible at all. In the words of Clark, "an immediate point, touching on both epistemology and theology...is the impossibility of knowing God otherwise than by revelation...either revelation must be accepted as an axiom or there is no knowledge of God at all."(9)

Further, in Christian epistemology, there is no dichotomy between faith (revelation) and reason (logic). These two go hand in hand, for it is Jesus Christ, the Logos, who reveals the truth. Christianity is rational, because Christ is Himself the Logic,(10) Reason, and Wisdom of God incarnate (*John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3*). Being the image of God, man can reason; he can think logically, because God has given him this innate ability.

This God-given ability permits men to understand the propositions revealed in Scripture. It is necessary to believe something, as one's axiomatic starting point, in order to understand anything. To reason properly, one must have a foundation upon which all is based. In the Christian worldview (Christian rationalism), knowledge comes *through* reason (*i.e.*, logic), not *from* reasoning (as in pure rationalism). Unlike pure rationalism, Scripturalism stands upon the foundation of Biblical revelation. As stated in Augustine's dictum: "I believe in order to understand."(11)

General and Special Revelation

The Bible teaches that the triune God has revealed Himself to man in both general and special revelation, which are in harmony. The former is general in audience (all mankind) and limited in content, whereas special revelation, which is now found only in the Scriptures, is more restricted in audience (those who read the Bible), and more detailed in content. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:1) states:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary for salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and

afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

As sufficient as general revelation is to reveal God to all men, leaving them without excuse, it is insufficient, as the *Confession* says, "to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation...which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary." Without the propositional truth of God's Word, *i.e.*, special revelation, sinful man is not able to come to a sound and saving knowledge of God. The necessity of special revelation rests on the insufficiency of general revelation. Due to its limited nature, then, general revelation must always be interpreted in light of special revelation. This was true even before the Fall of man (*Genesis 3*), but even more so afterwards, because the universe is now in a state of abnormality (*Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 8:19-25*). Thus, knowledge of God and His creation can only be derived from Scripture.

The Bible teaches, as stated by John Calvin, that the Spirit of God has implanted an innate idea of Himself, a *sensus divinitatis*, in all men, which is propositional and ineradicable. This is due to the fact that all men are created in the image of God. When man interacts with God's creation, which demonstrates His glory, power, and wisdom, man, as God's image, is forced, in some sense, to "think God." The visible creation itself does not mediate "knowledge" to man (as in the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas), for the visible universe sets forth no propositions. Rather, it stimulates the mind of man to intellectual intuition (or recollection), who as a rational being is already in possession of *apriori*, propositional information about God and His creation. This *apriori* information is immediately impressed upon man's consciousness, and it is more than adequate to show that the God of the Bible is the one and only true God.(12) Yet, without the "spectacles" of special revelation, all of the evidences speak in vain. One must not attempt to prove God; He is the necessary premise for all proof.(13)

Since all knowledge must come through propositions (which are either true or false), since the senses in interacting with creation yield no propositions, knowledge cannot be conveyed by sensation. Rather, as noted above, the senses apparently stimulate the mind of man to intellectual intuition, to recollect the God-given innate ideas that man already possesses. Gordon Clark used the illustration of a piece of paper on which is written a message in invisible ink. The paper (by illustration, the mind) might appear blank, but in actuality it is not. When the heat of experience is applied to the mind (as when heat is applied to the paper), the message becomes visible. Human knowledge, then, is possible only because God has endowed man with certain innate ideas.(14)

The Christian view of epistemology has its roots in the *Logos* doctrine.(15) According to the *Gospel of John*, Jesus Christ is the cosmological *Logos* (1:1-3), the epistemological *Logos* (1:9, 14), and the soteriological *Logos* (1:4, 12-13; 14:6). He is the Creator of the world, the source of all human knowledge, and the giver of salvation. As to the epistemological *Logos*, which is the focus of the present study, Christ is the "true light which enlightens every man coming into the world" (1:9). Apart from the *Logos*, the "inward teacher," knowledge would not be possible.

Another way of explaining this is that the sum total of all truth exists in the mind of God: "For in Him [God] we live and move and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*). Nothing exists outside of the mind of God. That is the meaning of the words "omniscient" and "omnipresent." If man is going to know the truth, he must come to know the eternal propositions in the mind of God. As stated by Jonathan Edwards, "since all truth is in the mind," and since "God is truth itself," if we are going to know the truth there must be "the consistency and agreement of our ideas with the ideas of God."(16) Some of these propositional truths are implanted in man from conception by God. And when man interacts with creation or reads the words of Scripture, the divine teacher, the *Logos*, illuminates the mind so that the propositions come to consciousness, as the invisible ink.

This is possible because the mind of man is enveloped by the mind of the *Logos*, who enlightens him to understand the eternal propositions in the mind of God. It does not come about by man's effort or initiative, but by God's, who reveals truth.(17)

God created humans with rational minds that use the same laws of thought as His own; men are image-bearers of God. The principles of reason (logic) and knowledge are innately given by God to mankind through the *Logos*. Thus, whenever human beings know truth, they know that which exists in the mind of God; they do not merely have a representation of the truth.

Scripturalism denies the correspondence theory of truth, *i.e.*, that the mind of man has only a representation of the truth, and not the truth itself. Rather, a Christian epistemology holds to the coherence theory of truth, which maintains that what man has is the real truth: the same truth that exists in man's mind exists first in the mind of God. As stated by Gordon Clark: "Realism is the view that the mind of man actually possesses the truth. Representationalism holds that the mind has only an image, a picture, a representation, an analogy of the truth, but does not have the truth itself."(18)

A Christian epistemology maintains that a proposition is true because God thinks it to be true. Therefore, when man knows truth, what he knows coheres with that which God knows. Our knowledge must coincide with God's knowledge if we are going to know the truth. In the coherence theory, the mind and the object known are both part of one system, a system in which all parts are in perfect accord, because they are found in the mind of God. Since God is omniscient, knowing all truth, if man is going to know the truth, he must know what God knows.

Moreover, Scripturalism avers that general revelation (along with the earliest teachings of special revelation which God first gave to Adam) is the reason for the basic religiosity of mankind and the many so-called religions which presently exist. The problem is that fallen man, who is now in an ethical state of total depravity (*Romans 3:10-18; 8:7-8*), suppresses the truth about God which he innately possesses. Yet, this knowledge is part of the basis for his responsibility; and he is inexcusable (*Romans 1:18-21*). Man is guilty before God due to the general revelation that he possesses and suppresses. But even though this revelation is more general than special revelation, and is sufficient to make man culpable, it is not sufficient to show him the way of salvation: Jesus Christ. Such information is given in Scripture alone (special revelation). General revelation reveals God as Creator; special revelation reveals Him as Savior. Calvin wrote:

Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds [i.e., innate knowledge], having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift [special revelation], where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens His most hallowed lips. Not only does He teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows Himself as the God upon whom they are to look.... God has provided the assistance of the Word for the sake of all those to whom He has been pleased to give useful instruction, because He foresaw that His likeness imprinted upon the most beautiful form of the universe would be insufficiently effective.... We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from His works.(19)

As taught by the *Westminster Confession* (14:1), "the grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer, it is increased and strengthened." This work of God is referred to as the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is an "immediate" work of the Spirit, by and with the proclaimed Word, wherein He produces belief in the mind of the elect sinner.

As the Confession says, the Spirit does not (ordinarily) work in the elect sinner apart from the Word. Lost sinners need to hear of Christ. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the church to teach the whole counsel of God, to evangelize, and to do the work of apologetics. These are Christian duties. But the Spirit of God alone produces belief. As stated by Paul in *1 Corinthians 3:6*: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." The sinner, without any special work of God's Spirit, can understand the message preached. There is a difference between understanding the truth and believing he truth. Some non-believers understand the Bible better than some Christians.

Epistemology and Soteriology

Scripturalism teaches that soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) is a branch of epistemology. It is not a branch of metaphysics, because sin is not a meta-physical problem and men are not deified when they are saved. Neither is it a branch of ethics, for men are not saved by their own works or conduct. Rather, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone (i.e., by belief in the truth as revealed by God the Spirit in His Word), in Christ alone (*Romans 1:16-17*). And this salvation is the gift of God (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). In agreement with the Westminster Assembly, salvation in its entirety has to do with epistemology. Not only is one justified by means of believing the truth, one is also sanctified by knowing the truth. In *John 17:17* we read the words of Christ: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth." And in *2 Thessalonians 2:13* the apostle says: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth."

Revelation and Apologetics

A Scripturalist worldview rejects the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas and his modern day followers, as well as the natural theology of the theological liberals and humanists. That is, it does not hold to an evidentialist view of apologetics. Rather than beginning with creation, arguing for the existence of God, and then for the reliability of Scripture, we must begin with Scripture.(20)

According to Gordon Clark, a Scripturalist critique of natural theology begins with the fact that it is based on an empiricist methodology. We are not able formally to deduce the triune God of the Bible from an empirical examination of the universe.(21) Knowledge cannot be derived from sensory experience. Empiricism provides us with no more knowledge about the Creator of the world than it can about the world itself.

On this subject, Dr. Clark wrote:

One might consider what the apostle Paul thought of Aristotle's cosmological argument for the existence of God.... Thomas Aquinas held that Paul proleptically declared valid Thomas' restatement of Aristotle. From the present paragraph [*1 Corinthians 1:18-25*] one would suppose that Paul regarded it as nonsense.

In so far as Paul's words can be applied to Aristotle, [*1 Corinthians*] 3:20 would be even a clearer repudiation of philosophical speculation about God.... Christian apologetes therefore would do well to repudiate the scholastic futility of so-called "natural theology." They should desist from attempts to prove God's existence and to describe His nature on the basis of empirical observations.(22)

All of the traditional "proofs" for God's existence are invalid; they are logical fallacies. As David Hume pointed out, it is not logically necessary for the creator of a finite world to be infinite. All that is necessary, according to Hume, is that the creator be at least as great as that which he created. Not only this, but observation can never prove causality; it may give us sequence, but never causality.(23)

Neither is the (non-empiricist) ontological argument of Anselm and Descartes sound. This argument, stated Clark, basically asserts that “God, by definition, is the being who possesses all perfections; existence is a perfection; therefore God exists.”(24) There are several problems with this reasoning. First, let it be said that the syllogism as stated by Descartes formally is valid. The trouble is not with the form of the argument, but with its terms. Existence, for example, is an attribute that applies to everything without exception. Dreams exist; hallucinations exist; mirages exist. The question is not whether something exists or not; the question is what is it that exists.(25) This is why the Westminster Assembly asked the question the way it is found in the *Shorter Catechism* (Q. 4): “What is God?,” rather than “Is there a god?” If the ontological argument is understood as an unpacking of what the word “God” means in the Bible, then it may be useful. But it is not an argument from something extra-Biblical to God. The definition of God found in the ontological argument includes elements smuggled in from Scripture, including monotheism.

Another error seen in the traditional “proofs” is that normative conclusions may never be drawn from descriptive premises. Gordon Clark wrote:

The theory of natural law commits a major logical blunder when it tries to deduce a normative conclusion from descriptive premises. No matter how carefully or how intricately one describes what men do, or what the provisions of nature are, or how natural inclinations function, it is a logical impossibility to conclude that this is or is not what men ought to do. The *is* never implies the *ought*. This criticism applies to all empirical theories.(26)

Further, if the various proofs, such as Thomas’ “five ways,” could prove the existence of God, they would prove the falsity of the Bible. How could one know if the five proofs prove the same god? Why could it not be two, three, four, or five gods? In fact, if the theistic proofs are valid, it would demolish Christianity; it would prove, if anything, the existence of a pagan deity, not the Christian God. Fortunately, the proofs are not valid.(27)

One cannot prove the God of Scripture by means of natural theology. Neither can one prove Scripture to be the Word of God. For the Scripturalist, the Word of God is the axiomatic starting point. It is indemonstrable; it is self-authenticating and self-evident. Augustine’s dictum, “I believe in order to understand,” must also be our own.

This is not to say that there are not numerous evidences which manifest the Bible to be the Word of God; there are many such evidences. But the evidences do not “prove” the Scriptures to be true. As taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:4-5):

The authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and the divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

And in the words of Gordon Clark:

There may be, say, a thousand historical assertions in the Bible. Fortunately, many of these that the modernist said were false are now known to be true. For example, the modernists asserted that the Hittite nation never existed. Today the museums have more Hittite books than they have time to translate. The modernists said that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, because writing had not yet been invented in his day. Well, writing existed over a thousand years before the time of Moses. Still, the fact that the Bible is correct on these points does not 'prove' that it is without error. Obviously there are many historical assertions in the Bible that we cannot check and never will be able to check. Who could hope to corroborate [by means of archaeology and historical research] the assertions that Eliezer asked Rebekah for a drink of water, and that Rebekah drew water for his camels also?(28)

John Calvin, too, spoke of the persuasiveness of the various evidences that are available to us: the religious or moral argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from common grace, and the argument from the human anatomy. Yet, said the Reformer, unaided by Scripture, these arguments speak in vain.(29) He wrote: "The proofs of faith must be [sought at] the mouth of God [*i.e.*, His Word] alone. If we dispute about matters which concern men, then let human reasons take place; but in the doctrine of faith, the authority of God alone must reign, and upon it we must depend."(30)

There are numerous evidences, both internal(31) and external, that the Bible is God's infallible revelation to man. But apart from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, these evidences are inconclusive. The Bible itself tells us why we believe it to be the Word of God: God the Spirit produces this belief in the mind of the elect; He does not do so for the non-elect. There is no greater authority than the Word of God.

A Scripturalist apologetic methodology presupposes the primacy of Scripture as providing the basis for all proof. The Bible has a systematic monopoly on truth. It is self-attesting and self-authenticating. It stands in judgment over all books and ideas, and is to be judged by no person or thing. This is not to say that the evidences are not useful; they are. They can be used in an *ad hominem* fashion to reveal the foolishness of non-Christian systems. Here the Scripturalist sees *Proverbs 26:4-5* as very important to the discipline of apologetics: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, lest he be wise in his own eyes." The Biblical apologete refuses to answer the critic of Christianity based on the foolish presuppositions that he has adopted in his non-Christian worldview. The Christian will not answer this "fool according to his folly," because to do so would make him just like the fool. Rather, standing on God's inspired, infallible, inerrant revelation, the Christian apologete should "answer the fool as his folly deserves" by using the evidences apagogically to refute the fool's faulty worldview. Such argumentation is to be used to criticize internally the non-believer's worldview, revealing its inconsistencies, thereby showing it to be in error.(32) Gordon Clark said it this way:

Let us use as much archaeological evidence as we can find. Let us go into great detail on J, E, D, and P. We shall discuss the presence of camels in Egypt in 2000 BC, and the hypothetical council of Jamnia. But our arguments will be entirely *ad hominem*. We shall show that the principles our opponents use destroy their own conclusions.

The argument is *ad hominem* and elenctic. When finally the opponent is reduced to silence and we can get in a word edgewise, we present the Word of God and pray that God cause him to believe.(33)

This apagogic methodology, consisting in a series of *reductiones ad absurdum*, is the principal method available to a Biblical apologist. The reason is that even though there is metaphysical common ground between believers and non-believers in that both are created in the image of God, there is no common epistemological ground. There are no common theoretical propositions, no common “notions,” between Christianity and non-Christian philosophies. The *ad hominem* apagogic arguments are to be used against the non-believer, who is a covenant-breaker and already in possession of the innate idea of the God against whom he is rebelling. They are also part of “demolishing strongholds and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 *Corinthians* 10:4-5). The arguments are to be used in a fashion that will attempt to make him epistemologically self-conscious (and thus God conscious) of his covenant breaking rebellion.

After demonstrating the internal incoherence of the non-Christian views, the Biblical apologete will argue for truth and the internal, logical consistency of the Scriptures and the Christian worldview revealed therein. As taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:5), there is in Scripture a “consent of all the parts.” The Biblical apologete will show how Christianity is self-consistent, how it gives us a coherent understanding of the world. It answers questions and solves problems that other world-views cannot. This method is not to be considered as a proof for the existence of God or the truth of Scripture, but as proof that the non-Christian view is false. It shows that intelligibility can only be maintained by viewing all things as dependent on the God of Scripture, who is truth itself.

Commenting on the Scripturalist apologetic methodology of Gordon Clark, Gilbert Weaver wrote:

An extended example of this type of apologetics is found in Clark’s volume, *A Christian View of Men and Things*. In it he takes up the topics of history, politics, ethics, science, religion, and epistemology, and in each one shows that the major opposing non-Christian systems fail to establish answers to the basic problems of the area of study, that they tend to skepticism or self-contradiction and that the Christian worldview based on divine revelation provides plausible solutions in each case. The net result is that the rivals of Christianity are undercut in each area of thought, and thus are in no solid position from which to launch an attack upon the Christian faith.(34)

Dr. Clark used the Augustinian argument from the nature of truth to reveal the internal consistency of Christianity.(35) Truth, he argued, must exist; thus, skepticism is false. Even to deny the existence of truth (that is, to say that it is “true” that there is no truth) is to assert that truth does and must exist. Further, it is not possible for truth to change. That which changes, by definition, cannot be true. To deny truth’s eternity (i.e., to say that it is “true” that truth is not eternal or that it will someday perish) affirms its eternal nature. And since truth can exist only in the form of propositions, it must be mental (i.e., being propositional, it can exist only in the mind). But seeing that the mind of man is not eternal and unchangeable, there must be a mind superior to the mind of man which is eternal and unchangeable: the mind of God. God, as Scripture testifies, is truth itself. And if a man knows any truth, he also knows something of God.

In the consistent Scripturalist apologetical system, then, there are two steps: First, the apologete must show the non-believer the logical inconsistency of his methodology. Second, he must exhibit the internal consistency of the Christian worldview. Once these two points have been argued, the Biblical apologete must urge the non-believer to repudiate his false system and embrace the teachings of Scripture.

Knowledge and Opinion

An important part of the Scripturalist worldview is the epistemological distinction between knowledge and opinion. Throughout the history of Western thought, philosophers such as Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, have correctly differentiated between these two. Augustine and Gordon Clark are just two examples of Christian philosophers who have done the same.(36) There is a difference between that which we “know” and that about which we may have opinions.

In the Scripturalist worldview, knowledge is not only possessing ideas or thoughts; it is possessing true ideas or thoughts. Knowledge is knowledge of the truth. It is justified true belief. Only the Word of God (that which, as the *Westminster Confession* [1:6] says, “is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture”) gives us such knowledge.

Opinions, on the other hand, may be true or false. Natural science is opinion; archaeology is opinion; history (with the exception of Biblical history) is opinion. In these disciplines we are not dealing with “facts.” In them there is no justified true belief. To “opine” something is not to “know” it. Justified truth is found only in the Word of God.

The Scripturalist begins with the presupposition that the Bible is the Word of God; this is axiomatic. He then deduces everything else from Scripture. How does man come to knowledge of God and His creation? This is possible only by means of God’s self-revelation. Knowledge is possible only because God has chosen to reveal Himself to man. Such knowledge is not received from or discovered by either sensation or ratiocination. All knowledge is revelational and propositional by nature, and its source is God.

Epistemological Limitations and the Language of Scripture

Scripturalism avers that man can “know” the truth. But this does not mean that man is able to have exhaustive knowledge (*Job 11:7; 36:26; Psalm 139:6*). Only God has such knowledge (*Romans 11:33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:11*). God is omniscient. All of His knowledge is intuitive, while man’s is discursive. There are limitations on man’s knowledge, not only due to sin, but also due to the fact that he is a creature. Even sinless Adam, prior to the Fall, could never have obtained exhaustive knowledge. This limitation will not even be removed in the final sinless state.

Nevertheless, whatever knowledge man has, because it must be a truth that God knows, must of necessity be the same knowledge as God’s knowledge. This means that we must reject the Thomistic and Van Tilian view of analogical predication. According to Thomas Aquinas and Cornelius Van Til, all of man’s knowledge of God and His creation is analogous. There is not a single point of coincidence between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge.(37)

The Scripturalist does not deny that there is a quantitative difference between that which God knows and that which man knows. There is a vast difference in the degree of knowledge (*Psalm 139:6*). But there is not a difference in the knowledge itself. There is a point of contact between that which God knows and that which man knows; there is a univocal point at which God’s knowledge meets man’s knowledge. Gordon Clark wrote that “if our minds and God’s mind did not have some univocal content, we would know nothing at all. If He has all truth, we cannot know any truth except the truth God knows.”(38) The difference between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge is one of degree. God knows more and will always know more than any creature. If all we have is an analogy of the truth, then we do not have the truth. A mere analogy of the truth, without a univocal point of understanding, is not “the truth.”(39)

The special revelation given to us in Scripture is propositional in nature. The triune God of Scripture has revealed Himself to man in the form of propositional statements. He speaks to man in propositional,

universal truths. Propositions are logical, understandable combinations of words—subject, copula, predicate—which objectively teach something. They are the meaning of indicative sentences. Propositions are either true or false. And what makes a proposition true is that God thinks it to be true. Moreover, there is no such thing as a non-propositional truth. Truth is a characteristic, an attribute, of propositions alone.

According to the Scripturalist, the truth of Scripture is not “in between” or “above” or “behind” the words, or only in the mind of the interpreter. Neither are the words secretly symbolic or metaphorical, intimating some “higher” truth. Rather, God’s truth lies in the logical meaning and organization of the words of Scripture themselves.⁽⁴⁰⁾ His truth comes through our understanding of these propositions according to the rules of grammar and logic. Thus, the Bible does not contain logical paradoxes. Obviously, these propositional statements cannot teach two or more contrary or contradictory “truths” at the same time (as in Neo-orthodoxy and Neo-liberalism). They teach one truth at a time, and this one truth may have various applications or logical implications. This also relates to the events of history and their meaning. That is, not only does the Bible teach us that certain events have occurred in history, but it also tells us the meaning of those events. The interpretation of the event is not left to the subjectivity of one’s own imagination. Scripture gives us the event and the meaning in propositions.

As noted above, the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the logic (*Logos*) of God (*John 1:1*); He is Reason, Wisdom, and Truth incarnate (*1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3; John 14:6*). The laws of logic are not created by God or man; they are the way God thinks. And since the Scriptures are a part of the mind of God (*1 Corinthians 2:16*), they are God’s logical thoughts. The Bible expresses the mind of God in a logically coherent fashion to mankind.

Conclusion

Scripturalism is a Christian worldview. It is the only consistent worldview taught in the Word of God itself. Scripturalism maintains that the Bible, which is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, is foundational in the entirety of one’s philosophical and theological dealings. Scripture stands in judgment over all and is to be judged by no person or thing. The Bible must be considered as the Christian’s axiomatic starting point. It is the indemonstrable first principle, the axiom from which all is deduced. Every system of belief must begin with indemonstrable premises. If these premises could be proved, then they would not be first principles. Hence, Christianity begins with Scripture and its self-authenticating claim of inspiration.

Again to cite the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6):

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Soli Deo Gloria

NOTES

1. Much of this article has been adapted from W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1999).
2. John W. Robbins coined the term *Scripturalism*, see “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” *The Trinity Review* (July and August 1993).
3. All references to the Westminster Standards, which are comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, are from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.
4. Gordon H. Clark, “How Does Man Know God?,” *The Trinity Review* (July/August 1989), 1.
5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volumes I & II, John T. McNeil, editor, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) I:1-1-3.
6. See Gordon H. Clark, *God’s Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1982), 1-23.
7. Calvin, *Institutes* I:7:1, 4-5.
8. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), I:293.
9. Gordon H. Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1968, 1993), 60; now included in *Christian Philosophy*, 299-300, and *Clark and His Critics*, 53-54.
10. The English word *Logos* is derived from the Greek *Logos*.
11. Augustine, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Volume III, edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), On the Holy Trinity (15:2); see also Norman L. Geisler, editor, *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 14-19.
12. Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*, 61-62 (*Christian Philosophy*, 300-301; *Clark and His Critics*, 54-55); Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 6, edited by Wallace E. Anderson, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), 346, 361, 368. Edwards referred to this intellectual intuition (or recollection) as “exciting ideas.”
13. Calvin, *Institutes* I:1-6.
14. Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, [1961], 1995), 142-143.
15. Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 59-69.
16. Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, 340-342.
17. See Gordon H. Clark, *The Johannine Logos* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1972, 1989).
18. Ronald H. Nash, editor, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), 440; reprinted in *Clark and His Critics* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2009), 209.
19. Calvin, *Institutes* I:6:1, 3; II:1-17.
20. For more on this, see Robert L. Reymond, *Faith’s Reasons For Believing* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2008).
21. Clark, *God’s Hammer*, 66.
22. Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, [1975], 1991), 52.
23. Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, [1957], 2000), 299-308; and Gordon H. Clark and Aurelius Augustine, *Lord God of Truth and Concerning the Teacher* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1994), 24.
24. Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, [1946], 1988), 31.
25. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, 33-44.
26. Gordon H. Clark, *Essays on Ethics and Politics*, edited by John W. Robbins (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1992), 102.
27. Clark, *God’s Hammer*, 87-89.
28. *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*, 17.
29. Calvin, *Institutes* I:1-5, 16.
30. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Volumes I-XXII (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), Commentary on Acts 17:2.
31. Technically speaking, “internal evidences” are not evidences at all; they are a part of special revelation. Only external (extra-Biblical) evidences are actually “evidences.”
32. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 24:1, edited by Stephen J. Stein, *The “Blank Bible”* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 575-576.
33. Nash, editor, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 451-452; reprinted in *Clark and His Critics*, 240.
34. Cited in Nash, editor, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 290; reprinted in *Clark and His Critics*, 271.
35. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things*, 318ff.; Nash, editor, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, 157-161; reprinted in *Clark and His Critics*, 128-131.
36. See W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), 402; Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1969); Robert Crouse, “Knowledge,” in Allan D. Fitzgerald, editor, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 488; Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*, 57-92 (*Christian Philosophy*, 297-323; *Clark and His Critics*, 57-77); and Robbins, “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” *The Trinity Review* (July/August, 1993).
37. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, XXXII-XXXIV. Cornelius Van Til held to a view similar to that of Aquinas. In his “Introduction” to B. B. Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, edited by Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), for example, Van Til has written that it is because of the analogical nature of Scriptural revelation that man’s knowledge is “at no point identical with the content of God’s mind” (33).
38. Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 119.
39. Clark, *God’s Hammer*, 30-34, 38, 71.

40. It is, of course, true that all of the statements of Scripture are not in the form of propositions. Some, for example, are commandments, and others ascriptions of praise to God. But even these can be made propositional by putting them into a larger sentence, for example, "God commands thus and so," and "God is worthy of praise."

Holy Scripture
GORDON H. CLARK

For the philosophic problem of the knowledge of God, for the construction of a theology, and as well for religious stability, a view of the Bible as revelation is most important. Currently many authors both in Europe and America are trying to meet the need. In the December 24, 1962 issue of *The Presbyterian Outlook* four southern professors join forces to propagate a particular view. The four are: Dr. Kenneth J. Foreman, professor emeritus of doctrinal theology at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; Dr. James H. Gailey, Jr., professor of Old Testament at Columbia Seminary; Dr. James L. Mays, professor of biblical interpretation at Union Seminary (Virginia); and Dr. John F. Jansen, professor of New Testament interpretation at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. They write under the general title *Do We Need an Infallible Bible?*

The four articles are part of the wide-spread contemporary attack on the truthfulness of the Bible. It is instructive to see how their arguments are constructed. Dr. Foreman in the first article addresses himself mainly to the question of the (alleged) need of an infallible Bible. He asks, "Do I need an infallible Bible to convict me of sin?" In all plausibility the answer is No. Of course, a man may be convicted of sin without ever having seen a Bible: he may simply hear an evangelist and the Holy Spirit may convict him. Such a consideration indicates that the initial question is not quite the correct question to ask, if we are interested in the truthfulness of the Bible.

After a few more slightly irrelevant questions Dr. Foreman asks, "Is it necessary for the Bible's geography to be above reproach before I can put my trust in the God of the Bible?" The series of irrelevant questions with their plausible negative answers has supposedly conditioned the reader to continue with a negative here also. But if the question is examined a little, the negative is not so plausible. If the Bible is mistaken on geography, which ought to have been easy for the writers to put down correctly, it might very well be mistaken on theology, which is much more difficult than geography. To this question an affirmative answer is at least as plausible as the negative answer was to the first question. There is another part of this first article that depends more on innuendo than on logic. The author writes concerning (alleged) discrepancies in the Scriptures that "Many believers in this theory (of inerrancy) about the Bible, when such discrepancies are pointed out as they cannot explain without arguments that sound suspiciously twisted, resort to the proposition that whatever errors may be found in our Bibles, there was none in the original manuscripts. This affirmation cannot be proved; it cannot be disproved. It will be worth discussing when we have the originals." The implication seems to be that it is not worth discussing now, and we are left with the fallible Bibles that we have.

This argument is an excellent example of begging the question. The innuendo begins with the suggestion that attempts to explain discrepancies are (usually always) suspiciously twisted. Thus the mind of the reader is prejudiced against the truthfulness of the Scripture. The author hides the fact that the burden of proof lies on the critic to show that no explanation is possible. So many alleged discrepancies have by now been removed by archaeological discoveries that the person who accepts the Word of God needs no longer be terrified by the unsupported doubts of the unbelieving critic.

There is also another flaw in the argument. The author suggests that there is no use discussing whether the alleged error was missing from the original until we have the original. This seems to betray a forgetfulness of textual criticism. The differences between the Greek New Testament which we have and the autographs are few in number and of slight consequence. Most of them are differences in spelling, or in word order, or in some small detail that does not affect the sense. To suppose that we are so ignorant of the original wording as this argument requires is to cast aside the whole science of textual criticism. It may be that we cannot prove true some particular statement in the Bible; but the reason is not that the autograph is missing. What is missing is corroborative evidence from historical or archaeological sources, without which the unbeliever refuses to accept the statement of the Bible. Therefore we do not acquiesce in Dr. Foreman's desire not to

discuss these matters until the original is found - a requirement he is safe in making; on the contrary, we shall remind the world that the critics once asserted that the Hittite nation never existed.

Let us grant that archaeology can never prove the truth of every statement in the Bible, not even every historical statement. But our assurance of the truth of the Bible does not depend on the sort of proof these professors want. It depends on a consideration found in chapter one, section five, of the Westminster Confession, which these Presbyterian professors have not seen fit to refer to. This excellent summary of Biblical teaching says, "Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." Dr. James L. Mays, ostensibly asserting the "authority" of the Bible, attacks its infallibility. And what is strange for a professor in a Presbyterian seminary, he does so by recourse to a Roman Catholic argument. "If we had a book whose value consisted in its infallibility, we could not use this value unless there were infallible men to go along with it." This is essentially the claim of the Pope that an infallible text requires an infallible interpreter. But what honest Protestant ever accepted this popish dictum? Where is the compulsion in the assertion? How does the Pope or the professor justify his demand for an infallible interpreter? Have Protestants forgotten their heritage to the extent of being deceived by old Romish superstitions?

Suppose it were true that an infallible text required an infallible interpreter. Then, of course, the Bible would require a papal encyclical for its interpretation. But since the encyclical, on this theory, is itself an infallible text, it too requires an infallible interpreter. Whoever this might be, his interpretation, also infallible, would require another infallible interpreter; and so on ad infinitum. Obviously the papal claim of this Presbyterian professor is absurd. When then the professor concludes, "The authority of the Bible is best commended to the world, not by a fearful defense of its infallibility, but by lives which show the reality of that authority," we reply, without minimizing the lives of any saints who obey the Bible, that we are not fearful of our defense of infallibility against this fallacy of false disjunction. The professor ought to be fearful of his lack of logic. Indeed, we wish to ask these men what authority the Bible can have, if it is not true. The neo-orthodox, or whatever name best suits them, talk a good deal about the Bible and its authority. But they are not at all clear as to why we should believe, submit to, or honor a book that is marred with discrepancies and errors. Karl Barth, it will be remembered, attributes to the Bible not only geographical mistakes and number mysticism, but errors in theology. But if a doctrine is false, why should it be authoritatively preached? The logic of such a position is more than puzzling.

Now, Dr. Mays asserts that the Bible is authoritative. And in doing so, he makes some statements that are so commendable that he himself ought to pay attention to them. He says, Presbyterians are supposed to build faith on the Bible to get what is said in theology from Scriptures. And that includes belief about the Bible: We have to look at it and examine it to learn what it is right to say in faith. It is presumptuous to refuse to look and to tell God what we need without considering what he has, in his grace and wisdom, given us." This is excellent advice. But none of the four professors follow it. As is the case with Barth also, their theory of the Bible is not what the Bible says about itself. It is something they have imposed on the Bible from without. The quotation just made says that we should frame our view of the Bible, its inspiration, its authority, from what the Bible Itself says. What then does it say?

The Bible says that all Scripture, that is, all the words that were written down in the Old Testament (at least) is breathed out by God. Holy men spoke; they spoke words, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The Old Testament has many instances of the phrase "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Many other times we read, "The" word of God came unto ... " Deut. 18: 18 says, "I will put my words in his mouth. And the same phrase recurs in Jeremiah 1:9. Everywhere the Bible speaks of itself, it teaches verbal inspiration. The words are the words of God. It is nowhere said that the words contain geographical discrepancies and theological errors. No examination of the text itself can produce evidence that the words are not inspired. If we take our belief about the Bible from what the Bible says about itself, we must conclude that the words are the words of God who cannot lie. Verbal inspiration is an unpopular doctrine in many seminaries today. Of the many distasteful things that the Bible says, its teaching of verbal inspiration is perhaps the most distasteful of all.

Ingenious attempts are made to avoid it, deny it, or replace it with something else. It is castigated as mechanical - though how God's speaking can rightly be called mechanical is hard to see. It is called static and presumably static is a noise that obscures the message. Instead of static and verbal inspiration, a theory of dynamic inspiration is proposed. The only trouble is that it is not a theory. It is simply a word that carries an appealing connotation so that the unwary reader may be deceived into thinking poorly of verbal inspiration without having any definite view to replace it. In brief, the neo-orthodox views on inspiration are unbiblical. They are not arrived at by listening to what the Bible says, but by imposing on the Bible preconceived notions of what revelation must be.

In particular the neo-orthodox views of the Bible are a denial and contradiction of the teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Did Christ ever admit errors, geographical or otherwise, in the New Testament? Did he ever make complicated attempts to harmonize the Divine Infallibility of the Bible with its human fallibility? Did he ever teach that God can reveal himself in false statements as well as in true statements, as Brunner does? What was Christ's view of the Bible?

Christ's view of the Bible can very quickly be indicated. Christ said: It is written. If ye believe not Moses' *writings*, how shall ye believe my *words*? For the Scripture cannot be broken. Do we need an infallible Bible? We need an infallible Bible, unless we are willing to contradict the teachings of Christ. We need verbal inspiration, if we are to believe the call to repentance and the doctrine of Justification. We need inerrancy if we are to have any confident knowledge of God. For, if the Bible is mistaken in its doctrine of inspiration, why should we think it correct in its doctrine of God, repentance, or anything else? Our only alternatives would be to believe nothing of what the Bible says, or as most liberals and neo-orthodox thinkers do, to adopt some principle by which we determine what in the Bible we choose to believe and what we prefer to reject. In either case, we must admit that the Bible itself is no *authority* for us. We do not believe a doctrine because the Bible teaches that doctrine but because on some other ground, rational, mystical, or otherwise, we acknowledge its truth.

Our Lord held to a very different view of the Bible. He commanded his disciples to believe all of it. (Luke 24:25). And if Christ does not tell us the truth when he says that the Scripture cannot be broken and that the words of Moses are as true as his own, why should we believe him when he says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor?" By all means we should take our view of the Scripture from our Lord Christ and from the authority of the Scripture itself. And this is what the liberal critics refuse to do, even while saying that it should be done.

Butler University
Indianapolis, Indiana

Concerning System and Demonstration

By GORDON H. CLARK

[Dr. Clark very kindly gives us here a clarification of his use of the word “system”, and further comment on so called “isolated facts”, “neutral facts”, and geometrical “demonstration.” Editorial comment follows his article; see page 114 and following.—Ed.]

Since the philosophic problems of evidence are of such great importance for the effective presentation of the gospel, I greatly appreciate the generous invitation of Dr. Buswell’s *Editorial Note* (December 1947) to discuss briefly the notions of “system” and “demonstration.” As an introduction to this matter, I should like first to repeat something from my *Comments* and place it beside a part of Dr. Buswell’s *Editorial Note*.

In the *Comments* I pointed out that the book, *A Christian Philosophy of Education*, denied a common ground between Christian and non-Christian systems, but it did not deny a common ground between regenerate and unregenerate individuals. Dr. Buswell, quoting the paragraph in his *Editorial Note*, prefaces the quotation with the statement, “he has made important concessions to the point of my argument.” And he also speaks of “The distinction which Dr. Clark’s reply *now* makes between a non-Christian system and non-Christian people . . .” This distinction, Dr. Buswell continues, “seems to me to involve and lead up to a complete surrender of his position.”

To this I wish to repeat that the distinction was not made just “now” in the *Comments*. It is not at all a “concession” to Dr. Buswell’s review, but on the contrary it is found explicitly in the book itself. Nor is the idea of a system confined to the one paragraph Dr. Buswell quotes. The first chapter of the book virtually defines educational endeavor as the striving toward a system; the argument of the second chapter, involving the criticism of the traditional proofs of God’s existence, depends on the notion of system (cf. pp. 48, 49 and *passim*); the several chapters against neutrality have the same basis; and in short the notion of system rather permeates the book. I am therefore forced to conclude that Dr. Buswell has viewed as a “concession” what in reality is his own better understanding of what I explicitly said.

In order further to elucidate, I must ask agreement to the proposition that all men are more or less inconsistent. The fact that you and I are born again Christians does not mean that everything we think is Christian truth. This should be obvious because we sometimes contradict each other. If you are right, I am wrong; and in this case what I believe is not a part of the Christian system. Hence clarity requires a sharp distinction between what a given person thinks and what the system really is.[*] If there were no such distinction, the beliefs of anyone who called himself a Christian could be taken for Christianity. Indeed, this is the point of view that Modernism with its anti-intellectualism actually adopts. To define Christianity the modernist does not determine the exact meaning of what the Bible says; he simply notes what ideas happen to be popular in his ecclesiastical fraternity. Accordingly the point must be emphasized that a Christian, even a true Christian, and Christianity are two different things. The Christian is inconsistent. Christianity is the whole consistent truth. Similarly an atheist and atheism are two different things. Atheism, a system, is as consistent as any false system can be. But an individual atheist not only may, but does believe propositions inconsistent with his professed atheism.

[*] Dr. Buswell doubts that the word is ever so used; but cf. Brand Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought*, Vol. I, p. 78.

The atheistic system, and the professed atheist too, conceives the world as a non-created, self-existent entity. “A world naturalistically conceived” is precisely the system of atheism. A world naturalistically conceived is a world whose trees and whose stars have not been created by God. And I maintain that from such a world it is impossible to prove the existence of God or to derive any part of Christianity. If anyone doubts the truth of

my position on this matter, he may convince himself by attempting to produce an argument that begins with a world naturalistically conceived and concludes with the existence of the triune God. The attempt would result in some such argument as this: animals and men, plants and planets are the evolutionary results of a purely natural process; nothing has been created and supernatural intervention is inconceivable; *therefore*, God exists. The argument is obviously absurd. From such an atheistic or naturalistic world, no Christian truth can be deduced. There is no proposition common to the two systems. There is no logical passage from one to the other. And until someone improves on this absurd argument, I shall have to maintain my original opinions.

Dr. Buswell apparently thinks that the word *system* cannot be properly used in the above sense; he even asserts that I have not so used it; and he seems to say that the word *system* must mean “a more or less consistent or inconsistent complex of thought.” If this were so, modernists in Presbyterian pulpits could more easily salve their consciences. At their ordination they were asked: “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church as containing the *system* of doctrine taught **in** the Holy Scriptures?” And the modernists could answer, “Yes, I receive the Confession as the more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts taught in the Bible.” I do not believe that the ordination vow was originally so intended.

One purpose in emphasizing system is to exclude the notion of neutral facts. In one or two passages I used the expression “isolated facts.” This seems to have conveyed the idea that there are people who believe that no fact has any relation whatsoever to any other fact. Such an idea is so extreme that it is not wonder Dr. Buswell objected to it, even though the context and the argument had nothing to do with such a view. However, William James and Bertrand Russell seem to assert that some groups of events, interrelated among themselves, are totally unrelated to other groups of events. Russell was cited on p. 37 of *A Christian Philosophy of Education*. Similarly *A Pluralistic Universe* (pp. 321-322) by James excludes system and with system excludes Christianity in the words: “nothing . . . dominates over everything . . . However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective center of consciousness or action something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity.”

As a description of human efforts to grasp the system of truth, James’ statement is undoubtedly accurate. Our greatest success leaves us with many gaps, spots, and jumps, or, as Dr. Buswell might say, with a more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts. But William James **meant** more than this. If the words are read again and carefully, it will be seen that James intended to rule out the notion of an almighty and omniscient God. Conversely, the Christian doctrine of omniscience requires the notion of system and prevents us from viewing the world as composed of isolated groups of facts.

Nor can Christianity allow the existence of neutral facts, *i.e.* facts whose meanings can be determined without theological presuppositions. Dr. Buswell in his *Editorial Note* says that he thinks nobody believes in neutral facts. I think that many people do; was this not the usual “scientific” attitude, at least until quite recently? Sir Isaac Newton’s famous claim that he did not invent hypotheses was characteristic of nineteenth century physics. It was argued that the facts themselves, apart from the scientists’ wishes, choices, or manipulations, irresistibly forced certain conclusions. The facts themselves were there with all their meaning, and should be accepted in their own right without presuppositions, bias, or prejudice. This is a refrain that is very familiar to me. And while Dr. Buswell was writing his *Editorial Note*, I was reading a current book review to the effect that a certain history of the faith is “unembellished with miracles and, generally, free from dogmatic predilections.” It seems to me worth while to point out that such claims are false. A predilection against miracles is as dogmatic as a predilection in favor of miracles. When unbelievers object to Christianity on the basis that it views the world on the basis of undemonstrated hypotheses, the reply should plainly be made that everyone more or less consciously bases his conclusions on undemonstrated assumptions. There are no facts, no meaningful facts, apart from presuppositions. And hence I stated that unless we begin by assuming the Triune God, we shall never get to God at all.

Perhaps Dr. Buswell's illustrations of red lights and green glasses can serve a purpose, though usually illustrations do not illustrate. But let us say that the Christian looks out of his eyes through theistic glasses; that is, the Christian thinks of the world by means of theistic presuppositions. Therefore he thinks that the plants and planets have been created. The atheist uses naturalistic glasses or presuppositions and thinks the world uncreated. Both Christian and atheist use and must use glasses. And regeneration is the only way by which the atheist can get a new pair.

Consequently, the Christian viewpoint is the result neither of isolated nor of neutral facts. It is not the result of induction at all. The knowledge of God must precede a Christian view of the world. If we know God to begin with, we can see that the world is created. But if we have something other than God as our presupposition, we see other things. And if we have no presuppositions, we simply do not see. Dr. Buswell wrote, "we take the facts not as neutral, but as they are seen; we then show that the facts truly lead toward the Christian position." It seems nearer the truth to say: we take the facts as they are seen—through theistic presuppositions—and then we show that the facts follow from (rather than lead toward) the Christian position.

In addition to the theories of James and Russell and in addition to the so-called scientific attitude, there is opposition to the Christian system from another angle. This has to do with demonstration.

In his [Editorial Note](#) Dr. Buswell said, "Dr. Clark persists in challenging the traditional evidences for the Christian view of God on the ground that they do not give *geometrical* demonstration." This sentence is inaccurate. Nowhere in *A Christian Philosophy of Education* did I disparage Christian *evidences*. Chapter two attempted to forewarn some over enthusiastic Christians against pressing evidences too far and falling into a trap. If anything, my view shows how evidences are possible. They are not possible when viewed as furnishing strict demonstration. Dr. Buswell continues, "But he does not answer the fact that geometry never can demonstrate the existence of anything." Of course geometry cannot demonstrate the existence of anything physical. It does demonstrate in its construction theorems the existence of certain figures. And these, I should hold, are just as "real" as any physical object. But all this is beside the point. My purpose in referring to geometry was not to discuss the reality of ideal figures, but to indicate examples of rigorous logical proof. The theorems of geometry are *demonstrated*. There is no fallacy in the argument. Given the premises there is not any theoretical possibility that the conclusion might not follow. Dr. Buswell also writes, "I deny that the traditional proofs for the existence of God 'were supposed to start from neutral facts . . .'. . . . No competent theologian claims that any inductive argument, or any argument for any existing thing affords a 'demonstration' in this impossible sense." But I believe that Dr. Buswell is mistaken on this point. I apprehend that this is exactly the Thomist or Roman Catholic position. The Roman Catholic theologians claim that it is possible to begin with the fact of motion and, without any theological assumptions, prove by strict logic that God exists. Their whole system proceeds on the assumption that all knowledge is based on sensation, that the mind has no form of its own, and is actually nothing before it thinks. Then by a process of abstraction from sensory material, theological conclusions can be obtained with syllogistic certainty. But the closer I examine the Thomistic arguments for the existence of God, the more I am convinced that the syllogisms are invalid. The more too I am convinced that the sensory epistemology underlying them is false. And the more I prefer to stress presupposition and innate knowledge rather than induction and "unprejudiced," neutral experience.

[These are some of the considerations that have led me to reject the theistic proofs and accept the words of Calvin: "We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity" (I iii 1). "All have by nature an innate persuasion of the Divine existence. . . . This is a doctrine, not first to be learned in the schools, but which every man from his birth is self-taught" (I iii 3). "An idea of God is naturally engraved on the hearts of men" (I iv 4).]

[Continuing our series on the 1947-1948 exchange between J. Oliver Buswell and Gordon H. Clark, the following is Clark's initial reply to Buswell's review of Clark's book, *A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION*. And as with the series of exchanges between [Buswell and Van Til](#), this series too provides a lesson in the exercise of Christian polemics.]

Dr. Clark Comments

By PROFESSOR GORDON H. CLARK, Ph.D.

DR. BUSWELL, whose zeal for the cause of Christ I admire and whose friendship I value, has generously offered me the opportunity to comment on his review^[1] of my book, *A Christian Philosophy of Education*. The points raised in the review are so numerous that it would require more than a volume to deal with them all. I must therefore refrain from analyzing Dr. Buswell's various arguments against my position, and direct attention to one point, a very important point, where Dr. Buswell has misapprehended my meaning.

On page four Dr. Buswell says, "He denies that we have any common ground, in facts and rationality, with unbelievers." This does not happen to be the case.

It may be that some contemporary Calvinists, in their efforts to state the Biblical position and to defend it against humanism, have denied "any common ground, in facts and rationality, with unbelievers." To me, however, this denial seems unscriptural and therefore untrue. All men are made in the image of God, even though the image is marred by sin; and all men are inhabitants of one and the same universe. These are two "grounds" in common.

The quotation from *A Christian Philosophy of Education*, p. 164, which Dr. Buswell uses in this connection, does not deny such common ground. If it is read in its context, one will see that it says "There is no such thing as a common ground between *Christianity* and a *non-Christian system*. From a world naturalistically conceived, one cannot argue to the God of Christianity."

In this philosophical discussion it has seemed important to me to distinguish between a system of thought and an actual person. Since everyone is fallible, since some people hold more erroneous views than others, it is clear that a given Christian does not have all the truth or all the system. Some of the system he must believe in order personally to be a Christian; some of the system he may not know at all; and some parts of the system he may consciously reject. For example, Calvinists and Arminians accuse each other of rejecting parts of Biblical teaching. Therefore what is true of an inconsistent person is not necessarily true of a consistent system. And I have maintained that there is a common ground among persons, but not among systems.

Dr. Buswell is not the only person who has failed to see this distinction. Probably the fault lies in my manner of expression. Doubtless the immediate interest in Christian schools led to a too concise and therefore obscure formulation of more basic and more general philosophic principles. But that the distinction is important may be shown by noting, in one or two cases, the effect of this misapprehension on other parts of Dr. Buswell's review.

On page five Dr. Buswell quotes the argument that the resurrection viewed as an isolated historical event does not prove that Christ died for our sin. This should be obvious, for other people have been raised from the dead, and yet they had not died for our sin. Clearly therefore a resurrection does not prove an atonement. Then says Dr. Buswell,

"But I insist that the phrase, 'viewed purely as an isolated historical event' is an unreasonable qualification, contrary to all the presuppositions in traditional presentation of Christian evidences. Dr. Clark does not believe that any historical event is 'isolated' and *neither do the atheistic naturalists.*"

Dr. Buswell is entirely correct when he says that I do not believe that historical events are isolated. I believe that the meaning of the proposition “Christ rose from the dead” depends on its inclusion in God’s system of truth. The meaning of “Christ died for sin” similarly depends on the same system. And in that system the two propositions are related to each other.

But I am not so sure that *all* the atheistic naturalists deny the existence of isolated events. At least some opponents of Christianity argue that if we examine the *facts*, the facts of physics or the facts of history, without prejudice or presupposition, the *facts* themselves will disprove Christianity. It is these people whom I am parodying on page thirty-five. My aim is to show that there must always be presuppositions, and when the naturalist appeals to *facts* he is deceiving himself if he thinks his interpretation is without presuppositions. Even if he as a person fails to recognize them, the system he advocates is based on them.

Similarly the Christian does not really appeal to bare facts. He offers an interpretation of facts which presupposes God.

And this too is one reason why I reject the traditional theistic proofs. Those proofs were supposed to start from “neutral” facts and arrive, by logical demonstration, at the existence, not merely of some God, but the triune God. To my way of thinking, this simply cannot be done. Arguments based on neutral facts can never conclude with a Creator. And if one does not begin with neutral or isolated facts, he must begin either with facts atheistically interpreted or with facts theistically interpreted. The former facts would disprove God; and the latter facts, far from *demonstrating* God’s existence, presuppose it.

Of course the heavens declare the glory of God. They declare God’s glory to man who is already created in God’s image. Such verses in the Bible do not show that the cosmological argument is valid. They mean rather that man who is born with a knowledge of God may recognize God in God’s works. A being not made in God’s image, a being with no innate sense of Deity, could never recognize the marks of Deity in the heavens. Thus the heavens, and history too, give *evidence* for God and for Christianity, but they do not give (geometrical) demonstration.

Similarly, unless man was made in God’s image, unless the law of God was written on man’s heart, man could perceive no difference between right and wrong. Because God’s law is written on the hearts of the heathen (and this is a common ground), they are without excuse. This law is something deeper and more fundamental than any conclusion asserted to be the result of experience. It is innate—an original gift of God in creation. Thus it will be seen that Dr. Buswell on page 10 of his review has misapprehended my argument on page 107. On that page I was chiefly concerned to contrast a grade school text-book which explains the Psalms as the experience and reflection of nomadic shepherds, with the Bible which explains them as an authoritative revelation. David did not just reflect on the stars and his sheep. God spoke! Further, without a revelation from God, no one could know what God requires. Hence I connected (not obedience, but) the knowledge of God’s requirements with *revelation*. I did not connect this knowledge only with *the Scriptures*, for although all Scripture is revelation, not all revelation is Scripture. For this reason I did not do what Dr. Buswell says I did, *viz.*: “Dr. Clark teaches (p. 107) that the idea of obedience to God without special reference to the Scripture is contrary to Christian doctrine. Paul, however, teaches in the second chapter of Romans that there may be a time of true obedience to the Lord prior to a competent understanding of the rightful place of God’s revealed Word.” A rereading of page 107 will now show that I did not connect the knowledge of God’s requirements with the Scriptures only; and much less did I connect it with the irrelevant notion of “a competent understanding of the rightful place of God’s revealed Word.”

For these and similar reasons it seems important to me to make the distinction between a person and a system. What is true of the one need not be true of the other. At any rate I believe that there is a common ground in innate knowledge between the believer and the unbeliever, but that there is no common ground

between the system of theism and the system of atheism. And, finally, I wish publicly to express my appreciation of Dr. Buswell's kindness in asking me to reply to his review.

System and Induction

By GORDON H. CLARK

[This is the third in a series of short articles by Dr. Clark. The others, accompanied by argumentative editorial comments of my own, are found in the December 1947 and January 1948, issues of *The Bible Today*. The series was started off by my review of his recent book, *A Christian Philosophy of Education*, in *The Bible Today* for October, 1947.]

I must confess that, as I see it, Dr. Clark fails in the present article to meet the issues. Rather than repeating, I suggest that the reader who wishes answers to what Dr. Clark says and to the questions he asks here, will find the answers in my editorials in the December and January issues. My arguments have not been answered.

(While searching, the reader might look for the alleged place where I have “admitted that the cosmological argument is a formal logical fallacy.” I haven’t found that place!) For the present then, I shall let Dr. Clark have the last word. I think you are making a great mistake, good brother. — Ed.

A sound rule of Biblical exegesis is that the meaning of a crucial word should be determined by the context, the author’s usage, and his intent. For example, the meaning of the words *faith, flesh, redeem, sin, life, death*, are neither necessarily nor usually just the same in the New Testament as they are in pagan writers. To assume that the meanings are the same would reduce parts of the New Testament to absurdity. Similarly it is a sound rule for criticizing contemporary books to determine the meaning of the author. If one of his words interpreted in one way makes nonsense of some of his paragraphs, it would be wiser to seek another meaning than to jump to the conclusion that the author makes no sense. Furthermore, an author may use the same word in several senses. A critic cannot legitimately require a writer to confine himself to just one strict meaning.

It seems to me that Dr. Buswell in his book review of *A Christian Philosophy of Education* and in his two Editorial Comments violates this principle of interpretation. He seems to insist, even in his January Editorial Comment, that *system* can mean only “a more or less consistent or inconsistent complex of thoughts.”

I defended the legitimacy of my usage of the word *system* by two citations. The first was from Brand Blanshard: *The Nature of Thought*. Dr. Buswell, it seems to me, confuses the issue by first objecting to elements of Professor Blanshard’s philosophy. I too am in fundamental disagreement with that philosophy; but the point at issue was not certain phases of rationalistic idealism, but whether the word *system* can be used in the sense of a perfectly consistent series of propositions. Having thus confused the issue, Dr. Buswell continues by arguing that Professor Blanshard did not so use the word *system*. His reason is that Professor Blanshard uses the word *system* in the other sense also. If by “fragmentary systems, whose parts are connected by the most diverse relations” Professor Blanshard indeed means “more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts,” still it does not follow that he has not also used the word in the sense of a perfectly consistent series of truths. An author cannot legitimately be required to use a word in only one sense.

Webster’s Dictionary also, to which Dr. Buswell appeals, allows of several meanings. There is nothing in Webster that requires Dr. Buswell’s preferred meaning. In fact neither Webster nor Funk and Wagnalls even mention Dr. Buswell’s *inconsistent* complex.

The second citation I made to defend my usage of the word *system* came from the Presbyterian ordination vows. One of these vows contains the phrase “the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” It seems obvious to me that this does not mean ‘the more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts taught in the Holy Scriptures.’ But Dr. Buswell in his January Editorial Comment says I am in error: “Dr. Clark’s error in citing Presbyterian usage is in his failing to mention that *before* the statement accepting the Westminster standards ‘as

containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures' every Presbyterian minister was required to declare that he believed the Scriptures to be the Word of God.'" I fail to see the error. I think rather I have justified my usage against Dr. Buswell's criticism.

But perhaps Dr. Buswell has granted me reluctant permission to use the word *system* as I have done. His next criticism is that by such a usage "Dr. Clark has removed the 'system' of unbelief so far into the abstract that it cannot interfere with evangelism." Would it were so easy to remove interferences with evangelism! But instead of being removed into some far off sphere of abstract irrelevance, it seems to me that this notion of system lays the basis for evangelism and that, other things being equal, a Christian who is conscious of system will be a more effective evangelist than one who is not. To justify the relevance of system to evangelistic effort, it is necessary to speak first of the system of truth and second of the system of unbelief.

The basis of the notion of system and its importance for the Gospel is seen most directly in the doctrine of God's omniscience. When a certain fundamentalist minister writes that there are some things God does not know, he is not preaching the Gospel. But when the Bible ascribes wisdom to God.

when John identifies Christ as the Logos, when it is revealed that God sees the end from the beginning and works all things after the counsel of his will, more is meant than that God knows a collection of items. It seems to me that the implication is that God's mind is a system. Dr. Buswell says "The truth is a perfectly consistent system in the sense that it contains no logical contradictories, not in the sense that every element is implied by the system" (January, Editorial Note). Now, it seems to me that Dr. Buswell's remark is decidedly inadequate. For example, a series of statements such as, two and two are four, Columbus discovered America, David was King of Israel, the Hudson River is in New York, is perfectly consistent in the sense that the series contains no logical contradictories; but such a haphazard collection I should not care to call a system. God's mind is not a haphazard collection. While Dr. Buswell objects to the idea that every truth in God's mind *implies* or is *implied by* every other truth, yet this surely is nearer the truth than Dr. Buswell's (possibly haphazard) collection of non-contradictory items. Everything in the Bible seems to me to imply that God's mind is an orderly, completely integrated system. The integration may depend on teleological relationships rather than on formal deduction, and in this sense the word *implies* may convey a wrong meaning; but in popular terms every item of God's knowledge must surely *fit in with* every other item.

This also seems to me to solve the philosophic problem of truth. The three chief contenders in this field are the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, and the pragmatic theory. For reasons too numerous to include here, I believe pragmatism leads to complete skepticism. The correspondence theory would require us to compare an idea we have in consciousness with some utterly unknown object. This is impossible. The coherence theory remains.

It cannot be charged with skepticism. If it is objected that it requires an impossibility, *viz.* that a man be omniscient, the reply is that its Hegelian form may involve such an impossibility; but this impossibility does not occur in the Christian system where an omniscient God makes a definite revelation to man. Hence, it is not necessary for a man to know everything before he knows anything. The subjective knowledge of any man depends not on his own complex of thoughts but on God's system and on the fact of revelation. And contrary to what seems to be Dr. Buswell's opinion, this is not at all inconsistent with God's sovereign grace.

With many things omitted, it is now necessary to rush on to discuss the system of unbelief and determine whether or not it has been removed into some far off sphere of irrelevance.

The book from which this discussion took its departure had to do with the establishment of Christian schools. It was not a general introduction to philosophy. I did not think it necessary or expedient to treat of other problems in any extended way. Therefore I did not discuss the notion of system. It has now been seen

that Professor Blanshard uses the word in two senses; I used it in a sense different from Dr. Buswell's; and the dictionaries list six or eight meanings. I have also argued above that it is legitimate for an author to use a word in more than one sense. The Old Testament uses the word *flesh* in at least four different meanings.

Now, in *A Christian Philosophy of Education* one sentence to which Dr. Buswell objected was, "there is no common ground between Christianity and a non-Christian system." Christianity, I have tried to say, is not only *a* but *the* perfectly consistent, integrated system of truth. A non-Christian "system" is something a little different, for fortunately for me, if not for my readers, English is somewhat elastic. By a non-Christian system, however, I do not mean the actual, subjective, more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts of any one man. In an evangelistic apologetic effort one may show an unbeliever that his naturalistic opinions contradict some other opinion he also holds — an opinion consistent with or favorable toward Christianity. And it is true that the Holy Ghost may use this revelation of his inconsistency in, regenerating him and convicting him of sin. But on the other hand the unbeliever may reply; "I see that I unfortunately have not yet sloughed off all my childish supernaturalistic superstitions; thank you for showing me this; I now reject this Christian opinion and will henceforth conform more closely to my naturalistic system." It is *his system*, not because he has it all consciously, but because he is progressing toward it. Similarly in Christian circles we may say that Calvin's system was not the man Calvin's more or less inconsistent complex of thoughts, but God's perfect system to which he so closely approximated. The difference between the two systems lies in this — at least it seems so to me: the Christian system is truth and the only basis of truth; the non-Christian system when exhaustively analyzed reduces to skepticism. Hence, the evangelistic-apologetic approach (with people whose minds think along these lines) should be to show that naturalism consistently worked out leads to skepticism and makes life meaningless. Accordingly this notion of system and the denial of common ground between systems is not irrelevant to evangelism but a very important consideration. But though more important than Dr. Buswell was willing to admit, I have no notion that argument, discussion, or even preaching the Gospel will regenerate an unbeliever. A change of heart, *a change of mind* (repentance), is the work of the Holy Ghost.

Perhaps now it begins to become clear that induction, to which Dr. Buswell attaches so much importance, seems of much less importance to me. He says and I agree with him that "I do not believe any one ever approaches any facts in complete neutrality." How then can he say only a few lines below in the January Editorial Note, "I, for one, testify that I sometimes see facts which could in no reasonable way be ascribed to my presuppositions." Our presuppositions are like the red cellophane or colored glasses to which Dr. Buswell previously referred: we see everything through them. The difficulty with the illustration is that while we may remove our glasses and still see, we cannot remove our minds and still think. It is an erroneous opinion that scientists simply observe facts and discover a law by induction. On the contrary, no laws of physics are *discovered*: they are *chosen*. Scientific data never force the choice of one law. With the most delicate measurements possible, there is still a wide range, an infinitely wide range of choice. And the scientist's choice depends on his presuppositions. With exactly the same observed data, either of two mutually contradictory laws may legitimately be chosen: or, better, with nothing but observed data, there is no ground for any choice. Laws are not obtained by induction-without-presuppositions. It is for this reason that a pre-Newtonian theory of refraction, repudiated through the nineteenth century, has again been accepted.

Hence, so far as I understand them, I accept Dr. Buswell's words, "He seems to say in effect that there are no facts which speak except in and through presuppositions. These presuppositions seem to be innate ideas." Just what this has to do with Leibnizian monads and other parts of Leibniz' system, I don't know. Neither do I know how Dr. Buswell proposes to use Romans 1:20 against me. Since Dr. Buswell himself has admitted that the cosmological argument is a formal logical fallacy^[1] he can no more than I interpret this verse to mean that the cosmological argument is valid. The Roman Catholics so interpret it because they adopt Aristotle's or Thomas' proof of the existence of God. But with my view of system, demonstration, presupposition, and induction, I am free to interpret Romans 1:20 as referring to evidence and not to the cosmological argument taken as formally valid. The views I have defended seem to me to furnish a sound

basis for a refutation of the Roman Catholic Philosophy and, although Dr. Buswell implies that I have misread Calvin, these views also follow in the general Augustinian and Calvinistic tradition.

If Dr. Buswell continues to object, may I ask one question in three ways? Does Dr. Buswell reject Thomistic epistemology, and if so, on what basis? Does Dr. Buswell hold that all knowledge is based on sensation, and if not, what is his epistemology? Does Dr. Buswell believe that man is made in God's image, and that, as Calvin says, "All have by nature an *innate* persuasion of the Divine existence . . . This is a doctrine, not first to be learned in the schools, but which every man from his birth is self-taught . . . An idea of God is naturally engraved on the hearts of men" (I.iii.3; iv.4).

The Philosophical Basis of Christianity

By Rev. David S. Clark, D.D.
[*The Presbyterian*, 94.50 (11 December 1924): 6-7.]

MUCH has been said and written about the philosophical basis of Christianity. It is doubtful if such terms should be used in accurate speech. It is chiefly when Christianity is conceived as a purely subjective phenomenon, or where the subjective elements prevail, that the term finds largest use.

There is indeed a philosophical basis for many men's *conceptions* or *representations of Christianity*. Christianity has often been tinged and warped by philosophical approach. From the Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism of the early centuries to the present-day evolutionary approach, Christianity has suffered from philosophical viewpoints. But the objective facts of Christianity are to be considered historically rather than philosophically. The factual basis of Christianity, to use Professor Machen's terms, is not to be evaporated in the cauldron of philosophical ebullition. It is true that men often minimize or distort the facts by reason of philosophical preconceptions, and thus produce a mongrel Christianity; but the facts of Christianity constitute the true basis rather than the philosophical accretions or interpretations.

It may be said that, in looking at and evaluating the facts of Christianity, we only substitute one philosophy for another with which we disagree. It is perhaps inevitable that a man will be influenced by whatever philosophy he holds, even in so important a matter as his estimate of Christianity and his presentation of the same. Still it is true, aside from every philosophical bias, that the true basis lies in the facts, and we may say, the historical facts; because Christianity is a historical religion.

This philosophical bias is what is meant by the term "approach," so glibly used to-day. We are told that the "approach" to the Scriptures and the "approach" to Christianity is entirely different in these modern days, giving us an entirely new view, and requiring a new statement of Christian doctrine, and a reconstruction of religion. These terms are familiar enough and are sure symptoms of an infectious modernism.

Many have been the attempts to re-state Christianity in the terms of philosophical postulates. Schleiermacher's approach to the Scriptures and to Christianity was from the standpoint of Pantheism. Hence he left the doctrine of a personal God as an open question; repudiated the Old Testament, and dealt in a perfectly arbitrary way with the New Testament. Religious authority was entirely subjective; the effect of the atonement was a moral influence; Christ bore the sins of men only in his fellow feeling and sympathy for them in their struggles and suffering on account of sin. This sympathy draws us into fellowship with Christ to our greater good and blessedness—thus Christ becomes a Saviour and substitute. Christ was divine only in a purely pantheistic sense, being the man who most of all realized his oneness with the Eternal, or possessed, what was called a God-consciousness. Thus philosophy was the basis of Schleiermacher's *perversion* of Christianity.

Kant's transcendentalism gave new impetus to idealistic speculation, and resulted in the philosophies of the Absolute. On the basis of Kant's metaphysical aberrations, his pupil Fichte declared that "the moral order of the universe is God and that there is no other God." Schelling went a step farther and combined the subject and object in the process of thought, and obliterated the distinction between God and man. That philosophy has impinged on man's *conception* of Christianity the history of the world bears only too sad evidence. We are glad to have been brought up under the healthy Realism of Dr. James McCosh, far from the mists and mysteries and mud of such philosophies. The world by wisdom knew not God; but the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

At the present time, the world is under the spell of an evolutionary philosophy. That which at first seemed but a mere fragment of science, has, since the days of Herbert Spencer, turned out to be a full-fledged

philosophy. Spencer has sought to account for all things in the heavens above and in the earth beneath on the principle of evolution. In doing so, he has pushed God so far away, so far into the somewhere, into the something, into the Unknown and Unknowable that the common man cannot find him. Well may the unsophisticated dweller among realities lament: They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. Of what value to the common man is a God whose chief, if not only, attribute is his unknowableness ?

The evolutionary philosophy has given us a mechanistic universe, a sensuous and impressionist metaphysic, a materialistic consciousness, and has reduced psychology to physiology. It has not only obscured the reality of God, but the reality of the soul. But no man can explain mind in terms of matter without first assuming the existence of the mind which the matter is supposed to explain. Metaphysics are not transmuted into physics by being stated in material terms. To reduce psychology to physiology is to hark back to the philosophy of David Hume and John Stuart Mill, with all their skepticism. Mill defined matter as “a permanent possibility of sensation”; and mind as “a permanent possibility of feeling.” Sane thinking must raise the inquiry how such a permanent possibility can exist without a permanent something in which the potentiality inheres.

That the life of this globe was created by an infinite Will is too miraculous for the materialistic evolutionist ; but to assume that this life sprang from dead matter is to endow that same dead matter with miraculous potency to the very highest degree. Consistency, thou art a jewel. The more evolution stresses the omnipotence of the process, the more certain it is that some Omnipotence stands back of and antedates the process. And it is a fact in present-day scientific circles that the more heredity and natural selection are studied, the less adequate they prove themselves to be. Evolution as a philosophy or as a working hypothesis does not fill the bill on scientific grounds alone.

But the Christian system has a philosophy, and the only philosophy which satisfies both the common man and the highest intellectualism. He who gets his philosophy from the Scriptures gets it from God. It is a philosophy which involves the reality of both the infinite and the finite. God is not the Unknown and Unknowable, but the First Cause and Father of us all. Man is not a string of physical sensations, but an immortal soul. And the universe is not a mere mechanism that started without a starter, and ends, if ever, without an *end*—without First Cause or final cause or *raison d'être*.

Better than a philosophic basis of Christianity is a Christian basis of philosophy.

Modernism and the Higher Criticism

by Rev. David S. Clark, D.D.

[*The Presbyterian* 95.1 (1 January 1925): 8-9.]

Modernism is one of the “assured results” of the higher criticism. The fruit is characteristic of the root. The higher criticism is based on a method so erroneous that error was certain to appear as the result. Any one who has given attention to the higher criticism will readily perceive that it is largely based on a philological method. Philology has its value, and may be legitimately applied in its proper sphere ; but to make it the sole criterion of historical data, or the determining factor of such data, is unworthy of a serious investigator. The higher critic is essentially a word-monger, and his method enables him to prove, to his own satisfaction, what is not true by any other method of determination, and to deny what all other methods assert. Hence it is the fact that historians and archaeologists generally reject the findings of the critic.

Without denying the value of philology (and it has its value, and some historical value, too), it is still true that the philological method of the higher critic is a false procedure in historical investigation. By this method the higher critics have resolved Abraham, Moses, David, Samson and others into astral myths.

Canon T.K. Cheyne declared that the existence of such a personage as Moses was unproved and improbable. There are some of us uncharitable enough to think that if Professor Cheyne had been consigned to an asylum at the age of forty, it would have saved this world a lot of bother. By the very same methods employed by the criticsw some obliging individuals have *demonstrated* as “assured results” that Napoleon, Gladstone, and Chamberlain were similar myths ; and the same accommodation might be readily extended to Prof. S.R. Driver.

Now, it is needless to say to intelligent readers that there have been honest critics. No doubt there has been a rationalistic bias in much of the critical work that has vitiated the results, but some at least must have the credit of honest purpose. The assiduity, the erudition, the indefatigable toil displayed in the analysis of the Scripture text are not only prodigious, but the amazement of contemplating minds. But the fault was in the method. No amount of toil can make a wrong method produced “assured results.” To re-construct centuries of history in a remote past by a study of words is impossible, notwithstanding a contributory value in philological studies. What value would attach to a history of the discovery and settlement of America based on philological grounds? Documents and even traditions furnish more reliable information.

To assign a large part of the Pentateuch to post-exilic times, as the critics do, is an anachronism from the standpoint of historical criteria, whatever it may be from a philological standpoint. The historian takes account of records, traditions, institutions, laws, national and private life, influence transmitted to succeeding ages and a hundred other things that validate a true history. Can we conceive of a Hebrew people in Palestine without an Abraham? Can we account for the laws, usages, worship, beliefs, and customs of the Israelites without a Moses? Then may we account for Christianity and deny that there ever was a Jesus Christ? Then may we account for the Lord's Supper, celebrated throughout the ages, and deny that any historical event lies at the basis of it? From such examples we may see that many things validate a history besides linguistic research ; and that the real historian draws from a varied field.

The higher criticism of the classics produced the same results as have been so confidently asserted of the Pentateuch. But there is no one so poor to-day as to do reverence to the abject failure of the criticism of the classics. With the utmost prodigality of good ink, the critics dissected and analyzed and re-distributed and re-combined till, as one has facetiously remarked, they “refined grand old Homer into Homer Ltd. But at present Homer Ltd. is bankrupt, and Homer is still Homer.” Regard to sane historical methods might have saved much midnight oil.

If now some archaeologist's spade should bring to light some tablets or cylinders of the Pentateuch dating from the days of David or Samuel, the whole higher critical fabrication would go up in smoke. A record on clay or rock, coming down from primitive times, or a manuscript having clear evidence of lineal descent from antiquity, or even a well-traced tradition going back to, or near to, the events in question, is of more historical value than all the speculations that spring so sporadically from a German critic's brain. The higher criticism of the classics is indeed beyond resurrection, and the higher criticism of the Pentateuch only awaits a suitable day for burial. The one is as hopelessly inane as the other.

Even on the ground of philological investigation, with such historical value as might be rightly attributed to it, some of the modernistic pretensions meet with strong contradictory evidence. Against the claims of Professor Driver we may confidently urge the more complete induction and generalizations of [Prof. R.D. Wilson](#). Professor Driver, like Schliermacher, died too soon to see the futility of his methods.

The world ought not to be allowed to forget the services of some eminent men in the field of philology. For example, Prof. Fritz Hommel has made learned and painstaking investigation into certain features of the language of South Arabia. Out of a mass of material gathered by assiduous labor he has shown that primitive personal names from South Arabia are frequently compounds of the word *Ilu*, God ; but seldom, if ever, are these names compounded with the names of gods. The practice parallels that found in the Scriptures as witnessed by the frequent use of El and Jah, etc. in early Scripture nomenclature. And furthermore, it bears witness, by the persistence of these patronymics, to a primitive monotheism, on which the polytheistic cults of a later day were but parasites. This is the entire reversal of the modernism that is so glibly recited in many quarters to-day. It is not without great value in the argument that the Scriptures and the philology of South Arabia bear witness to the same thing and tell the same story. Monotheism is not the evolutionary product of a primitive polytheism ; but polytheism is the mistletoe bough on the stronger oak.

The fallacy of half-truths and the folly of half-methods have wrought irreparable harm to the faith and to the souls of men. It *does* matter whether or no men believe the doctrine of the virgin birth, a personal devil, and the coming of Christ for judgment. Dean Brown to the contrary notwithstanding. "When I am asked about the virgin birth, my answer is that of Paul ; he said nothing ; I am content to follow Paul." Aside from the danger of men's faith in discrediting the veracity of the Scriptures, the method of the argument is false *toto caelo*. What men do not say on a subject which they are not discussing is quite inconclusive evidence. Shall we believe in the atonement? James does not mention it. Did Jesus rise from the dead, and shall our dead rise again? James says not a word. Shall we therefore refuse to sing :

"When with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile?"

Shall we adopt the rule that no doctrine is to be received unless every Scripture writer has mentioned it? What Paul *does not* say is no refutation of that which Matthew and Luke *do* say. What Paul *does* say has not much weight with men who belong to the school of Dean Brown ; but what he *does not* say is proof conclusive.

Modernism is a present-day fad. It will damage the faith of multitudes, and wreck the lives and souls of multitudes more. But it will pass and be reckoned as one of those evanescent vagaries numerous enough to fill the Encyclopedia Britannica. Higher Criticism and Modernism will pass because founded on wrong methods. This is not the only reason, to be sure ; but reason sufficient to forecast their demise. They will pass as gigantic evils like war, but their wreck and ruin and ravage and devastation will strew the centuries. Alas for the souls snared by the unbelief which they generate.