

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

March, April 1986

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Books and Letters

John W. Robbins

Things keep piling up on my desk—things that ought to be published but are not long enough to fill an entire issue of *The Review*. In the interest of clearing my desk a little, I am putting some of those things in this issue of the *Review*. The reading isn't very heavy, but we do think you will enjoy it.

New Books

For those of you who may not have noticed, Clark's *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* is back in print. This is an excellent study guide for individuals and groups. Unlike the superficial *Confessing Christ*, *Mere Christianity*, and *Basic Christianity* that so many churches use, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* does not try to minimize the amount of doctrine a Christian is expected to know. Like the *Westminster Confession*, on which it is a commentary, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* aims to give a good summary of the whole counsel of God. Even before C. S. Lewis (whose theology is of doubtful orthodoxy at best) published *Mere Christianity*, popular Christian writers were falling over themselves in their eagerness to reduce Christianity to the bare minimum. Fundamentalism, the four laws, kerygmatic theology, and other reductionist movements are the sub-Christian results of this sort of thinking. But as Dr. Clark points out in his new commentary on *Ephesians*, "The apostle said that he was pure from the blood of all men because he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God. Many pastors today, and I mean many, are blood-guilty because they shun and

avoid preaching many New Testament, or for that matter, Old Testament, ideas."

Paul prayed for two things when he preached: boldness and clarity. Our modern preachers lack his courage, so they teach only those doctrines that are least offensive to the world and call them mere Christianity. They also lack the understanding that Christianity cannot be defended by falling back to a core position of a few non-negotiable doctrines. Christianity is a system, to quote Nietzsche, a whole view of things thought out together. To surrender "nonessential" doctrines is, in principle, to surrender the Christian position totally. In time, unless the process of truncating Christianity is reversed, no truth will be left to defend.

We at the Trinity Foundation are not interested in defending only the "fundamentals." "The whole counsel of God," "the pattern of sound words," "all things that I have commanded" are to be taught and defended. Mere Christianity is sub-Christianity. *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* is a clear and complete presentation of Biblical doctrine. No better summary is available today.

Another new book is *Clark Speaks from the Grave*. Dr. Clark wrote the book well before his death in April 1985. In it, he reprimands his critics for their abysmal failure to pay attention to Scripture, to logic, and to the progress of the intellectual war with the world. The result has been the failure of apologetics, even as the atrophied gospel of the modern church—and I am speaking of the so-called

The Trinity Review March, April 1986

"evangelical" churches, not the synagogues of Satan—has destroyed evangelism and missions in our time. Few generations of Christians have been given a gift like Gordon H. Clark; and those that have not will rise up at the judgment day and condemn this generation for its faithlessness, ignorance, and stupidity.

In 1986 we hope to continue our ambitious publishing program. Among the books we are planning are a new edition of *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, one of Clark's apologetical masterpieces. The book has been out of print for years, and we anticipate a great deal of interest in it. When I was a graduate student at The Johns Hopkins University, I read *Religion, Reason and Revelation* while searching for a defensible Christian philosophy. Clark's chapter on "God and Evil" convinced me that he alone among twentieth-century theologians had understood the meaning of the much used but little understood phrase "the sovereignty of God." His steamroller logic, impeccable English style, and clarity of expression shaped my thinking and my doctoral dissertation which, incidentally, was successfully defended before the Hopkins philosophy and politics faculties. Had it been influenced by Van Til or Gerstner rather than Clark, that might not have been the case.

Another title we intend to release in 1986 is *I & II Thessalonians*, another commentary by Clark. Would you like a sample? Try this:

In this simple address [to the Thessalonians in verse 1:1] a very important idea lies concealed in the seemingly innocuous phrase "to the church." Note that the letter is not addressed to any officer of the church. Even in *Philippians* 1:1, where Paul addresses bishops and deacons, he had just previously addressed "all the saints." For a thousand years the Papacy denied or at least curtailed the right of the laity to read God's word. This by itself was enough to justify the Reformation. And if some "practical" souls among the Protestants think there should be a minimum of

theology and maximum of application and exhortation, we can add that all Christians are divinely obligated to study the Scripture—all of it. Unfortunately most do not.

We think that *I & II Thessalonians* will be a very helpful book for laymen and leaders alike.

A third new book, God willing, will be *Ambitious To Be Well-Pleasing*, a centennial festschrift for Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia. The book will contain a long essay by Clark, "Lord God of Truth." As some of you may know, Clark taught at Reformed Episcopal Seminary early in his career. He always had high regard for some of the gentlemen long affiliated with the Seminary. Besides Clark, other contributors to the book include Jay Adams, Joni Eareckson Tada, Milton Fisher, Wayne Arndt, Allen Guelzo, Robert Westley Peach, John Howard-Smith, Theophilus J. Herter, Leonard Riches, and Robert K. Rudolph. No price has yet been set on the book.

A fourth new book will be *The Atonement*, a major section of Clark's systematic theology. Several other books we have published in recent years belong to the same series—*Faith and Saving Faith* and *The Trinity* to name two—which will be the major statement of Calvinist theology in this century.

As finances permit, we will publish more books, both new and old, in 1986. For The Foundation 1985 was the best year ever; and for Dr. Clark, to die was gain. Clark has left us the tools to clean and repair the filthy and ramshackle house that is contemporary Christian theology, and we intend to proceed with our work as quickly as God permits. If you would like to help, order any of our forthcoming books at thirty percent off list price and send your check with your order. We cannot guarantee delivery dates (nor can the printer, based on our past experience), but we do intend to publish them this year. If we do not, your money will be refunded.

Letters

The Trinity Review March, April 1986

Three years ago we printed some of the letters we have received from our readers. Letters are always welcome, and we try to reply to them all, although we sometimes fail. Here are some of the more recent that we have received:

The Mighty Mite

Dear Dr. Robbins,

My ailing ninety-year-old husband and I, a "disabled person," live on a small pension. How I wish I could send \$500 instead of \$5 for the wonderful work you're doing for our Lord.

J. S.

New York

Deplorable Apologetics

Dear Sir,

I wish to express my gratitude for your dedication in publishing the writing of Dr. Gordon H. Clark. The latest booklet is no exception in this expression. I have long awaited an answer to the "Westminster Seminary School of Apologetics." It is bad enough that we have to deal with evidentialism, but a weak presuppositionalist apologetic is deplorable.... My prayers with you, for indeed you need the continued support of God's grace to endure such labor.

M. H. S.

Florida

A Word Processor

Dear Brother Robbins,

After reading your publication, *The Trinity Review*, and reading your request for help, my wife and I decided to try and help as we could. We are impressed with your stewardship and if I could type as well as you could manage finances, I would be a word processor.

Please accept this small gift and as we are able with God's grace, we will continue to help. May God bless your work in the furthering of His Kingdom.

S. A.

Kansas

A Permanent Impact

Dear Dr. Robbins,

Thank you for your determination to promote the writings of Dr. Clark. You are making a greater impact on the religious scene than you probably suspect. Literature endures for generations, and your publications will have along-term effect on Christianity—to the glory of God!

N. J.

South Dakota

Clear-headed Reasoning

Gentlemen:

It's fortunate that you solicit for funds now and then. We tend to forget people who don't ask all the time, which is especially unfortunate when the product is consistently good (as in your case).

I look forward to your publications. Thank God for clear-headed reasoning and a bold voice, tempered by the love of Christ.

J. I.

New York

Transforming the Mind

Dear Sirs:

As a layman who seeks truth and understands that real regeneration is a process of transformation of the mind, I have appreciated the focus and challenge the Foundation (and other like-minded Christians) has so presented to me. The works of systematic theology by Dr. Clark I have read to date have aided in doctrinal discernment that hitherto was clouded by inconsistency and nebulous cliches. My appreciation for your efforts is truly greater than this donation. Thank you.

S. F.

New York

Philosophy's loss/medicine's gain

Dear Dr. Robbins:

I just finished your book on feminism and particularly thank you for your essay "The Crisis of Our Time." In a time when so many speak of various books or events as "blessing their hearts" it is a genuine pleasure to also have my *head* blessed.

When our director was in college, he was initially a philosophy major but changed because of the general vacuity, meaninglessness, and absence of absolutes that he found in the field as presented to him at that time. Upon being introduced to Dr. Clark, he commented, "Why didn't we have this when I was in school? I could have stayed in philosophy!"

We pray for revival in individuals, in families, in the church, and in our nation should it escape God's further judgment for our national apostasy. What you are doing through Trinity Foundation is helping us be better prepared for this warfare.

J. A.

Kentucky

Reprehensible

Gentlemen:

Having read *Logic* by Dr. Clark, I have two objections.

The substitution of Logic for LOGOS in *John* 1:1 by John Robbins in the foreword is reprehensible. Christ cannot be confined to one aspect of his character.

If your advertisement calling Dr. Clark the "American Augustine" is true, will he soon declare Rome to be the city of God and the Catholic Church to be sacerdotal?

Nonetheless, the work *Logic* is fresh, important, and usable at \$8.95....

D. A. G.

California

Pseudo-Reformed Ministers

Dear Mr. Robbins,

Today I read your book, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries, Part One: Feminism*. You expressed my concerns when I read the books by Knight, Foh, and especially Hurley. As a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, I have been disturbed by the number of ministers who believe that women can do all that any non-elder man can do. It is as if they wished that *I Cor.* 11:3 did not teach "The head of woman is man...."

My [research] gave me the opportunity to read the writings of the Westminster Divines and to see how their views differ from the views widely held by "Reformed" ministers today....

The writer is a P.C.A. minister whom I wish to protect by not identifying him in any way. When enough laymen are educated in the truth and the present ecclesiastical power structure is replaced, then it will not be necessary to keep such letter writers anonymous. —Editor

A Dangerous Book

Dear John,

The analysis [of *Classical Apologetics*] in the September/October 1985 *Trinity Review* which both you and Dr. Clark presented is most welcome, as I believe that *Classical Apologetics* is a dangerous book—not only does it have a surface plausibility, but it lays claim to be a "classical" apologetic, thus implying that presuppositionalism is a radical modernism of some unspecified sort. I especially enjoyed Clark's comments on the Gerstner-Sproul misuse of Jonathan Edwards—I have long believed that Gerstner the historian has hugely misrepresented Edwards (contrast Gerstner's *Steps to Salvation* with Norman Pettit's last chapter in *The Heart Prepared* [1966], and Norman Fiering's delineation in *Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought and Its British Context* [1981] of Edward's intractable antipathy to the whole Hutcheson-Butler-Paley gospel which underlies evidentialism), and now Gerstner the apologist proposes to manufacture a natural theology for him. Imagine,

Bishop Butler and Jonathan Edwards, together at last!

A. G.

Pennsylvania

Shining Beacons of Truth

Hi There—

Thank you very much for all your work, you're one of the few shining beacons of truth left in this country. I praise God for your work.

D. M.

Georgia

The Apostasy

Dear Brethren,

I received Dr. Clark's book, *What Do Presbyterians Believe? Thank you so much! Many Presbyterians are abandoning their heritage. II Timothy 3 and 4.*

The writer is a leading minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. —Editor

We Regret It Too

Dear John,

I appreciated very much your splendid article on Gordon Clark. [Special Issue, April 1985]. Although I did not know that he had been ill, I suspected by virtue of his age that his departure would not be too far off. The announcement left an empty feeling. Who on the horizon can carry on in his footsteps? I only regret that all of his manuscripts had not been published during his life. For your dedicated labor in this respect, I am indeed grateful.

H. D.

Illinois

P.S. Just a further note to express my appreciation for the *excellent* cover designs on his books. They indeed set the tone for his writings.

Free Books for Seminaries

Dear Mr. Robbins,

I read with sadness of heart and deep appreciation your fine tribute to Gordon Clark. I am looking forward to greeting him for the first time in the presence of the Lord.

Someday, I'd like to report to him that the sad neglect of his books by seminaries was overruled by means of your "Free Books for Seminary Students" proposal. Neither I nor my son...who attends _____ Seminary were aware of the failure of seminaries to use Gordon Clark's books. I believe your proposal to be a bold and honest one which I commend you for and support....

Enclosed is another check ... in support of publications and your labors on behalf of Gordon Clark in our mission to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

E. C.

California

Later this year we will report on the Free Books program and the competition for the Clark Prize in Apologetics. —Editor

A Subjective Mess

Dear Sirs,

I'm an American missionary engaged in church planting work here in South Africa. I saw your advertisement in a recent *Christianity Today*....

In South Africa, we find ourselves submerged in a mess of religious subjectivism that is amazing to behold. In this context, I have found, in recent years, the books of Gordon Clark to be very helpful.

B. B.

South Africa

Offensive Cover

Dear Mr. Robbins:

The Trinity Review March, April 1986

I was pleased to receive my copy of Gordon Clark's *The Trinity* today. I have already begun reading it and I am looking forward to an enlightening and joyful experience.

I was saddened with the cover illustration, however. Whatever the merits of the work by Poussin, I find it inappropriate for a work of Reformed theology to be sent to the public in this fashion. I don't know what Dr. Clark's views were regarding pictorial representations of our Lord, but certainly there are many potential readers in the Reformed community (my own denomination is the O. P. C.) who would take offense at such a cover.

This is to be interpreted as constructive criticism. I am young in the work of the Foundation and pray that the Lord will continue to bless you. Perhaps some other illustration might be considered for the future printings which are sure to come.

J. W. C.

Connecticut

Petty Diatribes

Dr. Robbins:

I have enjoyed *Trinity Review* with its meaty practical theology.

However, the article in March/April [1985] issue on Roman Catholicism reminds me of the diatribes of many years ago. Haven't you bothered to learn anything about the Catholic Church? The information in this article is all half-and untruths that have been answered *many* times by both Catholic and *fair* Protestant theologians.

To repeat it in your journal is petty, to say the least. If this is what you have come to, please take my name off your mailing list.

E. R.

California

This is not what we have come to; it is what we have always been. Semper eadem is our motto. We're sorry to hear that you've changed. —Editor

Doctrine-bashing

Dear Sirs:

Thanks for placing your ad in *The Presbyterian Journal*. It really struck a chord in me. I am a member of a church where the pastor spends a fair bit of energy informing his flock that spiritual development and spiritual doctrine have nothing to do with one another. One feels for the new Christian within hearing range of that stuff.

When I saw your reference to the passage in Peter's epistle [2 Peter 1:2-4] I went to look it up thinking I could combine it with several others for use when this particular sheep speaks to his shepherd about doctrine-bashing. But then it occurred to me how silly it was to appeal to Scripture to try to convince an evangelical minister that revelation matters.

M. O.

Oklahoma

"Evangelical" used to mean "Scripture alone." Now it apparently means "experience alone."—Editor

Eye-opening

Dear Christian Brothers,

We received in the mail ... a copy of *The Trinity Review*, January/February 1985, No. 41, on "Abortion, the Christian, and the State" by John Robbins. This is an excellent, eye-opening message, and it has convicted our hearts at Christ's Church to want to become active in opposing abortion in a public way. We have a newsletter mailing list of 425 Christian families across the country, and we would really like to forward a copy of this publication to everyone on that mailing list....

We commend you for your love of God and his precious truths, and we look forward to hearing from you.

G. R.

New York

Terrific

The Trinity Review March, April 1986

Dear John:

I wanted to thank you—much too belatedly—for sending me the two terrific volumes by Gordon Clark. The *Christian View of Men and Things* is exactly the kind of book that I wish someone had given me when I was in school. As things turned out, I have had to pick up a few of its lessons sporadically by myself. Our educational system is really failing us when it comes to transmitting the wisdom of our civilization to new generations. I am only glad that people like you are working hard to keep such books in print.

The author is a member of the President's National Security Council in Washington. —Editor

Intellectual Ammunition

Mr. Robbins,

My wife and I have agreed to give \$10 a month to "Trinity Foundation" as our part to help have Dr. Clark's and your own writings continue. For about ten years *Atlas Shrugged* was my bible and after conversion I wanted the intellectual ammunition to show the false and erroneous thinking expounded by Ayn Rand and her mouthpieces that you meet everyday. Your answer to her did that and I thank you....

My wife was acquainted with yours and Dr. Clark's writings through me and immediately grasped the importance that these writings put on the intellect. We are both committed to the idea that our minds are guided by Christ and his indwelling Holy Spirit and are saddened by the disdain shown by Christians toward so-called intellectual pursuits. We don't consider ourselves intellectuals, just two Christians who want to know more about God and His precepts.

A & B. C.

Colorado

Significant Role

To the Trinity Foundation:

I am writing to request official rules and entry forms for the Clark Prize in Apologetics....

I am pleased that you are offering this prize in honor of Dr. Clark. I was a personal friend, and student, of Dr. Clark, at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary in Colorado, and at Covenant College. He played a very significant role in "teaching" me to think, and in bringing me to the Reformed faith.

S. T.

Missouri

Defending the Faith

Dear Dr. Robbins:

My deepest thanks to you for publishing Dr. Clark's textbook on *Logic*. It is the most needed book for our generation and certainly far exceeds any other textbook on the subject I have seen, not only for its Scriptural orientation but in clarity and profundity. I was very impressed and helped tremendously.

Your book on Feminism, *Scripture Twisting*, is also quite needed and was very well done. I have agreed with your conclusions for years but lately I had begun to waver in the face of Jordan's argumentation (and he borrows heavily from Hurley, though he would vehemently refuse ordination to women.) You have done a most masterful job defending the faith.

R. M.

Missouri

Teachers will be judged

Dear Mr. Robbins:

I received your fund-appeal letter in the mail the other day. Unfortunately at this time I am an unemployed seminary graduate who cannot really afford to send anything.

There is such an urgent need today for people to faithfully uphold the truth of the Reformation. If there were more witnesses for truth, then perhaps I could have avoided many of the spiritual pitfalls which dominated by earlier years as a Christian. I

The Trinity Review March, April 1986

was raised in Romanism, became involved in the charismatic movement, and eventually earned two Masters degrees from the Assemblies of God seminary in Springfield, Missouri. During that time, I discovered the errors of tongueism, and embraced the Reformed faith.

Now after almost ten years, for the first time in my life, I am a member of a church which preaches anything resembling what the Scriptures actually teach. I have years of education behind me which are totally useless in helping me find employment, and which offer no practical use for my personal life except for giving me the credentials of being able to personally experience some of the most heretical movements in the world today. Everything I know is *INSPITE OF* not *BECAUSE OF* my education.

Much of this could have probably been avoided if there were more churches and individuals speaking the truth today. Therefore, I wish to support anyone doing so, if not financially, then at least prayerfully....

May the Lord bless your work.

T. M. C.

Nebraska

No Fellowship here

We also send letters. Below is one that was never answered, despite repeated mailing to Mr. Colson and conversations with his secretary. Stonewalling, it seems, did not end at Watergate. —Editor

May 21, 1985 Mr. Charles Colson

Post Office Box 17500

Washington, D.C. 20041

Dear Mr. Colson:

I have just finished reading *Loving God* and listening to the series of tapes based on the book, and I would like to make some comments about them.

In both the book and the tapes you make many true statements, for which I am thankful. Your defense of the inerrancy of Scripture is highly commendable. But you also make many false statements. As a teacher, you ought to appreciate James' warning about the severe judgment teachers will face and try to eliminate as many mistakes from your book as possible.

Let me be more specific. In both your book and tapes, you emphasize paradox. This is most unfortunate, since "paradox" is a code word of existentialism and neo-orthodoxy, a word used to express euphemistically the idea that the Bible is self-contradictory. Now I believe that you do not mean to endorse any view impugning the rationality of God. But you ought to realize that by publishing a book you are entering a theological conversation that was already in progress long before you spoke. In that conversation, the word "paradox" had already become a polite, subtle, deceptive way of denying the logical consistency of Scripture. By using the word, you are conveying that idea to your readers, whether you mean to or not. In the legitimate sense of the word, "paradox" means a seeming or apparent contradiction. But what seems contradictory to you may not seem so to me. Paradox is purely subjective. There is no good reason to emphasize this subjectivism as you do. A paradox, to quote Gordon Clark's definition, is a charley horse between the ears. It can be removed through rational massage.

Second, in your book and tapes you praise Mother Teresa very highly as one of the "contemporary giants of the faith" and "the greatest saint in the world." I do not know which faith you are speaking about, Christianity or Roman Catholicism, since you seem to think that the two are identical or at least that Catholicism is a species of the genus Christianity. I am enclosing a sermon by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher, on the subject of Catholicism. I urge you to read it. If R. C. Sproul did not tell you about Lloyd-Jones, he should have. After you have read the sermon, you will realize what a great betrayal of Christ your Protestant-Catholic communion-mass in Belfast was. It is this sort of mistake that is inexcusable in

one who presumes to teach the church through his books and lectures.

Third, in your book and tapes you attack creeds and philosophies and emphasize the Person and cross of Christ. You contrast a "magnificent philosophy" with a "living truth," and "academic theory" with a "living Person." But the Bible makes no such contrast. Indeed, it teaches the opposite: As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Christ said, "My words are spirit and they are life." The words are the Spirit. The Gospel, the truth, the words are powerful. There is no contrast in the Bible between words or teaching or doctrine or philosophy and Christ. There is a contrast between profession of belief and actual belief, but not between Christ and his words. The contrast is a figment of modern psychology. We know Christ only insofar as we know about him. One cannot know Christ, or any other person, except by knowing propositions about him. Knowledge is always knowledge of a proposition. Saving faith is always assent to one or more Biblical propositions. Therefore, please do not disparage knowledge or teaching or doctrine, for by doing so, you are disparaging Christ. As Calvin put it, we owe to Scripture the same reverence that we owe to God.

Fourth, in your book (37), you write that faith is "not just knowledge, but knowledge acted upon. It is not just belief, but belief lived-out—practiced." This blurring of the distinction between faith and practice is fatal to Christianity, for it makes the conclusion inescapable that we are justified by faith and works. Augustine defined faith as knowledge with assent. So should you. Practice is the result of faith, not part of faith. Faith is the cause; practice is the result. Bonhoeffer's statement is precise and true: Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes. If a person does not believe, he cannot be obedient, no matter how "good" his behavior is; and if a person believes, he will be obedient, as James says. To put it in more technical language, sanctification is a necessary consequence of justification; and justification is a necessary precedent for sanctification. But justification and sanctification are not the same. To confuse them is to be ignorant of the Gospel.

Fifth, speaking of justification, you failed to mention it once, in either your book or tapes. Since it is the heart of the Gospel, why?

Sixth, a very minor point. There is a glaring but insignificant contradiction on page 68 of your book. Line two reads: "The first [proposition] is the shakiest." The first line of the second paragraph following reads: "The myth theory is even more untenable than the mistake theory." Which is it?

Seventh, you believe that the Resurrection "breaks what might otherwise be considered a circular argument" (69). But how do we know about the Resurrection? Only by Scripture. The relationship, if you will recall your high school geometry, is that of axiom and theorem. The inerrancy of Scripture is the axiom of Christianity. One does not, need not, and cannot prove axioms. Yet they are indispensable; every philosophy and every person must have axioms, or there would be no philosophy and no persons. From this axiom, all other Christian doctrines follow, including the doctrine of the Resurrection. They are theorems. I urge you to read *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, a copy of which is enclosed.

Eighth, on page 127 you make a contrast between obeying moral rules and obeying God. But Christ made no such contrast: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Both Paul and John define love as obedience to the law. You seem to have the right idea on this page, but in trying to be eloquent, you make a false disjunction. If we owe to Scripture the same reverence that we owe to God, then we owe to his commands the same obedience we owe to him. In fact, "obeying God" is a meaningless phrase unless it means "obeying his commandments." To hold otherwise is to posit the possibility of obeying God while disobeying his commandments, an impious suggestion if there ever was one.

I am enclosing some books and essays that I hope you will take the time to read. You are obviously interested in truth, but I fear that your teachers have not taught you some of the basic lessons a Christian in the twentieth century needs to know. Please read these materials carefully. If you have any comments

or questions about them, I can be reached at the address and telephone number below.

Sincerely yours,

John Robbins

3606 Cool crest Drive

Jefferson, Maryland 21755

(301) 371-7155

Enclosures:

A Christian View of Men and Things

God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics

Biblical Predestination

The Biblical Doctrine of Man

What Is Faith?

The Sovereignty of God

Social Action and Evangelical Order

The Coming Caesars

God and Logic

Abortion, the Christian, and the State

Roman Catholicism

The Trinity Catalogue

New Books from the Trinity Foundation

Competence and Credentials

A recent debate between two clergymen about apologetics in *The Presbyterian Journal* illustrates some confusion among the clergy about credentials and competence. This confusion has been

institutionalized in many church governments, so it is not an inconsequential or trivial matter.

Dr. Greg Bahnsen, criticizing *Classical Apologetics*, the recent book by Messrs. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, took the three authors to task for an alleged lack of academic credentials. It seems that his assertions were false, but what is more interesting is his raising of the issue of credentials in the first place. Many clergymen, and many churches, confuse credentials with competence. They seem to reason, if a man has graduated from college and from seminary, he is competent to be a member of the clergy. If he has done neither or only one, he is not competent to be a member of the clergy. ("Clergy," I hasten to point out, is a concept alien to the New Testament Church; the Bible speaks only of elders and deacons, and there is only one set of requirements for all elders; but that is another matter.) The confusion of academic credentials with competence is a most serious error, and a most common one.

Many of the credentialed theologians of our day are incompetent. Moreover, some of the best theologians never attended seminary. The Biblical requirement for an elder is that he be "apt to teach," not a graduate of a seminary. But most churches have substituted seminary degrees for "apt to teach." Paul demanded competence, not credentials.

Competence in teaching is not to be determined by the degrees after one's name, but solely, I repeat, solely, by one's ability to articulate the truths of Scripture clearly, accurately, completely, and boldly. For too long local congregations have surrendered their right to judge who is apt to teach and who is qualified to be a "teaching elder" to the credentialed faculties of theological seminaries, faculties that all too often are incompetent. It is the Word of God that constitutes the standard against which candidates for church leadership are to be measured, not the faculties of colleges and seminaries. Credentials do not necessarily imply competence, and competence does not require credentials. The sooner Christians learn that lesson, the better off we all will be.