

## ***Preface***

Dr. Gordon Clark affirmed the “first principle” (also affirmed by Luther, Calvin and other reformers), namely “the axiom of Scripture” (Luther’s *Schriftprinzip*). This “first principle” applies to all of human thought.

## ***Introduction***

Gordon Clark was born in 1902, the son of a Presbyterian minister. He earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania in 1929 where he later taught. He then went on to teach at the nearby Reformed Episcopal Seminary and at Wheaton College where he was forced to resign in 1943 by those in opposition to his Calvinistic theology.

Dr. Clark sought ordination in the recently formed OPC (which he and J. Gresham Machen organized in 1936). His ordination was challenged by some faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary over his views on the incomprehensibility of God and the place of logic in Christian thought. The challenge to his ordination eventually failed.

Often misunderstood and under-appreciated, Clark has been referred to as “America’s Augustine.” He viewed his contributions to theology and philosophy as a continued development of Augustinian thought. His works (over 40 books) are often neglected today in the church and in Christian academia.

Gordon Clark died in 1985 after a career in teaching that spanned 60 years.

## ***I. Part One: Knowledge***

### **A. Introduction**

Clark was a “Scripturalist” (that is, the Bible was his axiom, or foundation). Other terms used for Clark’s apologetic philosophy include presuppositionalism, dogmatism, Christian rationalism, and Christian intellectualism.

#### 1. Affirmed in 1:6 of the WCF:

“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.”

#### a. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17

### **B. Epistemology**

Epistemology is the key component of any theological or philosophical system, as well as its starting point. Before we can ask, “How can we know God?” we must ask, “How can we know anything?”

## 1. Three non-Christian methods of epistemology

### a. Pure rationalism

“Dr. Clark defined *rationalism* as ‘reason without faith.’ That is, reason, apart from revelation or sensory experience, provides the prime, or only, source of truth. The senses are untrustworthy, and our *a priori* knowledge (the knowledge we have before any observation or experience) must be applied to our experience in order for our experience to be made intelligible.” [Crampton, 17]

#### (1) Contrasted with Scripturalism

“In Scripturalism, knowledge comes *through* logic as one studies the revealed propositions of Scripture, understands them, and draws implications from them. In pure rationalism, however, knowledge comes *from* reason alone.” [Crampton, 17]

#### (2) False assumption of pure rationalism

A key false assumption of pure rationalism is that man, apart from revelation, is capable of coming to a true knowledge of reality, including a true knowledge of God.

#### (3) Errors of pure rationalism

(a) Men err in their reasoning (Eg. formal errors in logic)

(b) Problem of a starting point (no agreed upon axiom)

The classical rationalists such as Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza all had different starting points. Plato: Eternal Ideas; Descartes: Doubt (cf. his *cogito ergo sum*); Leibniz: A system of monads; Spinoza (pantheistic 17th c. Dutch philosopher): *Deus sive Natura*.

*TAB: There is an apparent controversy over whether Spinoza was a pantheist or a panentheist. Here is a helpful excerpt from Wikipedia explaining Spinoza’s thought, including his Deus sive Natura:*

*“Spinoza contends that ‘Deus sive Natura’ is a being of infinitely many attributes, of which thought and extension are two. His account of the nature of reality, then, seems to treat the physical and mental worlds as intertwined, causally related, and deriving from the same substance. It is important to note here that, in Parts 3 through 4 of the Ethics, Spinoza describes how the human mind is affected by both mental and physical factors. He directly contests dualism. The universal substance emanates both body and mind; while they are different attributes, there is no fundamental difference between these aspects. This formulation is a historically significant solution to the mind–body problem known as neutral monism. Spinoza’s system also envisages a God that does not rule over the universe by Providence in which God can make changes, but a God which itself is the deterministic system of which everything in nature is a part. Spinoza argues that ‘things could not have*

*been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case; ' he directly challenges a transcendental God which actively responds to events in the universe. Everything that has and will happen is a part of a long chain of cause and effect which, at a metaphysical level, humans are unable to change. No amount of prayer or ritual will sway God. Only knowledge of God, or the existence which humans inhabit, allows them to best respond to the world around them. Not only is it impossible for two infinite substances to exist (two infinities being absurd), God—being the ultimate substance—cannot be affected by anything else, or else it would be affected by something else, and not be the fundamental substance.*

*Spinoza was a thoroughgoing determinist who held that absolutely everything that happens occurs through the operation of necessity. For him, even human behavior is fully determined, with freedom being our capacity to know we are determined and to understand why we act as we do. By forming more "adequate" ideas about what we do and our emotions or affections, we become the adequate cause of our effects (internal or external), which entails an increase in activity (versus passivity). This means that we become both more free and more like God, as Spinoza argues in the Scholium to Prop. 49, Part II. However, Spinoza also held that everything must necessarily happen the way that it does. Therefore, humans have no free will. They believe, however, that their will is free. This illusionary perception of freedom stems from our human consciousness, experience, and indifference to prior natural causes. Humans think they are free but they dream with their eyes open. For Spinoza, our actions are guided entirely by natural impulses. In his letter to G. H. Schuller (Letter 58), he wrote: 'men are conscious of their desire and unaware of the causes by which [their desires] are determined.'"*

- (c) Reason without revelation cannot determine if the world is controlled by the God of Scripture

Apart from revelation we don't know if  $2+2=4$  (revelation) or if it equals 5 (skepticism). Note Nietzsche who argued that our logical categories and thought are only the product of evolution. Thus, their purpose is survival, not the discovery of truth.

- (d) Fallacy of asserting the consequent

- (e) Solipsism (the merging of the world into the ego so that the world is no more than a part of one's consciousness)

Apart from a Divine universal/absolute mind it is not possible for the individual to escape his own mind.

Hegel attempted to solve this problem by giving rationalism an Absolute Mind, but one from which individuals could not be deduced. "With Hegel we have the disappearance of the self into the Absolute or World Spirit. This pantheism too is a failure." [Crampton, 19]

## b. Empiricism

Empiricism maintains that all knowledge originates from the senses, an objective world that is beyond and outside the observer. Science is the epitome of empiricism. Science emphasizes repeated observation and with repetition knowledge and certainty are increased. This is also “reason without revelation.”

### (1) Empiricism contrasted with rationalism

In rationalism, reason means *a priori* logic. In empiricism, reason means sensation (knowledge from the senses).

“While the rationalists proceed by deduction, the reasoning used in empiricism is inductive as well. One collects experiences and observations and draws inferences and conclusions. This empirical knowledge is *aposteriori*, that is it comes after and through experience.” [Crampton, 20]

### (2) Problems with empiricism

#### (a) All inductive arguments are formal logical fallacies

Each argument starts with a premise and ends with a conclusion. However, it is not possible to collect enough data on any subject to reach an absolute, universal conclusion. Empirical conclusions must always be tentative and subject to change (cf. how science is always in flux).

“We [scientists] know nothing about it [“nature”] at all. Our knowledge is but the knowledge of school children. . . . We shall know a little more than we do now. But the real nature of things--that we shall never know, never.” [Einstein, quoted on page 21]

Science cannot operate without assumptions. Experiments are performed to test theories and the theory is one of the scientist’s assumptions.

Note also that, according to Clark, historical research never proves an event (even the event of Christ’s resurrection which Clark called “the best authenticated event in ancient history.” Yet, that event is rejected by most on the assumption that it is not possible. Research never produces faith; faith is the gift of God.

#### (b) The senses deceive us

#### (c) Empiricism itself cannot be verified by sense observation and is self-refuting

#### (d) Mathematics and logic cannot be verified by sensory impressions

“Rationalism, with its universal ideas, gives us an explanation of categories and similarities, but empiricism does not. And without these, rational discourse would not be possible.” [Crampton, 22]

- (e) Solipsism (the theory that only the mind is sure to exist) is inescapable in empiricist epistemology
- (f) Empiricism may be able to tell us *what is* but not *what ought to be* (it cannot make ethical judgments - the verb 'ought' has no logical meaning in empiricism)
- (g) Empiricism cannot give us ideas such as "parallel," "equal," or "justification"

These are never found in sense experience. No two experiences are ever the same. David Hume asserted: "if one takes his epistemological stand upon sensation, he can never know anything." [23]

God alone reveals what which could not otherwise be known (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Empiricism can never give us truth. Only propositional revelation can.

### c. Irrationalism (skepticism)

Championed by such men as Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, and the neo-orthodox theologians. It is anti-intellectual and claims that absolute truth cannot be known. Truth is subjectively known.

#### (1) Pragmatic "faith without reason"

We cannot know if God/a god exists, but we ought to take a "leap of faith" (Kierkegaard) so as to live as if there is one.

#### (2) Neo-Orthodoxy

For theologians Barth and Brunner, truth is subjective and logic disdained. "[F]aith must curb logic." [24] God's logic differs from man's and cannot be known. Neo-Orthodox theology is one of "paradox."

"The problem here is that when one divorces logic from epistemology, he is left with nothing. Skepticism is self-contradictory, for it asserts that nothing can be known. Or course, if nothing can be known, we cannot know that we know nothing. Christian theism, on the other hand, maintains that God is truth itself (Psalm 31:5; John 14:6; 1 John 5:6), and that truth is logical. The law of contradiction is a negative test for truth; that is, if something is contradictory, it cannot be true. The law of contradiction--something is not not-something--must not be considered as merely a formal law or an arbitrary stipulation to be used to construct systems of thought. The law of contradiction is a law of human thought because it is first a law of reality, that is, it is 'God thinking.'" [Crampton, 25]

#### (3) Jesus is the "logic" (Λογος) of God (John 1:1)

The laws of logic are the way God thinks; they are not created. Man possesses logic as part of his being created in God's image.

### **C. Christian Epistemology**

1. Every philosophical system must have its starting point (axiom)
  - a. An axiom cannot be proved - if it could it would not be THE starting point (they cannot be deduced from other earlier theorems)
    - (1) *TAB: belief in God as “properly basic”*
2. The axiom for Christian philosophy is the Bible

Dr. Clark referred to this as “dogmatism,” Biblical presuppositionalism,” and “Christian rationalism.”

- a. Answer to the critic’s accusation of “begging the question” or “circular reasoning”
  - (1) Axioms are not proven
  - (2) The Bible claims to be the Word of God

“[T]he Christian is well within the boundaries of logic to insist that the first reason for believing in the inspiration of the Bible is that it makes this claim.” [Clark, cited on page 28]

“The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth 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.” [WCF 1:4]

- (3) There is no dichotomy between faith (revelation) and reason (logic)

Christ is the Logic, Reason, and Wisdom of God. Man can reason due to his being created in the image of God.

“To reason properly, one must have a foundation upon which all is based. In Christian rationalism knowledge comes through reason, that is, logic, not from reasoning (as in pure rationalism). Unlike pure rationalism, Scripturalism stands upon the foundation of biblical revelation. Dr. Clark, then, was in full accord with Augustine’s dictum: ‘I believe in order to understand.’” [Crampton, 29]

### **D. General and Special Revelation**

1. General revelation must always be interpreted in light of special revelation
  - a. This was true even before the fall of man
2. All men have an innate understanding that God exists

Clark taught (with Augustine and Calvin) that by virtue of the *imago dei* the Spirit has implanted an innate, *apriori*, idea of God (*sensus deitatis*) in all men. This idea is both propositional and ineradicable.

a. This includes some knowledge of morality (cf. Rom. 1:32; 2:15)

“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 [1225-1274]), for the visible universe sends 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.” [Crampton, 31]

This knowledge is not received by empirical or rationalistic means. It is not mediated. According to Dr. Clark, all knowledge is immediate, revelational, and propositional.

There is a difference between an innate knowledge of God which conveys certain propositions *apriori* by virtue of being created in the image of God and nature itself, or any other *aposteriori* evidence which cannot convey propositional truth.

Human knowledge is possible only because God has given man innate ideas in keeping with the *imago dei*.

3. God’s Word (special revelation) is not merely ink on paper

a. The words on paper convey propositions which are revealed to the mind of man

(1) This is also true innately as some propositions are revealed through creation

4. The sum total of all truth exists in the mind of God and if man is to know the truth he must know the eternal propositions in the mind of God

5. The “correspondence theory of truth” is rejected in favor of the “coherence theory of truth”

Man knows what God knows, as He has revealed it. Truth is not analogical or representative, but actual equative, and real. Wrote Dr. 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.” [34]

And:

“If man knows anything at all, he must know a truth that God knows, for God knows all truths.” [35]

6. General revelation reveals God as Creator - Special revelation reveals Him as Savior

7. The difference between knowledge and belief

“Let us agree and insist that merely to learn and understand the doctrines does not make one a Christian. Any infidel can learn and understand them quite well. In addition to understanding the doctrines one must believe them; but note that it is the doctrines that must be believed.”  
[Clark, cited on page 36-37]

*TAB: Cf. the biblical concept that saving faith encompasses three essential elements: 1) “knowledge” (notitia), 2) “assent” (assensus), 3) and “trust” (fiducia).*

### **E. Epistemology and Soteriology**

1. Soteriology is a branch of Epistemology

Soteriology is neither a branch of *metaphysics* as sin is not metaphysical in nature and salvation is not deification, nor a branch of *ethics* as man cannot be saved by works (ethics).

### **F. Revelation and Apologetics**

1. Dr. Clark rejected the natural theology of Aquinas

a. Natural theology is also the theology of liberals, humanists, deists, and pagans

2. Dr. Clark rejected evidentialism as a branch of natural theology

3. Dr. Clark’s critique of natural theology

a. It is based on empiricism

“[T]he Hebrew-Christian view that ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’ does not, in my opinion, mean that the existence of God can be formally deduced from an empirical examination of the universe.” [Clark, cited on page 38]

Clark contended that no knowledge can be derived from sensory experience. Empiricism provides no more knowledge about God the Creator than we can know about the world itself. He also believed that 1 Cor. 1:18-25 and 3:20 refute philosophical speculation based on natural theology.

“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. . . . observation can never prove causality; it may give us sequence, but never causality.” [Crampton, 39]

b. Rationalistic arguments of Anselm and Descartes are unsound (eg. the ontological argument)

“This argument, stated Dr Clark, basically asserts that ‘God, by definition, is the being who possesses all perfections; existence is a perfection; therefore, God exists.’ There are several problems with the ontological argument. First, let it be said that the syllogism as stated by Descartes is formally 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.’ 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?’” [Crampton, 39-40]

The ontological argument may be useful only as it relates to deducing the implications from Scripture so that we know who this Creator God is.

Proofs such as Thomas’ Five Ways also fail for the same reasons.

c. God or the Bible cannot be “proven” by natural theology

(1) The Bible is the axiomatic starting point and is self-authenticating

The statement that “the heavens declare the glory of God” must be known by faith via biblical revelation. Cf. Augustine: “I believe in order to understand.” While there are “evidences” that manifest the Bible to be God’s Word, the evidences themselves do not “prove” the Bible to be true.

Dr. Clark wrote:

“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 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?” [41]

As the Westminster Confession affirms, the authority of the Bible is not derived from man or church, but solely from God who is truth. This is not to say that evidences don't exist, but apart from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit they are inconclusive.

#### 4. Are theological evidences useful?

They are useful when used in an *ad hominem* fashion to reveal the foolishness of non-Christian systems of belief (Prov. 26:5).

“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 B.C., and the hypothetical council of Jamnia. But our arguments will be entirely *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.” [Clark, cited on page 43]

*\*Definition of elenctic. : serving to refute —used of indirect modes of proof—opposed to deictic.*

While the believer and the unbeliever have a common metaphysical ground in that they both are created in God's image, they have no common ground epistemologically.

#### 5. Demonstrating to the unbeliever the falsity of his worldview

#### 6. Augustine's argument from the nature of truth

Truth must exist. Thus, skepticism is false. To deny the existence of truth is to assert that it exists, thus skepticism is self-refuting. It is also impossible for truth to change as that which changes, by definition, is not true. To deny that truth is eternal is to affirm, by denying, its eternal nature. Since truth can only exist in the form of propositions, it is a property of the mind. The human mind is not eternal and immutable, so there must be a Mind superior to that of man, a Mind that is eternal and immutable. Augustine argued that this Mind is God. If man knows any truth, he knows something of God.

#### 7. Clark's two basic steps to defending Christianity:

- a. Demonstrate that the axioms of secularism are self-refuting
- b. Demonstrate the internal consistency of the Christian worldview

### **G. Knowledge and Opinion**

#### 1. The important distinction between knowledge and opinion

- a. Knowledge is possessing true thoughts and ideas

(1) Only that which is stated or deduced from Scripture gives us this knowledge

*TAB: Cf. Ronald Nash who disagrees with this inference, contending that there are things that are true simply because they are true. In other words, not every single truth in the universe can be directly demonstrated by Scripture. I would add that the Bible does give us the philosophical foundation for all truth, something I'm sure Dr. Nash would have agreed with.*

b. Opinion may be true or false

Natural science, archaeology, history (apart from recorded biblical history) is opinion. We are not dealing with facts in these disciplines. Clark defined a scientific “fact” as “an arithmetic mean with a variable error of zero.” [Crampton, 46]

2. This is why Clark’s apologetic method has been referred to as “deductive presuppositionalism”

a. All knowledge is revelational and propositional with its source being God

“If man knows anything at all, he must know the truth that God knows, for God knows all truth.” [Clark, cited on page 47]

## **H. Epistemological Limitations and the Language of Scripture**

1. Man can know truth but only God has exhaustive knowledge of the truth

a. God’s knowledge is intuitive while man’s knowledge is discursive (i.e. by resolving complex expressions into simpler or more basic ones)

2. The knowledge of God’s truth is univocal and not analogical (contra Thomism and C. Van Til)

a. Clark did not deny a quantitative difference between what God knows and what man knows (the difference is one of degree, not kind)

b. Analogical truth is not truth--there must be a univocal point of reference

3. Propositions are either true or false

a. What makes a proposition true is that God thinks it true

b. The employment of grammatical rules and logic in knowing God’s truth

(1) God does not convey truth by “logical paradox”--this is a contradiction

## II. Part Two: Scripture

### A. Introduction

1. Clark believed that God has revealed himself to all men via general and special revelation
  - a. Both are propositional and only the latter can save from sin
2. True knowledge is only found in Scripture either directly or necessary inference
  - a. Cf. WCF 1:1, 1:6
3. Dr. Clark was the first philosopher to apply *Sola Scriptura* to all areas of thought

### B. Progressive Revelation

1. Unfolding of biblical revelation from the Garden of Eden to Christ
2. Clark believed that covenant theology gives unity to Scripture

“The two parts of the Bible are not two covenants differing in substance or effect, but they are differing administrations of the one Covenant of Grace.” [Clark, cited on page 53]

*TAB: I take Clark to mean the Old and New Testaments, not the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.*

- a. Covenant of works and covenant of grace
  - (1) Adam as the covenant head of the race

Perfect obedience was required of Adam under the covenant of works, but he broke the covenant and fell, along with his posterity, resulting in the covenant of grace. Cf. WCF 7:3.

- (2) Covenant of grace foretold in Genesis 3:15
  - (3) According to Clark: all the other biblical covenants flow out of the covenant of grace and culminate in the coming of Christ
2. The covenant of redemption

The covenant of redemption is a supra-temporal covenant between the three persons of the Trinity. Cf. Luke 22:29; John 5:30,43; 6:67-39; 8:42; 10:29; Romans 5:19; 8:3; Ephesians 1:4-5; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9.

Dr. Clark viewed the entirety of biblical revelation “as a developing body of revelation--developing from a less detailed to a more detailed form of a single plan of salvation. This single plan the Bible calls a covenant; and by this covenant between God and His people, the latter are prepared for and are brought to its complete fruition in Heaven.” [54]

### **C. Canonization of Scripture**

1. Progressive revelation affirms that by the end of the apostolic age (no later than AD 100) the miraculous gifts ceased and the canon was closed

“The offices of the prophet and apostle are things of the past. No Christian since A.D. 100 has inherited such an office. No one today receives new revelations from God. The canon is closed.” [Clark, cited on page 55]

2. God speaks authoritatively in the 66 books of the Bible alone

- a. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13

“In fact, stated Dr. Clark, to assert that the miraculous word gifts are still valid today is so egregious an error that it ‘implies that the canon is not closed and that sources other than the Bible should be normative for theology. It implies that miracles continue, as the Romanists claim, and that the contemporary tongues movement has apostolic authority.’” [56]

3. Extent of the canon

- a. The reformers upheld a 66 book canon (excluding the Apocrypha)
- b. The reformed confessions upheld a 66 book canon
- c. The canon is established by God not the church

### **D. The Inspiration of Scripture**

1. 2 Timothy 3:16 and θεοπνευστος
2. The technical distinction between “the Bible as the written Word” and “the Bible as the Word of God”

Dr. Clark wrote, as cited in footnote 105 (page 57):

“God spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the prophets. This speaking is not the written word, even if all that was spoken--and this is doubtful--was later written in the Bible. Then too the most orthodox of theologians admit that Jesus, the Word of God, was not literally the ink symbols written on a piece of papyrus or vellum. Furthermore, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God, as identified in 1 Corinthians 1:24, as well as the creative Word in Proverbs 3:19-20, are not the Hebrew characters on a page. Hence, one may legitimately say that the

Bible is the Word of God, even though the Word of God is not the Bible” (“The Toronto School,” *The Trinity Review*, August 1979, 1).

3. The Bible doesn’t “become” the Word of God (contra Neo-Orthodoxy)

4. 2 Timothy 3:16 and the extent of inspiration

The extent of inspiration does not directly relate to the thoughts or the spoken words of the prophets (although they *may* have been inspired) but rather the inspiration of the written words of the original MSS. Thus, θεοπνευστος has to do with the origin of Scripture, not so much its transmission.

5. 2 Peter 1:20-21--the human authors were inspired at the time of writing

### **E. The Nature and Extent of Inspiration**

1. Inspiration is the watershed issue of the 20th c.

2. The distinction between special revelation (canon) and inspiration (writing)

3. The orthodox doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration is sometimes referred to as “the organic view” (a term Clark thought to be “too vague”)

4. Erroneous views of inspiration

*TAB: Note that some of these categories are different than I learned them, such as the dynamic view.*

a. Dynamic View: The authors were inspired writers, much like a great poet. The writings themselves are not inspired or the words of God

b. Partial View: Inspiration extends to parts of the Bible, not all (Eg. the historical and scientific statements are not inspired)

c. Conceptual View: Only the concepts or thoughts are inspired, not the words themselves

d. Natural View; The authors were only men of great genius

e. Instrumental View: God’s revelation comes “through” the words but not “in” them (the Bible is thus infallible but not inerrant)

f. Neo-Liberal View (or “the new hermeneutic”): The Bible is part kerygma and part myth; historicity is not a concern, only the “kernel” of truth that can be discovered by “demythologizing” the text”

g. Neo-Orthodox View:

- (1) Neo-orthodoxy is opposed to liberalism but is not compatible with orthodoxy
- (2) According to neo-orthodoxy the Bible is not itself the Word of God
- (3) According to neo-orthodoxy Jesus Christ is the only true revelation of God and the Bible “becomes” the Word of God through subjective personal encounter with Him via “the Christ event”
- (4) According to neo-orthodoxy it is beneath a transcendent God to communicate a transcendent Christ through logical propositions (the Bible reveals events but not their meaning which must be ascertained by each individual by subjective experience)
- (5) According to neo-orthodoxy the Bible contains errors and is full of logical paradox (neo-orthodox is sometimes referred to as the “theology of paradox”)

h. Linguistic Philosophy View: Propositional truth is denied as human language is an inadequate means by which to convey transcendent truth (this view emerged from neo-orthodoxy and neo-liberalism)

## **F. The Attributes (Perfections) of Scripture**

### 1. Infallible and Inerrant

a. Crampton distinguishes between inerrancy and infallibility:

“[the difference is between] potentiality and actuality. The attribute of inerrancy maintains that Scripture ‘does not’ err, whereas the attribute of infallibility states that it ‘cannot err.’ Infallibility is a stronger term. Inerrancy does not demand infallibility, but infallibility does demand inerrancy.” [65]

*TAB: I question this distinction which contradicts what Crampton wrote about the erroneous “Instrumental View” on page 62 (the Bible is infallible but not inerrant). If I remember right, this was/is the position of Fuller Seminary which prefers the former term over the latter.*

### 2. Verbally and Plenary Inspired

a. Perspicuous

“Protestantism, in contrast to Romanism, has always said that the Scriptures are perspicuous.” [Clark, cited on page 65]

3. Epistemologically Necessary: The Bible is the foundation for all of knowledge and is necessary for a true knowledge of God and salvation

## **G. The Witness of the Bible and Church History**

1. The Bible testifies to a high view of Scripture from cover to cover

Cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 3:1, 4:11; John 10:35; Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:25-27,44; Romans 3:2; 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:15-16; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16.

2. The true church of Christ has held this same view throughout history

Cf. Inerrantists: Clement of Rome; Ignatius; Polycarp; Clement of Alexandria; Tertullian; Augustine; Calvin; Luther; Zwingli; Warfield; Machen; (as well as the reformed creeds).

## **H. Original Manuscripts, Copies, and Translations**

1. Inspiration and inerrancy extend to the original autographs which no longer exist

a. Is this an issue for inerrantists?

“... it is a *non sequitur* to assume that the autographic text (that is, the words) is no longer available to us just because we do not have the autographic codex (that is, the physical documents). The good copies we have, as a whole, can and do retain the former without the latter.” [Clark, cited on page 69]

b. The copies are not inspired (strictly speaking)

But the copies reflect the inspired originals to the degree that they are copied accurately.

“... while it is true that the pure text would not be perfectly reproduced in any one copy, it would be preserved within the whole body of documents, due to God’s providential watchcare over the transmission of His Word, which the Bible itself attests to (see Psalm 119:89,152,160; Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:24-25). [Crampton, 69]

“Dr. Clark, then, fully agreed with the *Westminster Confession* (1:8), when it states that all 66 books of the Bible have ‘by His singular care and providence [been] kept pure in all ages, [and] are therefore authentic.’” [69-70]

c. Textual criticism

According to Crampton, page 70, textual criticism has demonstrated that there is a significant difference in the text in only one out of one thousand words in the NT. There are over 5000 extant NT MSS compared to 10-20 for ancient writers such as Plato and Aristotle.

“The New Testament texts, noted Dr. Clark, ‘are established with far greater certainty’ than are the other texts of antiquity.” [70]

(1) Clark’s transition to a Majority Text view

*TAB: The argumentation cited by Crampton on pages 70-71 does not address the real issues in the critical / majority text debate. The scholars who favor the Majority Text are in short supply today. I do not doubt that the critical text establishes the most accurate translation of the NT.*

## **I. The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture**

### 1. The authority of Scripture

- a. There is no other source of divine revelation today: The Bible alone is God's Word

Contra Romanism with her Apocrypha and traditions, spiritual mysticism, and Existentialism. The canonical Scriptures stand as the final authority over every aspect of life (all thought and practice).

### 2. The sufficiency of Scripture

- a. A sufficiency that flows out of its authority: The Bible is the Word of God

- b. The essential role of preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God

(1) There is a sense in which Christ is preaching when the Word of God is taught faithfully

- c. False doctrine is not to be tolerated

- d. Clark believed that the offices of elder and deacon were to be restricted to men

## **J. The Law and the Gospel**

### 1. In historic Reformed theology Law and Gospel are not separated but distinguished

“Law without Gospel is merely a dead letter; yet, there is no Gospel without the Law that reveals one's need for the grace of God in Christ.” [Crampton, 74]

*TAB: I might stress that the Law and the Gospel must not be mixed or confounded in any way. The Law demands; the Gospel gives.*

### 2. Clark held to the three-fold division of the law (as outlined in the WCF): Moral/Civil/Ceremonial

*TAB: Crampton refers to the ceremonial law as a “tutor” which leads to Christ and which is abrogated in the NT. He conflated the Ten Commandments with the moral law calling them perpetually binding. He goes on to say in the next paragraph (page 75) that, “The Ten Commandments functioned pedagogically, in that they show the righteousness of God and disclose the sinfulness of man, leading him to see God's forgiveness. The Commandments likewise serve as a continually educative force in the life of the Christian by functioning as the*

*unchangeable standard by which to live. They are a pattern for life.” I would question the tutorial use (Gal. 3:24) of the ceremonial law which by Paul are referred to as “shadows” in the book of Colossians. The sticky question remains as to how the penalties for breaking the Commandments are to be enforced by the civil magistrate. The death penalty for murder predates the Commandments and without question remains. What of dishonoring parents or not keeping the Sabbath day? While these questions go beyond the scope of the book, they are nonetheless important.*

### 3. Contra Dispensationalism

*TAB: The argumentation on the bottom of page 76 seems to me an ‘either / or’ fallacy.*

## **K. Law and Love**

### 1. Clark believed that the law was necessary in order to love God and neighbor

“In orthodox theology, love is volitional; it is not an emotion. Love toward God consists of living life in obedience to His commands (see John 14:15,21,23; 1 John 2:4-5). Love towards one’s fellow man consists in treating him biblically (for example, not stealing from him, not hating him, not coveting his possessions).” [Crampton, 77]

*TAB: Obviously, a regenerate heart and the fruit of the Spirit issuing itself in love is also indispensable (Galatians 5).*

## **L. Biblical Hermeneutics and Application**

1. The proper interpretation and exegesis of the Scripture is the right and responsibility of every Christian (contra Romanism)

2. Clark believed sanctification to be an intellectual process (cf. growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, 2 Peter 3:18)

3. The *analogy of the faith* as the main rule of hermeneutics

a. Reformational principle that Scripture interprets Scripture and that obscure texts give way to those that are perspicuous

4. Each passage has only one interpretation but may have many applications

5. Interpret the Bible literally (*sensus literalis*), grammatically, contextually, and historically

a. “The Bible is literally true, but it is not always true literally”

There is a mandate to understand what genre of biblical literature you are studying and to recognize and interpret rightly the various figures of speech that are found throughout the Scriptures. “And in every case the rules of logic are to be applied.” [80]

### **M. Theology and Philosophy**

#### 1. Colossians 2:8 does not forbid the study of philosophy

This passage is warning against a godless philosophy, not the love (and study) of God’s wisdom as revealed in general and, specifically, special revelation--and applied in all of thought and life.

“Philosophy is not the love of knowledge, but the love of wisdom. Though wisdom is a kind of knowledge . . . there is a distinction between them, as hinted at in 1 Corinthians 12:8. Not all knowledge leads to blessedness; wisdom does.” [Clark, cited on page 80]

Theology and philosophy “go hand in glove.” Theology is the queen of the sciences and philosophy is her handmaiden.

### **N. Scripture and Biblical Institutions**

#### 1. Three main biblical institutions that are to be governed by Scripture: Family; Church; Government (Civil Magistrate)

##### a. The First Biblical Institution: The Family (considered the primary biblical institution, cf. WCF)

- (1) The other two institutions are founded upon the family
- (2) The family is the first of the three to be established in Scripture
- (3) As goes the family, so goes the church and society
- (4) The biblical mandate for a well-ordered family
- (5) Husband/Father is the head of the family
- (6) Wife/Mother is subordinate to the Husband/Father

Dr. Clark contended that in God’s social order, the woman is ontologically equal to the man but is to follow his lead in the home and church. This is by God’s design in the created order and not a result of the fall/sin. Under normal circumstances, the wife/mother is to be the homemaker.

- (7) Marital stipulations and grounds for dissolution

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. Incestuous marriages are unlawful. Celibacy is to be devalued and asceticism rejected (contra Romanism). Adultery and/or fornication, as

well as abandonment, “give the innocent party grounds to dissolve the marriage contract.”  
[Clark, cited on page 82]

(8) A central purpose of marriage is to produce a “holy seed”

“The children are not creatures of the state, nor were they born to the church. Children are the parents’ responsibility.” [Clark, cited on page 83]

(9) Children are to be well-educated

Clark believed in the centrality of the Scriptures in education. He also commended the WCF and believed that children should receive a well-rounded, classical, education within a Christian school framework.

(10) The priesthood of the believer establishes the principle that every Christian vocation is equally sacred

“Following the lead of Luther and Calvin, under the rubric of the ‘Puritan work ethic,’ Dr. Clark averred that there is inherent dignity in all types of legitimate work. In their labors before God, ‘the present-day assembly line mechanic, the clerks and salespersons, the independent plumber and carpenter, [are to] do an honest days work to please the Lord.’ [Clark, cited on page 83] The Puritan work ethic is both benevolent and egoistic. Not only is God glorified by honest labor, but others are benefited as well as one’s self. Hence, the rewards of a biblical ethic involved in a godly vocation are both spiritual and material.” [Crampton, page 85]

#### b. The Second Biblical Institution: The Church

(1) Dr. Clark agreed with Augustine, Calvin, and the WCF in distinguishing between the visible and invisible church

(a) The visible church

According to the WCF, the visible church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children.” [25:1-2]

(b) The invisible church

“The invisible church, on the other hand, comprises the true saints (the elect) of all time, even those not yet born.” [Crampton, 84]

“The catholic or universal church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” [Clark, cited on page 84]

The visible church will be a mixed church (elect and non-elect professors) until the final state.

(2) Dr. Clark agreed with Augustine that the true church is “one, holy, and apostolic”

(a) The church is “one” (this emphasizes her unity)

The “communion of the saints” includes the fact that all the saints stand in union with Jesus Christ. There is communion with Him as well as with one another. This unity is not organizational, but doctrinal (based on a common confession of the true gospel and the Scriptures as the Word of God).

(b) The church is “holy”

This holiness is a positional *ἁγιοςμους* grounded in the union with Christ all believers share. They possess His perfect holiness.

(c) The church is “catholic” (universal)

The church is not restricted to one nation, as during the OT economy under Israel. The church is composed of elect saints from every tribe, tongue and nation.

(d) The church is “apostolic”

The church is grounded in the teaching of Christ and the apostles as given in the New Testament.

(3) The centrality of the church’s worship

(a) Clark upheld the “regulative principle” of worship (cf. WCF 21:1)

(4) The three marks (actually four) of the church according to Clark:

(a) Preaching (the cardinal mark of the church)

Preaching is the principle “means of grace” and it is essential that the entire counsel of God be proclaimed. Contrary to Rome, the preaching and teaching of God’s Word holds primacy over the sacraments.

(b) Sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper)

The Scriptures are a means of grace themselves while the sacraments are a means of grace in as much as they are administered with and sanctified by the Word.

(c) Church discipline

i. Positively considered

“As the Word is faithfully preached and the sacraments properly administered, positive church discipline is exercised.” [Crampton, 87]

ii. Negatively considered

The process outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 is to be followed for professed Christians in a state of sin.

Clark writes, as cited on page 87:

“To the officers whom Christ has appointed for His church, He has given authority to impose censures. Censures, or heavier penalties are to be imposed when anyone, especially a minister, is adjudged guilty of public sin.”

(d) Church government (including the offices of elder and deacon)

Clark was a Presbyterian and argued for that form of government, as opposed to episcopal or congregational forms. Citing Acts 15, Clark also argued for the expanded form of elder rule that includes synods and councils (i.e. presbytery / general assembly).

As it relates to decisions made by such courts or counsels, and their authority over the individual church member, Clark approvingly quotes A.A. Hodge:

“If their judgements are unwise, but not directly opposed to the will of God, the private member should submit for peace’ sake. If their decisions are opposed plainly to the Word of God, the private member should disregard them and take the penalty.” [cited on page 88]

c. The Third Biblical Institution: The Civil Magistrate

(1) Two major errors in the history of the church:

(1) Papalism: the church (the pope) rules over church and state

(2) Erastianism: the state rules over state and church

*TAB: a basic definition of Erastianism from Britannica.com:*

*“Erastianism, doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Thomas Erastus, who never held such a doctrine. He opposed excommunication as unscriptural, advocating in its stead punishment by civil authorities.”*

Clark believed that both the church and the state are God-ordained institutions that have their own unique domains, but both are under the authority and responsibility of God’s Word.

“Dr. Clark believed that the Bible teaches a strictly limited role for civil government. In this sense, as Gregg Singer commented, Dr. Clark ‘may well be regarded as a strict constructionalist in his interpretation of the Federal constitution, and in this respect a

Jeffersonian.’ In accordance with the *Confession* (23:1), he taught that the duties of the state are restricted to that of justice and defense:

“God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people, for His own glory, and the public good; and to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers.” [cited on page 89]

“Dr Clark affirmed that it was incumbent upon the civil magistrate to adopt the principles of the Ten Commandments and the ‘general equity’ of the Mosaic judicials.” [Crampton, 89]

(2) Some governments are better than others

(a) Constitutional Republic is the best (most biblical) form of government

(b) Limited government

“Scripture approves of private property. Christ asserted the right of an employer to set the wages he will pay; He advised investment for gain in the marketplace. There is nothing socialistic in the New Testament political economy. Indeed, Christianity clearly supports a capitalistic, free enterprise system.” [Clark, cited on page 90]

(4) The mandate to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)

## **O. Conclusion**

1. According to Dr. Gordon Clark:

a. All of life is to be lived theocentrically to God’s glory while taking every thought captive to Christ’s obedience (2 Cor. 10:5)

b. The 66 books of the Bible form the axiom of Christianity

c. The Bible is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

d. Christianity is a logical system: A philosophy and worldview governed by the explicit, implicit, and necessary inferences of Scripture

“[The Scripturalism of Gordon Clark] is a whole view of things thought out together. It engages non-Christian philosophers 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.” [John Robbins, cited on page 91]

## ***Postscript: The Crisis of Our Time by John Robbins***

### **I. Introduction**

#### A. The 20th Century: The Age of Irrationalism

“This radical skepticism has penetrated our entire culture, from television to music to literature. The Christian at the end of the twentieth century is confronted with an overwhelming cultural consensus--sometimes stated explicitly but most often implicitly: Man does not and cannot know anything truly.” [John Robbins, 135]

##### 1. Christianity is nonsense apart from knowledge

“The misologists--the haters of logic--use logic to demonstrate the futility of using logic.” [John Robbins, 137]

### **II. Nonsense Has Come**

“Is it any wonder that the world is grasping at straws--the straws of experientialism, mysticism, and drugs? After all, if people are told that the Bible contains insoluble mysteries, then is not a flight into mysticism to be expected? On what grounds can it be condemned? Certainly not on logical grounds or biblical grounds, if logic is futile and the Bible unintelligible. Moreover, if it cannot be condemned on logical or biblical grounds, it cannot be condemned at all. If people are going to have a religion of the mysterious, they will not adopt Christianity: They will have a genuine mystery religion. ‘Those who call for nonsense,’ C.S. Lewis once wrote, ‘will find that it comes.’ And this is precisely what has happened. The popularity of Eastern mysticism, of drugs, and of religious experience is the logical consequence of the irrationalism of the twentieth century. There can and will be no Christian reformation--and no reconstruction of society--unless and until the irrationalism of the age is totally repudiated by Christians.” [John Robbins, 137]

### **III. The Church Defenseless**

Most of the theological schools and evangelical churches have been infected with an anti-intellectualism. They have not learned the first truth: that they are to know and love the truth.

### **IV. The Trinity Foundation**

### **V. The Primacy of Theory**

#### A. Theory without practice is dead and practice without theory is blind

“Doctrine is intellectual, and Christians are generally anti-intellectual. Doctrine is ivory tower philosophy, and they scorn ivory towers. The ivory tower, however, is the control tower of a civilization.” [John Robbins, 140]

## **VI. In Understanding Be Men**

The first duty of the Christian is to understand (know) doctrine and build his or her practice from that foundation. This is a biblical pattern, as well as a logical one.

“The church’s lack of power is the result of its lack of truth. . . . We are saying that Christianity is intellectually defensible--that, in fact, it is the only intellectually defensible system of thought. We are saying that God has made the wisdom of this world--whether that wisdom be called science, religion, philosophy, or common sense--foolishness.” [John Robbins, 141]

“To echo an early Reformation thought, when the ploughman and the garage attendant know the Bible as well as the theologian does, and know it better than some contemporary theologians, then the desired awakening shall have already occurred.” [Gordon Clark, cited by John Robbins on page 142]