

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.

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An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark

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Who Is Gordon Clark?

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 will; 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 *Bereshith* 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.

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 gospellers 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.

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