

# 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. (2 *Corinthians* 10:3-6)

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Email: tjtrinityfound@aol.com    Website: www.trinityfoundation.org    Telephone: 423.743.0199    Fax: 423.743.2005

## **The Westminster Confession of Faith and Logic** by W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

In the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6)<sup>1</sup> we read:

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

B. B. Warfield, commenting on this section of the *Confession*, wrote:

It must be observed...that the teachings and prescriptions of Scripture are not confined by the *Confession* to what is "expressly set down in Scripture." Men are required to believe and obey not only what is "expressly set down in Scripture," but also what "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." This is the strenuous and universal contention of the Reformed theology against the Socinians and Arminians, who desired to confine the authority of Scripture to its literal assertions; and it involves a characteristic honoring of reason as the instrument for the ascertainment of truth. We must depend upon our human faculties to ascertain what Scripture says; we cannot suddenly abnegate them and refuse their guidance in determining what Scripture means. This is not, of course, to make reason the ground of the authority of inferred doctrines and duties. Reason is

the instrument of discovery of all doctrines and duties, whether "expressly set down in Scripture" or "by good and necessary consequence deduced from Scripture": but their authority, when once discovered, is derived from God, who reveals them and prescribes them in Scripture, either by literal assertion or by necessary implication.

It is the Reformed contention, reflected here by the *Confession*, that the sense of Scripture is Scripture, and that men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications. The re-emergence in recent controversies of the plea that the authority of Scripture is to be confined to its expressed declarations, and that human logic is not to be trusted in divine things, is, therefore, a direct denial of a fundamental position of Reformed theology, explicitly affirmed in the *Confession*, as well as an abnegation of fundamental reason, which would not only render thinking in a system impossible, but would logically involve the denial of the authority of all doctrine of the Trinity, and would logically involve the denial of all doctrine whatsoever, since no single doctrine of whatever simplicity can be ascertained from Scripture except by the process of the understanding. It is, therefore, an unimportant incident that the recent plea against the use of human logic in determining doctrine has been most sharply put forward in order to justify the rejection of a doctrine which is explicitly taught, and that repeatedly, in the very letter of Scripture; if the plea is valid at all, it destroys at once our confidence in all doctrines, no one of which is ascertained or formulated without the aid of human logic.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All references to the Westminster Standards, comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, are from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 226- 227.

What Warfield is asserting (and agreeing with) is that the Westminster divines had a high view of logic. Logic, human logic, says the *Confession* (and Warfield), is a necessary tool to be used in the study and exposition of the Word of God. In fact, so important was the proper use of logic to the divines, that they required Gospel ministers to be trained in this area prior to ordination. In the section entitled “The Form of Church Government,” we read that a part of the ordination examination tested “whether he [the ordinand] has skill in logic and philosophy.”<sup>3</sup>

Warfield is not the only one who has understood the importance of logic. Another twentieth century theologian, James O. Buswell, said, “When we accept the laws of logic, we are not accepting laws external to God to which He must be subject, but we are accepting laws of truth which are derived from God’s holy character.” And centuries earlier Augustine wrote, “The science of reasoning is of very great service in searching into and unraveling all sorts of questions that come up in Scripture.... The validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men, but it is observed and noted by them that they may be able to learn and teach it; for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God.”<sup>4</sup>

What Buswell and Augustine are saying is that logic is eternal; it is not created; it “has its origin with God.” Or as the twentieth century theologian and philosopher Gordon Clark has written, “Logic is fixed, universal, necessary, and irreplaceable...[because] God is a rational being, the architecture of whose mind is logic.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Some Aberrant Views of Logic**

As important as the proper use of logic is for an understanding of God and His Word, there are a number of modern day theologians and philosophers who deprecate logic. They teach that there is no point of contact between divine logic and human logic. Here we have what Ronald Nash calls “the religious revolt against logic.”<sup>6</sup> And the revolt is not only from the Neo-orthodox camp. One would expect men such as Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner to take such an irrational position. After all, Neo-orthodoxy is known as the “theology of paradox,” in which faith must “curb” logic.

But this pervasive spirit of misology has infected even those who make no claim to Neo-orthodoxy.

Herman Dooyeweerd, for example, avers that there is a “boundary” which exists between God and the cosmos. The laws of logic, of valid inference, which are applicable under the boundary, do not have any application with regard to God. Then there is Donald Bloesch. In his *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation*,<sup>7</sup> Bloesch openly denies that there is any point of contact between God’s logic and human logic (121, 293). The truth of Biblical revelation, says the author, can never “be caught through the analytical methods of formal logic” (55). Bloesch frankly acknowledges that “I depart from some of my evangelical colleagues in that I understand the divine content of Scripture not as rationally comprehensible teaching but as the mystery of salvation declared in Jesus Christ” (114). Incredulously, he even goes so far as to say that “revelation cannot be assimilated into a comprehensive, rational system of truth” (289).

Sadly, the “religious revolt against logic” extends into the camp of genuine orthodoxy as well. Edwin H. Palmer, for one, teaches that the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty and man’s responsibility is a logical paradox. It cannot be resolved before the bar of human reason. The Calvinist says Palmer, “in the face of all logic,” believes both sides of the paradox to be true, even though he “realizes that what he advocates is ridiculous.”<sup>8</sup>

Then there is Cornelius Van Til. Dr. Van Til is well known for his assertion that the Bible is full of logical paradoxes. John Robbins, in his *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*,<sup>9</sup> cites numerous examples of Van Til’s deprecation of logic. For example, in spite of the fact that the Bible teaches that God is not the author of confusion (*1 Corinthians* 14:33), Dr. Van Til maintained that “all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory” (25). He frequently spoke of logic (not the misuse of logic, but logic itself) in a disparaging manner. He spoke of “logicism” and “the static categories of logic.” And with references to the *Confession*’s (1:6) statement quoted above, Van Til

<sup>7</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Intervarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Baker Book House, 1972), 85.

<sup>9</sup> John R. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986). The quotes used here are taken from Robbins’ book, where one may also find the title and page number of Van Til’s statements. As best as I can determine, Robbins has accurately quoted Van Til.

<sup>3</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 413.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Elihu Carranza, *Logic Workbook for Logic by Gordon H. Clark* (The Trinity Foundation, 1992), 97, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon H. Clark, “God and Logic,” *The Trinity Review* (November/December, 1980), edited by John W. Robbins, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), Chapter 9.

commented: “This statement should not be used as a justification for deductive exegesis” (24-25). Yet, deductive exegesis is precisely what the *Confession* is endorsing.

Ronald Nash also saw the problem with Van Til and his deprecation of human logic. Nash wrote, “I once asked Van Til if, when some human being knows that 1 plus 1 equals 2, that human being’s knowledge is identical with God’s knowledge. The question, I thought was innocent enough. Van Til’s only answer was to smile, shrug his shoulders, and declare that the question was improper in the sense that it had no answer. It had no answer because any proposed answer would presume what it is impossible for Van Til, namely, that laws like those found in mathematics and logic apply beyond the [Dooyeweerdian] boundary.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, unlike Warfield, Buswell, Augustine, Clark, and the Westminster divines, Van Til, like Herman Dooyeweerd, assumed that the laws of logic are created rather than eternally existing in the mind of God.

### **The Biblical View of Logic<sup>11</sup>**

The Bible teaches that God is a God of knowledge (*1 Samuel* 2:3; *Romans* 16:27). Being eternally omniscient (*Psalms* 139:1-6), God is not only the source of His own knowledge He is also the source and determiner of all truth. That which is true is true because God thinks it so. As the *Westminster Confession* says, God “is truth itself” (1:4). And since that which is not rational cannot be true (*1 Timothy* 6:20), it follows that God must be rational; the laws of logic are the way He thinks.

This is, of course, what the Bible teaches. God is not the author of confusion (*1 Corinthians* 14:33). He is a rational being, the “LORD God of truth” (*Psalms* 31:5). So much does the Bible speak of God as the God of logic, that in *John* 1:1 Jesus Christ is called the “Logic” of God: “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God” (the English word “logic” is derived from the Greek word *Logos* used in this verse). *John* 1:1 emphasized the rationality of God the Son. Logic is as eternal as God himself because “the *Logos* is God.” Hence, God and logic cannot be separated; logic is the characteristic of God’s thinking. In the words of Clark, “God and logic are one and the same first principle, for John wrote that Logic was God.”<sup>12</sup>

This will give us a greater understanding of the relationship of logic and Scripture. Since Logic is God, and since Scripture is a part of “the mind of Christ” (*1 Corinthians* 2:16), it follows that Scripture must be logical. What is said in Scripture is God’s infallible and inerrant thought. It expresses the mind of God, because God and His Word are one. Hence, as the *Confession* (1:5) teaches, the Bible is a logically consistent book: there is a “consent of all the parts.” This is why Paul could “reason” with persons “from the Scriptures” (*Acts* 17:2).

Further, logic is embedded in Scripture. The very first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” necessitates the validity of the most fundamental law of logic: the law of contradiction (A is not non-A). *Genesis* 1:1 teaches that God is the Creator of all things. Too, it says that He created “in the beginning.” It does not teach, therefore, that God is not the Creator of all things, nor does it maintain that God created all things 100 or 1,000 years after the beginning. This verse assumes that the words God, created, beginning, and so forth, all have definite meanings. It also assumes that they do not mean certain things. For speech to be intelligible, words must have univocal meanings. What makes the words meaningful, and revelation and communication possible is that each word conforms to the law of contradiction.

This most fundamental of the laws of logic cannot be proved. For any attempt to prove the law of contradiction would presuppose the truth of the law and therefore beg the question. Simply put, it is not possible to reason without using the law of contradiction. In this sense, the laws of logic are axiomatic. But they are only axiomatic because they are fixed or embedded in the Word of God.

Also fixed in Scripture are the two other principle laws of logic: the law of identity (A is A) and the law of the excluded middle (A is either B or non-B). The former is taught in *Exodus* 3:14, in the name of God itself: “I AM WHO I AM.” And the latter is found, for example, in the words of Christ: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (*Luke* 11:23).

Logic, then, is embedded in Scripture. This is why Scripture, rather than the law of contradiction, is selected as the axiomatic starting point of Christian epistemology. Similarly, God is not made the axiom, because all of our knowledge of God comes from Scripture. “God” as an axiom, without Scripture, is merely a name. Scripture, as the axiom, defines God. This is why the *Westminster Confession of Faith* begins

<sup>10</sup> Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Much of this article from this point on will follow Gordon H. Clark’s “God and Logic.”

<sup>12</sup> Clark, “God and Logic,” 2.

with the doctrine of Scripture in Chapter 1. Chapters 2-5, on the doctrine of God, follow.

As we are taught in the Bible, man is the image and glory of God (*Genesis 1:27; 1 Corinthians 11:7*). God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (*Genesis 2:7*). Adam became a type of soul that is superior to that of non-rational animals (2 *Peter 2:12; Jude 10*). Man, as God’s image bearer, is a rational being (*Colossians 3:10*).

Moreover, because Christ is the *Logos* who “gives [epistemological] light to every man who comes into the world” (*John 1:9*), we are to understand that there is a point at which man’s logic meets God’s logic. In fact, *John 1:9* denies that logic is arbitrary (as per Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, and Jean-Paul Sartre); it also denies polylogism, *i.e.*, that there may be many kinds of logic. According to John, there is only one kind of logic: God’s logic. And the *Logos* gives to every image bearer of God the ability to think logically.

Man has the capacity to think logically, to communicate with God, and to have God communicate with Him. God created Adam with a mind structured in a manner similar to His own. In the Scripture God has given man an intelligible message, “words of truth and reason” (*Acts 26:25*). God has also given man language that enables him to converse rationally with his Creator (*Exodus 4:11*). Such thought and conversation would not be possible without the laws of logic. Logic is indispensable to all (God-given) human thought and speech. This being the case, we must insist that there is no “mere human logic” as contrasted with a divine logic. Such fallacious thinking does disservice to the *Logos* of God himself.

One might argue here that the fall of man rendered logic defective. This, however, is not the case. The noetic effects of sin indeed hinder man’s ability to reason correctly (*Romans 1:21*), but this in no way implies that the laws of logic themselves are impinged. In the words of Gordon Clark:

Logic, the law of contradiction, is not affected by sin. Even if everyone constantly violated the laws of logic, they would not be less true than if everyone constantly observed them. Or, to use another example, no matter how many errors in subtraction can be found on the stubs of our check-books, mathematics itself is unaffected.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (The Trinity Foundation, [1952] 2005), 210.

As we have seen, the laws of logic are eternally fixed in the mind of God, and they cannot be affected; they are eternally valid.

### Conclusion

John Robbins correctly stated that “there is no greater threat facing the Christian church at the end of the twentieth century [as well as the beginning of the twenty-first century, WGC] than the irrationalism that now controls our entire culture.... Hedonism and secular humanism are not to be feared nearly so much as the belief that logic, ‘mere human logic,’ is an untrustworthy tool for understanding the Bible.”<sup>14</sup>

To avoid this irrationalism, which in effect denies that man is the image and glory of God, we must return to the *Logos* theology of the Westminster divines. We must insist that logic and truth are the same for man as they are for God. This is not to say that man knows as much truth as God knows. God is omniscient; His is truth itself, and that which is true is true simply because He thinks it to be so. This, of course, is not the case with man. Whereas truth to God is intuitive, man learns truth discursively. But it is the same truth. This is of necessity the case, because God knows all truth, and unless man knows that which God knows, his ideas cannot be true. It is essential to maintain that there is a coincidence between the logic and truth of God and the logic and truth of man. God thinks logically and He calls on man to do the same.

Dr. Clark said it this way:

Christianity claims that God is the God of truth; that He is wisdom; that His Son is His *Logos*, the Logic, the Word of God. Man was created a reasonable being so that he could understand God’s message to him.... Christianity is a rational religion. It has an intellectually apprehensible content. Its revelation can be understood.<sup>15</sup>

What must be done? As Dr. Robbins averred, we need to “embrace with passion the Scriptural ideals of clarity in both thought and speech; let us recognize, with Christ and the Westminster Assembly, the indispensability of logic...and let us defend the consistency and intelligibility of the Bible. Then, and only then, will Christianity have a bright and glorious future in America and throughout the Earth.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), edited by Ronald H. Nash, 137. (See *Clark and His Critics*, 2008, 114.)

<sup>16</sup> Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*, 40.