

# **The Necessity of Gordon Clark**

*by*  
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With many, I would have to agree, that Gordon Clark is one of the most interesting and prolific philosophers of our time. His works span a huge variety of topics and issues. And the best way to get in touch with the philosophy of Gordon Clark is to read the philosophy of Gordon Clark. Naturally, this is the best way to get in touch with the thought of any philosopher. Clark's system of thought has largely been misrepresented and misunderstood throughout most of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It will be the topic of this essay to express the importance and necessity of Gordon Clark, to display the depth, power and beauty found in his thinking.

Clark employed a method of philosophy that was entirely Christian (a notion that is quite rare, if not, entirely absent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). The rubrics of Clark do not merely cover theology, but stretch out to encompass the whole of human thought, as Carl F. H. Henry has said "Among articulate Christian philosophers on the American scene, none has addressed the broad sweep of contemporary concerns from an evangelical Protestant view more comprehensively than Gordon H. Clark"<sup>i</sup>; Clark's aim was to produce a comprehensive theory of knowledge.<sup>ii</sup>

The fundamental strength behind Clark's philosophy is his intense dedication to the authority of scripture. Many of today's modern theologians and Christian philosophers superficially endorse the authority of scripture, they do not take all of scripture; in fact, there are a few who are simply embarrassed by the authority of scripture.<sup>iii</sup> There is much that can be said about this subtle demise regarding scripture, but for now (because it is not the topic of this essay) we will say that it is most unfortunate and unnecessary.

Clark's system of philosophy and method of apologetics has been called 'Scripturalism'.<sup>iv</sup> This is certainly a good name for a system that has scripture as its sole foundation. Sadly, many sincere Christians have neglected the philosophy and apologetics of Gordon Clark. For all the reasons that could be given as to why, we may safely conclude that this is not because Gordon Clark was impotent as a scholar or unbiblical as a Christian. Rather, I think the best explanation as to why the philosophy of Gordon Clark has been cast in the shadows, is because Gordon Clark represents a system that is intensely scriptural and fiercely logical. Two solid traits and virtues that stand in direct opposition to most of evangelical Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Clark is known for pursuing an idea or proposition to its logical end; this is partly why many might find Clark's arguments difficult to follow. In short, we might say that men in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are not used to Clark's consistency, higher forms of education (such as philosophy) and purely scriptural apologetics. In fact, it might be noted, that many are downright offended by the philosophy of Gordon Clark, thinking it to be somewhat arrogant.<sup>v</sup>

Another factor that contributes to the neglect of Clark's apologetic is the rise of Van tilian apologetes and theologians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is everywhere these days, we hear of the apologetical methods of Van til. It doesn't take long before one learns of the

controversy between these two men. Certainly, there is a large number arguing for Van til, whereas those faithful to the truth of Clark's method do not get the air time of the those pushing Van til.

Another thing to be said for Clark is that he was an educated philosopher; his books deal with a tremendous amount of ancient, as well as modern philosophy. This has, no doubt, made it difficult for the general community of believers to appreciate the depth and weight of his arguments. Of course, the paradox in this situation is that many students are willing to sift through the convoluted prose<sup>vi</sup> that make up the apologetics of Van til, while at the same time, completely ignoring the clear, concise and accurate apologetics of Gordon Clark. The difference between these two men is quite staggering.

It is really a matter beyond dispute that most of today's apologetical methods are entirely Catholic, and may be considered just another persuasion from the church of Rome.<sup>vii</sup> The use of evidential apologetics has largely increased since the death of C.S. Lewis.<sup>viii</sup> Prominent Christian colleges such as Biola are dominated exclusively by evidential methods in apologetics.<sup>ix</sup> Clark was no evidential apologist; in fact, he presents, perhaps the best arguments ever raised against evidential systems of apologetics. We might note, that this is just one example of Clark keeping in step with the spirit of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>x</sup>

Because the great wave of thought in the last century has been so centered on empirical observation and the use of scientific investigation to arrive at knowledge, commitment to presuppositionalism has been ruled totally out of the question. Not only do Roman evidential arguments have a great deal of difficulty proving the Triune God with a Thomistic argument, but they also produce a bias against all presuppositional methods.<sup>xi</sup> This wave of rationalist, empirical thought is another reason why the methods and philosophy of Gordon Clark have been neglected in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Clark's vigorous attack on empiricism and agnostic-rationalism, representing illegitimate systems of philosophy has not made him out to be popular among modern apologists and philosophers.

With Clark's method comes Clark's foundational axiom (the most important tenet of Clarks system). As we have said, Gordon Clark was a Scripturalist, and in today's world this is certainly an uncomfortable position to hold, teach or defend. Clark's apologetic is a profound continuance of Reformation theology. Indeed, the very first principle of the reformation *sola scripture*, upon which all other principles of theology are founded, is also the very first principle in Clark's apologetic. To deviate from this principle is to deviate from truth, reality and wander into the world of pagan philosophy. Something all too many men seem to do with a vigor and proud passion these days. The entire Christian enterprise is founded upon the power and authority of scripture. To deny the power and authority of scripture is to deny the enterprise of authentic Christianity.

As for the apologetics of Van til: we will briefly note, that Van til does not start with scripture, but with a transcendental argument.<sup>xii</sup> Having said this, keep in mind, that this essay is not an attempt to discredit or devalue the method incorporated by Van til and followers, but is intended to explain the importance of the apologetics of Gordon Clark.<sup>xiii</sup> Indeed, the controversy between Clarkians and Van tilians deserves more space than this essay will allow for. It might also be briefly noted, that I am not informed enough regarding this controversy so as to dispense with exhaustive opinions and arguments.

However, what I do know for certain is that there is great genius and consistency in the apologetics of Gordon Clark. Perhaps, one of the more appealing aspects of Clark's philosophy is his ability to assess modern philosophers, and antithetical positions held against the validity of Christianity. Dr. Clark was no slouch when it came to logical reasoning, his ability for dealing with agnostic philosophers was prolific, and if one was to ask me (which is very unlikely), unmatched up to the present day.

The necessity of Gordon Clark is equal to the necessity of Luther's 95 theses, which helped to spark the Reformation. We as Christians cannot afford to overlook the assaults of secular culture. If Christianity will be rescued it must have a consistent philosophy. The philosophy and methods of Gordon Clark are essential because they uphold the authority and doctrine of scripture; give scripture its proper place in the halls of the church and on the canvas of the human mind. Scripture is the center of all Godly living, the foundation of all true knowledge and the axiom incorporated by the philosophy of Gordon Clark.

Do we know of another philosopher who has given scripture its proper place in the world?<sup>xiv</sup> There is only one place to run in a room that is dark and that is towards the light. Likewise in this world of evil full of the wicked systems of men, we are bombarded with lies from every direction, including the pulpit; there is only one place for good men to run and that is to the truth. Only scripture can promise us deliverance from the vain systems of men and only Clark's philosophy starts with scripture and ends with scripture. This is not to say that Clark is the only philosopher that is worth our time, but that Clark's philosophy cannot be a waste of time.

Many things we would call important, but few things we call necessary; the apologetics of Gordon Clark are not only important, but are necessary in this age of deflection and unbelief. They are necessary because they place scripture first and men last...necessary because Rome is not the mother of the Church, and lastly because Clark's method is concerned with truth and scripture is the only way to achieve and understand truth. It cannot be men's methods and then God's revelation; it must be God's revelation and God's truth. Every century of the world has had its share of reprobates and ungodly men; likewise, every age has had men of God. The works of Gordon Clark are a true witness and testimony of faith in a morally, philosophically, suicidal-culture of unbelief.

In Conclusion: the Philosophy and apologetics of Gordon Clark are necessary for two distinct and powerful reasons: 1) Scripture is the only foundation upon which one can build a philosophy and theory of knowledge; Gordon Clark's apologetics and philosophy are founded upon this Revelation. 2) Gordon Clark has done what few others have been able to do; in short, he has given exhaustive critique, with refutation, of nearly all systems of modern philosophy.<sup>xv</sup> Thus clearing the weeds that did so prohibit men from the fruit and goodness of God. Because of Clark, I am convinced, that men may better partake of the Grace and bounty of God's inexhaustible knowledge.

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<sup>i</sup> Carl F.H Henry "A Wide And Deep Swath" published from Trinity Foundation in "An Introduction to Christian Philosophy" by Gordon Clark

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ii “What theism needs is an application to all phases of learning.” Gordon Clark “Christian View of Men and Things”.

iii Even an apologist such as William Lane Craig, when dealing with Muslim apologist Shabir Ally, regarding the Resurrection did not argue that scripture was inerrant. Even though this is was subtle Craig does try to view scripture as a secular history book rather than the word of God. I am not trying to put forth an argument that Craig does not except the authority of scripture, I just think it peculiar that he would not push for inerrancy. For the debate see ‘Christianity and Islam’  
<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/menus/index.html>.

iv This is the view that Scripture must be the foundation of all knowledge. Propositional Revelation is the source of knowledge; men must take God’s axiom (Scripture) as priority in matters of epistemology. As John Robbins defines it: ‘Scripturalism is the logically consistent application of Christian - that is, Scriptural- ideas to all fields of thought’; taken from “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark”.

v A Study of the arguments for and against Clark, soon reveal that he answered the majority of his critics. Certainly as Carl F. H. Henry has said ‘No aggressive and creative scholar is without his critics.’ Henry goes on to say that Clark ‘stands above all in contemporary philosophical milieu as a champion of a personal God.’ It is not that Clark’s arguments and methods are arrogant, but that they are powerful and unflinching. If one asserts a lie with great boldness even though he has been refuted as being wrong, this constitutes arrogance; if one pushes for the truth, though it cause great discomfort, this is wise not arrogant. I do believe that a thorough reading of Clark will prove the latter to be the case.

vi As Dr. John Robbins has pointed out: “Worse, this confusion was not inadvertent; it was deliberate.” As Van til has stated in his systematic theology: “It is precisely because they (Vantilians) are concerned to defend the Christian doctrine of revelation as basic to all intelligible human predication that they refuse to make any attempt at ‘stating clearly’ any Christian doctrine, or the relation of any one Christian doctrine to any other Christian doctrine. They will not attempt to ‘solve’ the ‘paradoxes’ involved in the relationship of the self-contained God to his dependent creatures.” Another funny quote to be taken from William White’s book ‘Van til: Defender of The Faith’ is as follows “There is a controversy today as to who is the greatest intellect of this segment of the twentieth century, probably most thinking people would vote for the learned Dr. Einstein. Not me. I wish to put forth as my candidate for the honor, Dr. Cornelius Van Til. My reason for doing so is this: Only eleven people in the world understand Albert Einstein.... Nobody – but nobody in the world – understands Cornelius Van Til.”

vii Thomas Aquinas is the champion of Roman Catholic apologetics. He is famous for his cosmological argument.

viii C. S. Lewis (who died in 1963) is largely responsible for a revival in Thomistic apologetics. The most obvious reason for this would be because he was a master of the English language, and was able to present this method with style, clarity and persuasion. Let it be noted: that if I where to be an evidential apologist I would stick with Lewis all the way.

ix Two of Biola’s main Professors are William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, both men have published numerous volumes of literature from an evidential perceptive. Craig, is known for his defense of the Kalaam argument for the existence of God. However, there is no way that Craig can deduce the Triune God of scripture from the Kalaam argument.

x The formation of the Reformation was founded upon a flat out rejection of the authority of the church of Rome over scripture, so too, the methods of Gordon Clark are a rejection of the apologetics of this barbaric harlot.

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<sup>xi</sup> Many who hold to Roman evidential apologetics, consider the methods of Gordon Clark to be inferior. However, this is not by way of argument or exegesis, but because evidential apologists, like to hold on to there methods assuming that they are superior. As Dr. John Robbins points out in his essay on empirical apologetics: ‘How smug we are in America –especially American Christians, especially those who call themselves Evangelicals–and how foolish. We look down our educated noses at the primitive savages who worship their wooden idols, while we worship the philosophical idols created by the empirical philosophers and theologians: the Prime Mover, the First Cause, the Ground of Being, the Supreme Being, the Grand Designer, the Architect of the Universe. These gods, no matter what they are called, are idols. Our empirical apologists have confounded Heaven and Earth, the creature with the Creator, the name of God with that of the Prime Mover; they have done no less than what the ancient Israelites were punished for.’

<sup>xii</sup> Van til, argued from the impossibility of the contrary, placing the Christian position first. Van til did not start with scripture as an axiom, but with the Triune God.

<sup>xiii</sup> For a good synopsis of the controversy surrounding Clark and Van til see ‘The Clark - Van til Controversy’, Herman Hoeksema, published by Trinity Foundation. Also see ‘Van til: The man and The Myth’ by John Robbins, Trinity Foundation

<sup>xiv</sup> There are many good philosophers and theologians in the world. To name a few: Vincent Cheung, Robert Reymond, James R. White, John Stott, Carl F.H. Henry and many more that cover the globe of the world. However, Clark is the only American Philosopher that I am aware of who has covered a broad perspective of thought pertaining to philosophy.

<sup>xv</sup> As said by John Frame ‘His critiques of non-Christian thought are among the most useful available, and unlike most apologists, he has an appreciation for the need of presupposing the Word of God in all of thought.’ However, it is good to note that Frame is not follower of the methods of Clark, but was a student of Van til and has put forth his own system of apologetics.