

# 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

## *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* by Greg L. Bahnsen Reviewed by W. Gary Crampton

In the first paragraph of the Preface of Greg Bahnsen's *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*,<sup>1</sup> the editor, Joel McDurmon, writes:

Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen (1948-1995) provided perhaps the clearest, most faithful, and most powerful advancement of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics of anyone. This statement holds true both for Bahnsen's written scholarly work as well as his practical applications in both formal and informal debates and exchanges. Those knowledgeable of Van Til's "Copernican Revolution" in Christian apologetic method will understand the enormity of this compliment to Greg Bahnsen. Those not formerly introduced to Van Til or Bahnsen will understand shortly after beginning this volume—for this book presents the most clear, systematic, and rigorous statement and defense of Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics written to date (vii).

There is a sense in which what is said in this paragraph is true; and there is a sense in which it is false. Certainly Dr. Greg Bahnsen was a real scholar. He earned a B.A. (*magna cum laude*, philosophy) from Westmont College. He received his M. Div. and Th.M. degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary, a school where Cornelius Van Til taught for over forty years. He then went on to earn his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California, specializing in the field of epistemology ("the theory of knowledge"). Dr. Bahnsen taught for a period of time at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, and then, as

an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, served as pastor for a congregation in California. Later he served as Scholar-in-Residence at the Southern California Center for Christian Studies, in Irvine, California.

Greg Bahnsen was a distinguished scholar, author, and debater, who wrote and lectured extensively on the subjects of Biblical law and apologetics. He earnestly sought to defend Christianity against the worldly systems so prevalent in our day. This reviewer has profited from Dr. Bahnsen's theological labors: through reading many of his books and listening to numbers of his taped sermons and lectures. Then too, Greg Bahnsen was a friend, although we differed over certain matters of apologetic methodology.

But, as noted, there is also a sense in which the comments in this opening paragraph are not true. In his theological, philosophical, and apologetic endeavors, Dr. Bahnsen championed the use of logic. He correctly adhered to the need for a rational Christianity. He believed that a rational defense of the faith was essential to defending the faith. His mentor, Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand, did not. This is not to impugn Van Til's character, for every indication is that he was a godly man; he was a man who greatly desired to see the furtherance of God's kingdom on Earth.

At the same time, Dr. Van Til was not averse to speaking disparagingly of logic; he believed and taught that logic was a part of creation (rather than being intrinsic to the essence of God), and he rigidly held to the idea of logical paradox found throughout the entirety of the Word of God. Several scholars have documented this in their analyses of Van Til.<sup>2</sup> Here is where Drs. Bahnsen and Van Til (whose

<sup>1</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, edited by Joel McDurmon (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press & Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2008). The pagination found in the body of this review is from this book.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see John W. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Myth and the Man* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986); Robert L. Raymond, *Preach the Word* (Rutherford House, 1988), 16-

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apologetic methodology was far from a “Copernican Revolution”) would part company in their systems. Thus, when Dr. Bahnsen is attempting to construct a rational apologetic based on the philosophical foundations of his mentor, he is on shaky ground. In his own system, Bahnsen clearly deviates from Van Til’s philosophical perspective.

Shortly before his death, Dr. Bahnsen completed a major work that attempted to promote an understanding of the apologetic methodology of Cornelius Van Til: *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*.<sup>3</sup> According to editor Joel McDurmon, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* “presents the systematic counterpart to Bahnsen’s earlier publication” (viii). This present volume, however, is incomplete. Dr. Bahnsen intended a third part to his “*magnum opus*,” which, due to his untimely death, he never finished. The plan is to publish as much of Part 3 that was finished, after some additional editing.

After the Preface, *Presuppositional Apologetics* is subdivided into two parts. Part One is titled “Presuppositional Apologetics Positively Stated.” This part consists of three chapters: Chapter one, “Introduction: God in the Dock?” (3-23); chapter two, “The Christian Mind and Method” (25-75); and chapter three, “Neutrality and Autonomy Relinquished” (77-131). There is some fine work in these chapters, and the reader should benefit from a perusal of them. Part Two is titled “Consistency Applied: Critiques of Incomplete Presuppositionalism.” This part consists of four chapters: Chapter four, “Gordon Clark” (137-196); chapter five, “Edward J. Carnell” (197-240); chapter six, “Francis Schaeffer” (241-260); and chapter seven, “Conclusion to Part 2: The Critical Quintessence” (261-268). The author begins Part 2 by stating that the “presuppositional defense of Christianity” presented by Cornelius Van Til is the “most consistently Biblical” presuppositionalism that is found in the discipline of Christian apologetics. There are several other systems of presuppositional apologetics as well, besides the system presented by Van Til, each of which has “made contributions to the cause of Reformational apologetics.” Yet, says Bahnsen, who has “attempted to read all the major publications of these men in the best possible light,” he has found their “positions defective” (135-136). As noted, the three “defective” systems mentioned and critiqued in this book are those of Clark, Carnell, and Schaeffer.

*Presuppositional Apologetics* concludes with three Appendices: Appendix 1, “The Necessity of Revelational Epistemology” (269-278); Appendix 2, “The Pragmatist’s

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35; and Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Zondervan, 1982), 99-101.

<sup>3</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998). See my review of this book in *The Trinity Review* (July 2000).

Rejoinder and the Christian Alternative” (279-286); and Appendix 3, “The Possibility of Argument” (287-290).

The remainder of this review will focus on chapter four, wherein the author critiques the apologetic methodology of Gordon Clark. In the Preface the editor kindly comments that “it is a shame that the foremost exponent of Dr. Clark’s thought, John Robbins, passed away in August 2008, and thus will not be able to interact with this critique. It might have been helpful to hear his comments” (xiii). Mr. McDurmon is correct at this point in his analysis of Dr. Robbins, and the present reviewer does not presume to have the same knowledge of Gordon Clark that John Robbins possessed. Nevertheless, an attempt will be made to show how Gordon Clark’s apologetic methodology is Biblically sound, and when it comes to the apologetics of Dr. Clark, the Van Tillian apologete Dr. Bahnsen has met his match.<sup>4</sup> As Dr. Kenneth Talbot has pointed out, the criticism the author brings against the apologetics of Gordon Clark are (basically) the same that were registered by Cornelius Van Til years ago. They were unfounded then, and they remain unfounded.<sup>5</sup> (It may be that Dr. Bahnsen tends to read Gordon Clark through Van Tillian lenses.)

Dr. Bahnsen begins chapter four by quoting numerous “points of genuine and accurate presuppositional analysis in Clark’s many writings.” In each of these there is agreement between Clark and Van Til, *i.e.*, where “Clark parallels the thrust of Van Til’s position.” Dr. Clark, however, “disappoints us when we take into account what he says elsewhere.” There are “problems in his apologetical writings that sully and set aside these positive statements. An audit of those difficulties leads us to draw back from adopting Clark’s apologetics” (137-142).

The first two “difficulties” in Clark’s apologetic methodology that Dr. Bahnsen deals with, “Starting Points and Certainty” (142-147) and “Possibility and Necessity” (145-148), have to do with Clark’s alleged view of “possibility.” The author later returns to this “difficulty” under the heading of “Clark’s Probabilism” (174-176). Bahnsen cites several of Dr. Clark’s writings wherein he speaks of the “possibility” of the Bible being the Word of God. The author’s conclusion is that Clark is not considering the Word of God as a “certainty,” but only as a “possibility.”

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<sup>4</sup> Much of what is found in the defense of Gordon Clark in this review comes from W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (The Trinity Foundation, 1999). The reader may gain further insight into the teachings of Gordon Clark in this book.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth G. Talbot, President of Whitefield Theological Seminary (Lakeland, Florida) communicated this information to the present reviewer in a phone call on the subject of the book under review. The thoughts of Dr. Talbot (who first introduced this reviewer to the writings of Gordon H. Clark) have been most helpful in the writing of this review.

The interesting thing here is that Dr. Bahnsen approvingly quotes Clark in statements wherein he tells us how he uses the word “possibility.” According to Dr. Clark, all “norms of possibility must be accepted from naturalistic scientism, existential hunch, or the Biblical revelation with its miraculous supernaturalism” (138). Then too, the author approvingly quotes Dr. Clark’s denial that there is any certainty possible apart from divine revelation: “Only by accepting rationally comprehensible...information on God’s authority [the Bible] can we hope to have a sound philosophy and a true religion.... A rational life is impossible without being based upon a divine revelation [the Bible].” “The Bible [is] the very Word of God” (140). Further, Dr. Bahnsen states that Dr. Clark denied that there is any such thing as neutrality when it comes to worldviews: “Methodology is never neutral” (139). Certainly, then, whatever else Dr. Clark may be saying when he speaks of “possibility,” it could not mean that he is denying or questioning that the Bible is “certainly” the very Word of God.

The fact is that Dr. Clark did not consider the Bible only as “possibly” the Word of God; he was certain that it is God’s inspired, infallible, inerrant Word to man. As best as the present writer is able to discern, the passages cited by Bahnsen are those being used by Dr. Clark, either in the sense that he is saying nothing more than what has already been quoted, *i.e.*, that “all norms of possibility” come from axioms that are “necessary” for any worldview, Christian or non-Christian; or (as Clark was fond of doing in the philosophical milieu in which he worked<sup>6</sup>) using such language in the form of *ad hominem* arguments. It is beyond question, even as Dr. Bahnsen has (at least implicitly) pointed out, that Gordon Clark’s apologetic methodology presupposes the primacy of Scripture as providing the basis for all proof. According to Clark, the Bible has a systematic monopoly on truth. It is self-attesting and self-authenticating. It stands in judgment over all books and ideas, and it is to be judged by no person or thing.

Dr. Clark also believed that we must follow the apologetic principle taught in *Proverbs 26:4-5*: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.” The Christian apologete is not to answer an unbeliever based on his starting point, because then he would be just like the unbeliever. Rather, he is required to stand on the truth of Biblical revelation, and argue from Scripture

as his axiomatic starting point. At the same time, the Christian apologete may use arguments, such as the theological “evidences,” to refute the gainsayer. Here the apologete argues in an *ad hominem* fashion to reveal the foolishness of non-Christian systems. Standing on God’s infallible revelation, the Christian apologete can and should use the evidences apagogically, “to answer the fool as his folly deserves.” The design of this type of argumentation is to criticize internally the unbeliever’s worldview, revealing its inconsistencies.

According to Dr. Clark, this apagogic methodology, consisting in a series of *reductiones ad absurdum*, is the principal method available to a Biblical apologist. The reason is that even though there is metaphysical common ground between believers and unbelievers, in that both are created in the image of God, there is no common epistemological ground. That is, there are no common theoretical propositions, no common “notions,” between Christianity and non-Christian philosophies. The *ad hominem* apagogic arguments are to be used against the unbeliever, who is a covenant-breaker and already in possession of the innate idea of the God against whom he is rebelling. The arguments are to be used in a fashion that will attempt to make him epistemologically self-conscious (and thus God conscious) of his covenant breaking rebellion.

After demonstrating the internal incoherence of the non-Christian views, the Biblical apologete will argue for truth and the logical consistency of the Scriptures and the Christian worldview revealed therein. He will show how Christianity is self-consistent, how it gives us a coherent understanding of the world. It answers questions and solves problems that other worldviews cannot. This method is not to be considered as a proof for the existence of God or the truth of Scripture, but as proof that the non-Christian view is false. It shows that intelligibility can only be maintained by viewing all things as dependent on the God of Scripture, who is truth itself. This is the proper “presuppositional” approach to apologetics.

Dr. Clark used the Augustinian “argument from the nature of truth” to reveal the systematic consistency of Christianity. Truth, he argued, must exist. That is, skepticism is false. Even to deny the existence of truth (that is, to say that it is “true” that there is no truth) is to assert that truth does and must exist. Further, it is not possible for truth to change. That which changes, by definition, cannot be true. To deny truth’s eternity (that is, to say that it is “true” that truth is not eternal or that it will someday perish) affirms its eternal nature. And since truth can exist only in the form of propositions, it must be mental (that is, being propositional, it can exist only in the mind). But seeing that the mind of man is not eternal and unchangeable, there must be a mind superior to the mind of man which is eternal and unchangeable: the mind of God. God, as Scripture testifies,

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Talbot has pointed out that our understanding of the way Gordon Clark approached matters in his writings had to do with the *sitz im leben* in which he found himself. Dr. Clark lived and taught in an academic setting practically all of his adult life. This being said, his writings often reflected the dynamic of philosophical sophistry. Therefore, it would be a mistake to view his sophistry as “weakness” concerning his theological commitment to the inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word of God.

and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:4)<sup>7</sup> confirms, is “truth itself.” Therefore, if a man knows any truth, he also knows something of God, because God revealed it to him.

According to Dr. Clark, then, the defense of the Christian faith involves two basic steps. First, the Christian apologete must show the unbeliever that the axioms of secular systems result in self-contradiction. Second, the apologete should point out the internal consistency of the Christian system. When these two points have been made clear, the Christian will urge the unbeliever to repudiate the axioms of secularism and accept God’s revelation. This approach neither undermines the presupposition of Biblical revelation as foundational to a Christian worldview in general nor to apologetics in particular. Rather, it argues (*ad hominem*) from the standpoint of the unbeliever to show him the futility of his worldview and the consistent worldview presented in the Christian system. Dr. Clark’s “come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18) approach, however, is not looked upon with favor by Greg Bahnsen who prefers a more heavy-handed “dogmatic criticism” method (as will be noticeable below).

It is worthy of note that in Appendix 1 of this book (269-278), the author himself argues for “the necessity of revelational epistemology” without beginning with Scripture. Now if he is using this tactic in an *ad hominem* fashion, then it is both permissible and proper within a presuppositional approach to apologetics. But if he is arguing “for” the truth of “the necessity of revelational epistemology,” then he has violated his own presuppositional approach, the very thing for which he has accused Dr. Clark. Dr. Bahnsen also adhered to the apagogic method endorsed by Clark. He wrote: “the Christian apologist should seek to lay bare the character of those presuppositions on which the non-Christian operates when arguing against the [Christian] faith, demonstrating their self-vitiating quality, and then show the suppressed [revelational] beliefs that make the unbeliever’s formal reasoning and knowledge possible,” *i.e.*, the system of truth taught in the Bible (289-290). Dr. Bahnsen’s apologetic here does not differ substantially with that of Gordon Clark, and neither believes that the Bible is only “possibly” the Word of God.

The next group of “difficulties” the author finds in Clarkian apologetics has to do with “The Priority of Logic and the Testing of God’s Word” (149-159), “Logical Consistency as an Ultimate Criterion” (159-162), “Difficulties with Reliance on Logical Coherence” (162-174), and “Clark’s Probabilism” (174-176). All of these have their foundation-

al concern that Dr. Clark has placed logic as his axiom or starting point above Scripture. This, of course, would indeed put “God in the dock.” If this were true, it would be a serious error on the part of Gordon Clark. The fact is, though, that he does no such thing. Due to the oft-encountered attack mounted against Dr. Clark on his view of logic, we will briefly overview his teaching on the subject. According to Gordon Clark the Biblical view of logic is as follows.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible teaches that God is a God of knowledge (*I 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 of Faith* (1:4) teaches, God “is truth itself.” And since that which is not rational cannot be true (*I Timothy* 6:20), it follows that God must be rational. The laws of logic are the way He thinks.

This is what the Bible teaches. God is not the author of confusion (*I 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 emphasizes the rationality of God the Son. Logic is as eternal as God himself because “the *Logos* is God.” Christ, then, we are told in the Bible, is the logic (*Logos*) of God (*John* 1:1); He is Reason, Wisdom, and Truth incarnate (*I Corinthians* 1:24, 30; *Colossians* 2:3; *John* 14:6). The laws of logic are not created by God or man; they are the way God thinks. And since the Scriptures are a part of the mind of God (*I Corinthians* 2:16), they are God’s logical thoughts. The Bible expresses the mind of God in a logically coherent fashion to mankind. Hence, God and logic cannot be separated, because logic is the characteristic of God’s thinking. Gordon Clark taught that God and logic are one and the same first principle in this sense, for John wrote that Logic was God.

This will give us a greater understanding of the relationship of logic and Scripture. Since logic is a characteristic of God, and since Scripture is a part of “the mind of Christ” (*I 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 *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:5) teaches, the Bible is a logically consistent book: there is “consent of all the parts.” This is why Paul could “reason” with persons “from the Scriptures” (*Acts* 17:2). Since Christian theism maintains that God is truth itself

<sup>7</sup> All references to the Westminster Standards, comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, which are found in this review, are from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.

<sup>8</sup> Much of this portion of the review comes from Gordon H. Clark, “God and Logic,” *The Trinity Review* (Nov/Dec 1980).

(*Psalm 31:5; John 14:6; 1 John 5:6*), then truth is logical. In this sense, logic may be seen as a negative test for truth; that is, if something is contradictory, it cannot be true (*1 Timothy 6:20*).

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. It also declares 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 1000 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*).

Since logic is embedded in Scripture, Scripture, rather than logic as an abstract principle, is selected as the axiomatic starting point of Christian epistemology. Similarly, we do not make God 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 with the doctrine of Scripture in Chapter 1. Chapters 2-5, on the doctrine of God, follow. Clark would agree, then, with Bahnsen, that “Christ [is] the only foundation for reasoning” (18), and he would do so because the Bible tells us that He is the *Logos*, Logic incarnate, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Colossians 2:3*).

Due to Dr. Bahnsen’s belief that Clark presupposes logic prior to his presupposition of Scripture as the Word of God, he claims that Clark is not truly a Biblical presuppositionalist at all (149). This is very telling. The reason being that by his own admission, Bahnsen claims that his mentor,

Cornelius Van Til, did believe that there are proofs for the Word of God and the God of the Word. This means, of course, that Van Til was not a presuppositionalist himself. In his earlier volume, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, Dr. Bahnsen approvingly cites his mentor as teaching that there are proofs for the existence of God. In the words of Van Til: “I do not reject ‘the theistic proofs’ but merely insist on formulating them in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of Scripture.... There is a natural theology that is legitimate” (613); and “When the proofs are thus formulated [*i.e.*, on a Christian basis] they have absolute probative force” (615). This is true of the “ontological proof,” the “cosmological proof,” and the “teleological proof” (621). Bahnsen, in summarizing his teacher’s position, states: “Van Til did not sweepingly and indiscriminately discard theistic proofs. He affirmed quite boldly that the argument for the existence of God, when properly construed, is indeed objectively valid” (622). In the same volume, Dr. Bahnsen openly criticizes Dr. Clark who denies the validity of the theistic proofs altogether (671). Dr. Clark, he claims, is a “dogmatist,” who believes that the Bible is to be our “indemonstrable,” axiomatic starting point; whereas, writes Bahnsen (with approbation) Van Til “recoiled” at this notion (671). There are apparent contradictions involved at this point. The author has criticized Dr. Clark for averring that the Bible is only “possibly” the Word of God, and he has also stated that Clark is not a presuppositionalist because he placed logic ahead of Scripture as his axiom. Then at the same time, the author states that Clark is a “dogmatist” who believes that the Bible is the axiomatic starting point of the Christian worldview. These contradictions, it would seem, negate Dr. Bahnsen’s criticisms altogether. He cannot eat his cake and have it too.

Considering the nature of the issues noted above, it appears that neither Van Til nor Bahnsen are consistently presuppositionalist in their apologetic methodology. It is worth noting that John Frame, who is himself a Van Tillian apologete, believes that “there is less distance between Van Til’s apologetics and the traditional apologetics than most partisans on either side (including Van Til himself) have been willing to grant.” “The term presuppositional, [therefore]...is not an adequate description of Van Til’s position.” At the same time, Professor Frame indicates that the use of the term “presuppositional,” when it is considered in an apologetic context, better reflects the method of Clark than the method of Van Til.<sup>9</sup> “Unlike most apologists,” wrote Frame, “he [Clark] has an appreciation for the need of presupposing the Word of God in all of thought.”<sup>10</sup> Dr. Frame is correct in his assertions.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics For the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 85, 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Frame, “John Frame’s Lecture Notes” on Gordon H. Clark ([www.vantil.info](http://www.vantil.info)).

When it comes to the “difficulties with reliance on logical coherence” (162-174), Dr. Bahnsen argues that just because a system is logically coherent does not make it true. Here he is precisely correct. Clark (who taught the subject of logic for decades at the college level) would fully agree. The stress of Dr. Clark’s position regarding the logical coherence of the teachings of Scripture, as we have seen, is very much in line with the Reformed theology taught by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:5), which correctly states that there is a “consent of all the parts” of Scripture. This is Clark’s point. If a system contradicts itself it cannot be true (*1 Timothy* 6:20); but just because there is no contradiction does not assure us that it is true.

Logic in the Clarkian view functions as a negative test for truth. It is an apologetic tool to show how a contradiction in any system (which all non-believing systems contain) disproves it as a valid system. Logical coherence is a very valid way to proof-text a system for its validity or non-validity. The fact that the Bible is logically consistent does not prove it to be true, but it certainly shows the non-believer that the Christian worldview is based on a system of truth that is logically coherent. Gordon Clark’s statement that “the coherence theory [of truth]<sup>11</sup> cannot be applied with final satisfaction unless one is omniscient” (173) also bothered Dr. Bahnsen. But Dr. Clark is not asserting that since human beings are not omniscient they cannot ever be able to use the coherence test on a worldview system. What he is maintaining is that coherence can be verified even by fallen men, even though they do err. But the ultimate coherency test must be left in the hands of the omniscient God of Holy Scripture. That is why we must always depend on the Word of the all-knowing God who assures us that His Word is perfectly coherent and is that standard of truth by which all things must be judged.

Dr. Bahnsen believes that the disciplines of epistemology (the “theory of knowledge”) and metaphysics (the “theory of ultimate reality”) must be taken together as the first principles of a Christian worldview (77-84). He contends that “epistemology and metaphysics [are] interdependent” (84). Therefore, the author has a “difficulty” with Dr. Clark’s view that epistemology must logically precede metaphysics as the first principle. But when it comes to the author’s criticism of Clark’s “abstraction of epistemology from metaphysics” (157), he seems to be somewhat confused. Clark does not separate or “abstract” epistemology and metaphysics, as alleged by Bahnsen; rather, he distinguishes between them. Clark would not disagree with Bahnsen that these two tenets of philosophy are “inter-dependent,” because they are necessarily so. In the Clarkian view, however, epistemology must logically precede meta-physics, because it is patently obvious that until one establishes “how” he knows, he cannot possibly

know “what” it is that is known. This point cannot be overstressed. Clark asserts that it is not sufficient to maintain “that” we know without first ascertaining “how” we know. Only then can we determine “what” we know. Bahnsen himself implicitly admits this when he writes that the Christian’s “ultimate metaphysical commitment” to the triune God of Holy Scripture is “derived from God’s clear revelation” in the Bible. We must always begin, he writes, “with God’s Word as the most certain truth available to man,” because we “would never arrive at the truth about God [metaphysics] independent of [Biblical] revelation” (282, 284). The author here is affirming Dr. Clark’s position. The two elements of epistemology and metaphysics are never to be separated, but they must always be distinguished. Again, this is why the *Westminster Confession of Faith* begins with “Chapter 1: Of the Holy Scripture.” The doctrine of God (chapters 2-5) follows the study of epistemology, thus demonstrating that “how” we know precedes “what” we know. Dr. Clark’s view on this point is in accord with the Westminster divines, whereas Dr. Bahnsen’s is not.

Dr. Bahnsen comes to the last “difficulty” in Clark’s system of apologetics in his “Key Criticisms of Clark’s Apologetic” (176-196). The first key criticism is “Clark’s Rationalism” (176-183). Here the author criticizes Dr. Clark’s rationalist view of “the primacy of the intellect” (interestingly, “the primacy of the intellect” was also the view of Aurelius Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and J. Gresham Machen), and maintains that Clark adheres to a form of the Hegelian belief that “the rational is the real, and the real is the rational” (177). This is unfortunate. Dr. Bahnsen was a much finer scholar than to make such an absurd allegation as this. As noted above, Dr. Clark (correctly) believed that if a proposition, worldview, or system of doctrine, was irrational then it could not be true, but he did not aver that if something is rational then it is necessarily true. In the Clarkian view logic functions as a negative test for truth, but never as the only test for truth. The Bible alone is the absolute test for truth. However, Dr. Clark would say that when considering any system, it is only necessary to show that it contradicts itself to expose it as a false system. That is the purpose of a negative test for truth by logic for all such “truth claims.” Since truth cannot contradict itself, the contradiction is the proof of the system’s inherent falsity.

Dr. Bahnsen finds “the most incredible manifestation of Clark’s overweening rationalism...[in] his identification of God with logic. Dr. Clark maintained that the opening words of the *Gospel of John* may be properly translated “In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God.... In logic was life” (179).<sup>12</sup> This was

<sup>11</sup> The “coherence theory of truth” maintains that that which is “true” will necessarily consist of a coherent system of ideas.

<sup>12</sup> One wonders why Dr. Bahnsen does not question the usage of other words in *John* 1 which represent Christ, such as “light” and “truth.”

indeed the Clarkian view, and correctly so. The English word “logic” comes from the Greek *logos*, which is the word found in *John* 1. So when Dr. Bahnsen criticizes Clark on this point he is in error. Contrary to the author’s contention, Clark fully recognized that “John’s notion of the *Logos* is antithetical to the *Logos* speculation of the Greeks” (180). His epistemology, along with that of Augustine before him, had its roots in the *Logos* doctrine. According to John, Jesus Christ is the cosmological *Logos* (*John* 1:1-3), the epistemological *Logos* (1:9, 14), and the soteriological *Logos* (1:4, 12-13; 14:6). He is the Creator of the world, the source of all human knowledge, and the giver of salvation. As to the epistemological *Logos*, which is the focus of the present study, Christ is the “true light which enlightens every man coming into the world” (1:9). Apart from the *Logos*, the “inward teacher,” knowledge would not be possible. And although Dr. Bahnsen is correct in his assertion that “logic is a developing science” (182) and cannot be fully depended on, he fails to mention that the three fundamental laws of logic—the law of contradiction, the law of identity, and the law of the excluded middle (mentioned above) are not “developing,” but (as noted) are rooted in the Bible itself. Logic is the way God thinks. Dr. Bahnsen’s criticism of Clark here is un-Biblical and therefore unwarranted.

The second key criticism has to do with “Doctrinal Difficulties” (184-188). One of the issues addressed in this section is the theological controversy that existed during the years 1944-1948 within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, wherein a complaint was brought against Dr. Clark for his views on the incomprehensibility of God. He took the position that the primary difference between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge is “quantitative” rather than “qualitative.” The complainants believed that God’s knowledge must be both qualitatively and quantitatively different than man’s knowledge. Herein was the disagreement.

Dr. Clark believed that man can “know” the truth. He was quick to point out, however, that this is not to infer that man can have exhaustive knowledge. Only God is omniscient. All of His knowledge is intuitive, while man’s is discursive. There are limitations on man’s knowledge, not only due to sin, but also due to the fact that he is a creature. Even sinless Adam, prior to the Fall, could never have obtained exhaustive knowledge. This limitation will not even be removed in the final sinless state.

Nevertheless, Dr. Clark taught that whatever knowledge man has must be a truth that God knows, and is necessarily the same knowledge as God’s knowledge. Clark rejected the Thomistic and Van Tilian view of analogical predication. According to Thomas Aquinas and Cornelius Van Til, all of man’s knowledge of God and His creation is analogous. There is not a single point of coincidence between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge. Clark did

not deny that there is a quantitative difference between that which God knows and that which man knows. There is a vast difference in the degree of knowledge. Neither did he deny that there is a difference in the metaphysical nature of God’s mind and man’s mind.<sup>13</sup> At the same time Clark did affirm that even though man’s knowledge of God is limited, *i.e.*, it is finite knowledge whereas God’s is infinite knowledge, there is not a difference in the knowledge itself. There is a point of contact between that which God knows and that which man knows; there is a univocal point at which God’s knowledge meets man’s knowledge. If the mind of man and the mind of God do not have some univocal content, we would know nothing at all. If God has all truth, we cannot know any truth except the truth God knows. The difference between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge, then, is one of degree. Being omniscient, God knows more and will always know more than any creature. Yet if all we have is an analogy of the truth, as in Van Til’s perspective, then we do not have the truth. A mere analogy of the truth, without a univocal point of understanding, is not “the truth.” Drs. Van Til and Bahnsen are wrong on this point.

The third key criticism deals with “Clark’s Answer to the Attacks of Science” (188-192). In this section the author is critical of Dr. Clark, not so much because of his philosophy of science, but because he does not press the non-believing scientist to see “that the kinds of faith that science still uses...need to be under girded with Christian faith.” What is needed is a “transcendent, dogmatic criticism...that urges the repentance of the scientist” for denying the God of Christianity as a necessity for his endeavor (191). Perhaps Dr. Clark could have focused more of his concerns in this direction, but he did indeed use his philosophy of science as an apologetic tool, even in the milieu in which he ministered.<sup>14</sup> But, as mentioned above, he was more comfortable with a “come now, and let us reason together” approach than the “transcendent, dogmatic criticism...that urges repentance” on the gainsayer practiced by Dr. Bahnsen. As an example, in *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, Clark showed that, although science is a useful tool by means of which mankind may live comfortably in this world, it can never give us truth. The discipline of science is a continually changing endeavor, and that which changes can never be true. Therefore, the discipline of science, as valuable as it is, must not be viewed as a means by which we come to knowledge of “truth.” The Bible alone is the Word of God, and it has a monopoly on truth.

The fourth and final key criticism is “Clark’s Implicit Skepticism” (192-196). Dr. Bahnsen asserts that Dr. Clark’s view of epistemology maintains that “there is no

<sup>13</sup> John M. Frame, “Van Til: A Reassessment,” An Essay. This was sent to the present writer by Dr. Kenneth Talbot via email.

<sup>14</sup> See the footnote above on the *sitz im leben* in which Dr. Clark ministered and did his apologetic work.

knowledge to be obtained except in God's revelation and deductions therefrom" (192). Bahnsen is correct. But he goes on to state that because Clark must use exegetical tools such as books, archeology, cultural studies, *etc.* (all of which in some way involve empirical methodology), to gain knowledge from the Word of God, he therefore refutes his own conclusions. The result is skepticism.

Here again the author has missed the point of Dr. Clark's claim. Clark did not deny that God may use the senses as a "means" for persons to gain knowledge from the Word of God. What he denied is that the senses themselves are able to provide us with knowledge. Dr. Clark taught, and correctly so, that all knowledge must come through propositions (which are either true or false), and since the senses in interacting with creation yield no propositions, knowledge cannot be conveyed by sensation. That is, the senses are functional for man in his physical use, but offer no epistemological avenue for the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge must always be propositional. When man interacts with God's creation, which demonstrates His glory, power, and wisdom, man, as God's image-bearer, is forced, in some sense, to "think God." The visible creation itself does not mediate "knowledge" to man, for the visible universe sets forth no propositions. Rather, it stimulates the mind of man to intellectual intuition (or recollection), who as a rational being is already in possession of *apriori*, propositional information about God and His creation. This *apriori* information is immediately impressed upon man's consciousness. The knowledge, then, that man has of God and His creation is derived neither by empirical nor rationalistic means. Neither is it in any sense mediated knowledge. Rather, according to Dr. Clark, all knowledge is immediate, revelational, and propositional. It is the "inward teacher," Jesus Christ, the divine *Logos*, not the senses in one's interaction with creation, who teaches man.

This is true even with regard to the printed pages of the Bible. All speech or communication is a matter of words, and words (even those found in Holy Scripture) are signs, in that they signify something. When signs are used, the recipient, in order to understand, must already innately know that which is signified. Apart from this innate knowledge, taught Dr. Clark, signs would be meaningless. Clark asserted that God's Word is not black ink on white paper. God's Word is eternal; the printed pages of the Bible are not. The letters or words on the printed pages are signs or symbols which signify the eternal truth which is in the mind of God, and which is communicated by God directly and immediately to the minds of men in propositional form.

In this section Dr. Bahnsen also comments that since in the Clarkian view no knowledge is available outside of Scripture, then we are not able to draw ethical considerations, such as "You shall not steal." The reason being, allegedly, is that the Bible does not specifically tell

Dr. Clark that he owns a specific piece of property which may be stolen (196). The author's criticism of Dr. Clark here is easily resolved, however, by recognizing that Clark believed in the view espoused by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6), that it is not only the explicit propositional statements of the Bible which are true, but whatever may be implicitly deduced from those explicit statements is also true: "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." Therefore, although the Bible does not tell us explicitly that Gordon Clark owns a certain piece of property, it does explicitly tell us about property ownership. Therefore, we may deduce from this explicit statement that Dr. Clark also is able to own property. The problem is solved in this deduction and is one more demonstration of the importance of the use of logic in the Christian worldview.

Dr. Clark would also argue (and correctly so) that in ethics, empiricism, at best, can tell us what is; it can never tell us what ought to be. Scientists, for example, may invent lasers, but science cannot tell us how or if they ought to be used. Science has also given us the atomic bomb, but it is not able to tell us its proper use. "Oughtness" can never be deduced from "isness." Moreover, how can arguments from empirical observations give us moral principles? How can one show, empirically, that incest is sin, as per *Leviticus* 18? What is necessary for moral principles is divinely revealed prohibition or command.

Finally, we reach the "Conclusion" (196), where Dr. Bahnsen writes:

Gordon Clark has made good points of presuppositional analysis in his writings from place to place, but we have found that as a whole his system is not genuinely presuppositional and his presuppositions are not Biblical. Furthermore we have noted that numerous difficulties attach to his apologetic method and that it is ineffective on many counts. Clark's rationalism is basically incompatible with presuppositionalism and with Reformed theology, and his rationalistic apologetic is not an adequate challenge to unregenerate thought (196).

This review has shown that what Dr. Bahnsen alleges in his final paragraph is simply not the case at all. Although the author of this book denies it, Gordon Clark is the true presuppositionalist apologete, who did embrace the Augustinian dictum: "I believe in order to understand" (153).