This is the story of Gordon Clark (1902–1985), respected philosopher and prolific writer, who held that Christianity, as a logically coherent system, is superior to all other philosophies. Clark fought no wars and conquered no kingdoms. Yet he was a leading figure in many theological wars fought for the Kingdom of God. These battles for the minds and souls of men were every bit as crucial as physical wars between nations.

In an age of increasing secularization, he put up an intellectual defense of the Christian faith. This faith, he believed, was a system. All of its parts link together, a luxury of no other philosophy. His stance shows a Christianity that is in fact intellectual, not relying on appeals to emotion or experience.

In propounding this view, he encountered frequent opposition, not from the secular world, but from within his own denomination. This biography helps explain why his thought was so profound, why resistance mounted against him, and how his struggles impacted American Presbyterianism. Additionally, this book calls for a reappraisal of Clark’s views, which have been maligned by controversy. Understanding and applying his views could significantly fortify Christians combating irrational and non-systematic ideas prevalent in today’s churches.

THE PRESBYTERIAN PHILOSOPHER
THE AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY OF GORDON H. CLARK

DOUGLAS J. DOUMA

Foreword by Lois A. Zeller and Betsy Clark George

“I got hooked reading this book! Doug has done an incredibly good job documenting everything and putting together an accurate and sober narrative . . . of Gordon Clark to present him both as a thinker and as a Christian man. I was delighted to learn so many things about the history and views of this truly great Christian philosopher.”

—JOHN FRAME, Professor of Systematic Theology & Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary

“It is with great pleasure that I read and analyzed this biography. Matters mentioned in this biography have cleared up many of the lingering questions about the issues that I have had over the years. I suspect that a number of others will welcome those clarifications. For those who want to know more about the history and work of Gordon Clark, I can confidently recommend this book.”

—JAY ADAMS, Founder of The Institute for Nouthetic Studies

“This is the definitive book on Clark’s life, researched and documented by Doug Douma. A must-read for laymen, students, pastors, and professors who love Reformed Christian philosophy and apologetics.”

—KENNETH GARY TALBOT, President, Whitefield Theological Seminary and College

“This fascinating account of the life and work of controversial Presbyterian theologian Gordon H. Clark is not only of interest to every Reformed believer, especially every Reformed minister of the gospel, but it is also of urgent importance.”

—DAVID J. ENGELSMA, Professor of Theology Emeritus, Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

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Douglas J. Douma received a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan, an MBA from Wake Forest University, and a master of divinity from Sangre de Cristo Seminary. He and his wife currently reside in western North Carolina.

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Foreword

This biography is the result of the tireless efforts of the author in researching the life of Gordon Haddon Clark. So many facts, both trivial and momentous, have been uncovered in Clark’s books and correspondence, that we, his children, have been surprised at learning new details about our father, whom we thought we knew so well!

To many, he was a philosopher, since philosophy is what he taught full-time in four colleges and universities and part-time in at least four other institutions during his sixty-year career. To others, he was a theologian who was faithful to Jesus Christ and relentless in attempting to clarify perplexing passages from the Bible, so that Christians could be consistently “sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). To a small flock, he was a kind shepherd with a gentle heart. And to a few, he was a driven chess devotee.

To us, his two daughters, he was a patient father who taught us Scripture and Catechism, encouraged us to expand academic pursuits, develop musical talents, or follow whatever interests we had. His emphasis on learning foreign languages has been useful, and a source of joy, throughout our lives. He and our mother established the routine of a quiet home, but the calendar always included summer vacations that took us to fascinating places from Maine to California, with the high point of our teenage years being a marvelous and unforgettable four-month trip to Europe.

To you, the readers of the volume, may this man become a guide to wider experience and deeper thought. But primarily, may he become to you a true brother in Christ, our Lord.

We are thankful to Doug Douma for the years of work he has spent collecting and organizing material from various sources to show what an
unusual man Gordon Clark was, and what an impact his writing has had on countless numbers of serious students of philosophy and Christianity. We appreciate this labor of love so very much.

To God be all the glory!

Lois Zeller
Betsy Clark George
Abbreviations

Frequent correspondence is designated with the following acronyms:

GHC   Gordon H. Clark
CFHH  Carl F. H. Henry
CVT   Cornelius Van Til
EJC   Edward J. Carnell
JGM   J. Gresham Machen
JOB   J. Oliver Buswell
VRE   V. Raymond Edman

Presbyterian and Reformed Church and Institution Acronyms:

BPC   Bible Presbyterian Church (1937–present day)
CRC   Christian Reformed Church (1857–present day)
OPC   Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936–present day)
PCA   Presbyterian Church in America (1973–present day)
PCUSA Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (1789–1958)
PC(USA) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (1983–present day)
PCUS  Presbyterian Church in the United States (1861–1983)
PRC  Protestant Reformed Churches (1924–present day)
PTS  Princeton Theological Seminary (1812–present day)
RES  Reformed Episcopal Seminary (1887–present day)
RPCES Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (1965–1982)
RPC,GS Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (1833–1965)
UPCNA United Presbyterian Church of North America (1858–1958)
UPCUSA United Presbyterian Church in The United States of America (1958–1983)
WTS Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) (1919-present day)

Archives Referenced:
Wheaton Archives: Office of the President Records (J. Oliver Buswell), 1917–1980, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections.
BGC Archives: Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.
PCA Archives: Presbyterian Church in America Archives, St. Louis.
WTS Archives: Westminster Theological Seminary Archives, Philadelphia.
SDCS: Clark Collection, Clark Library at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary, Westcliffe, CO.

Where possible, all books referenced in footnotes are the editions which Dr. Clark owned and are housed in the Clark Collection at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary Clark Library.
Introduction

These pages tell the story of Gordon Haddon Clark (1902–1985), a great thinker who held that Christianity, as a logically coherent system, is superior to all other philosophies. In propounding this view, he encountered frequent and fervent opposition. This opposition came, in fact, most often not from the secular world but from within the very denominations of which he was an active member. This biography seeks to explain why his thought was so profound, why resistance mounted against him, and how the results of his struggles significantly impacted American Presbyterianism and American Christianity at large. Additionally, this book calls for a re-appraisal of Clark’s views, which have been maligned by the controversies in which he figured. Understanding and applying these views would significantly fortify Christians combating the various irrationalistic, non-systematic, and non-Reformed views prevalent in today’s churches.

Gordon Clark was a respected Christian philosopher who wrote extensively in defense of the Christian faith. Although Clark remains relatively unknown to most Christians today, he has received praise from a range of powerful voices in American theological circles. When asked which twentieth-century theologians will still be read 500 years hence, the well-known American pastor and theologian R.C. Sproul answered, “Gordon Clark.” Indeed, Clark’s literary works contained such breadth of material and depth of insight that Carl F.H. Henry, the first editor of Christianity Today, wrote of him, “Among articulate Christian philosophers on the American scene,

1. Christianity Today (1956-present day) is an evangelical Christian magazine founded by Billy Graham.
none has addressed the broad sweep of contemporary concerns from an evangelical Protestant view more comprehensively than Gordon Clark.\footnote{Henry, "A Wide and Deep Swath."}$^{11}$

What then, did Clark believe? Why should Christians, particularly Christian theologians, wrestle with his philosophy and apply his insights? Clark provides perhaps the best philosophical understanding of Protestant Christianity. For its breadth and depth, his work can be difficult at times. He challenges us to question basic assumptions of the world, and of our faith, and he forces us to think in a rigorous, logical fashion. This study then is intended to serve as introduction to his thought, to explain them as clearly and as simply as possible given their often complex nature, and to show how these thoughts developed within the general course of his life.

The contours of Clark's philosophy are as follows: He argued that any valid system of thought needed to be grounded in foundational first principles. From such principles, known as axioms, one could deduce further truths about the world. Most of the philosophies of his day, Clark felt, were hopelessly adrift because they were based on sensory experience. At the root of much of the problem was the philosophy of the empiricists, those who argued that ultimate truth could be derived solely or primarily from observation. Empiricism today is most visible in the sciences, where broadcasted discoveries based on observation can sometimes appear to contradict Biblical truths. Christians then find themselves on the defensive, and giving their own theories based also on observations to derive more palpable results. But Clark felt such competition for interpreting data was useless, since one could never derive absolute truths from observation. Turning to both sides, Christian and secular, Clark declared that one could, through empirical testing alone, neither confirm nor deny the validity of the theory of human evolution, the validity of miracles, nor even the existence of God. Clark's arguments against empiricism were extensive because he believed it was necessary for Christians to reject empiricism and seek higher ground to understand God and His will.

If however, science could neither prove nor disprove God, how can one come to know the world? Rationalist philosophers like Plato, Descartes, and Spinoza had argued that one could derive a theory of the world, or even a proof of God, through logical reasoning alone. Clark agreed that a correct theory needed to be logical, and much of his writings were focused on finding logical contradictions in competing philosophies. A good Christian theology, he argued as well, needs to be logical and recognize that logic is the very way in which God thinks. But Clark took exception to theories that used logic as a starting point. From logic alone he saw that the Rationalist
philosophers were unable to advance their philosophy beyond a few basic contentions.

In recognizing the insufficiency of empiricism, and indeed all secular philosophies to provide for any knowledge, Clark arrived at the thought that knowledge can only come through a third method, relying neither on experiential data nor derived from logic alone. This knowledge, he claimed, was only possible through revelation, as provided through the Bible. The essence of Clark's philosophy then is to show why all other axioms end in failure and how Biblical revelation as a given axiom provides man with a coherent and beneficial worldview.

The philosophy of Gordon Clark has been called Scripturalism because of his reliance on the truth of Scripture as his fundamental axiom or presupposition. Stated simply, his axiom is “The Bible is the Word of God.” Scripturalism teaches that the Bible is a revelation of truth from God, who Himself determines truth and is the source of all truth. In this theory, the propositions of Scripture are true because they are given by inspiration of God, who cannot lie. For Clark, the Bible, the sixty-six books accepted by most Protestant churches, is a set of true propositions. All knowledge currently available to man are these propositions along with any additional propositions that can be logically deduced from them.

Clark believed his philosophy to be aligned with, or even derived from, the Presbyterian Church’s Westminster Confession of Faith. In his writings, he wasn’t usually saying anything new—rather, he was repeating the teachings of Augustine, John Calvin, and of the divines who framed the Westminster Confession. In his dedication to the Confession, his very ordination vow, he could be considered the most strict, rigorous philosopher in the Presbyterian tradition. As per his academic background, having earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, he often employed philosophical terms in his writings, not always the biblical language which may be of greater familiarity to Christians.

He also employed the insights of presuppositionalism, a philosophical approach to which he helped formulate. Along with James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, and Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark was a pioneer in the field of presuppositionalism or presuppositional apologetics, which seeks to understand the underlying commitments of one's worldview, commitments recognized or not. Presuppositionalism asks: What are the preconditions of knowledge? What must reality be like if we are to be capable of knowing reality? Must not the ground on which we stand be sufficiently solid to support our weight?
Clark employed the tests of consistency and of explanatory power to show why biblical Christianity should be preferred over other philosophies. He wrote,

"If a philosopher ponders the basic principles of Aristotle, Kant, or even Sartre, he will do so by considering how well the author succeeds in solving his problems. So too it should be with Christian revelation as an axiom. Does revelation make knowledge possible? Does revelation establish values and ethical norms? Does revelation give a theory of politics? And are the results consistent with one another? We can judge the acceptability of an axiom only by its success in producing a system."

Let us judge Clark by his own standards.

Why would one write a biography of a philosopher? Gordon Clark questioned this very thought late in his life when his publisher John Robbins had mentioned his own intentions of writing such a book on Clark. Clark insisted that no one would be interested in his life; he had done nothing exciting, he had neither led armies nor conquered kingdoms, nor discovered a cure for cancer. In fact, in large measure I felt the same at the beginning of this project, for this project did not begin as a biography, but as a summary of Clark's philosophical thought. Quickly, however, I realized that Clark's theology and philosophy were not restricted to the confines of the academy, but had significant ramifications for Church history. An unimposing 5'7", Clark fought no wars and conquered no kingdoms. Yet he was a leading figure in many theological wars fought for the Kingdom of God. And these wars for the minds and souls of men were every bit as crucial as physical wars between nations.

Clark's life intertwined with the history of twentieth-century Presbyterianism in America. From the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America during the 1920s and '30s, to the growth by acquisition of the Presbyterian Church in America in the 1980s, he was directly involved in most of the major American Presbyterian denominational separations and mergers of his era. Neverthe-

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5. The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy was a religious controversy in the 1920s and 1930s that led to divisions in many American Christian denominations.
6. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) existed from 1789–1958 until its merger with the United Presbyterian Church in North America. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was formed in 1973 and is presently the largest conservative Presbyterian church in the United States.
less, second only to his voluminous writings, Clark is largely known today for the controversy regarding some of his theological views surrounding his 1944 ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This controversy, called the Clark-Van Til Controversy after its leading adversaries, has brought continued debate over the doctrines involved and has engendered some lasting animosity between the theological parties it helped to define.

As much as the story of Gordon Clark connects with American Presbyterian history, the philosophy of Gordon Clark engages the most important Presbyterian confession, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Time and again in Clark's life and works, his commitment to the system of belief described in this historic document is revealed. To evidence this point, the teaching of the *Confession* that "the Bible is given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life" prompted him to fight against the theology of the Auburn Affirmation in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and to join a reforming movement that later founded the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The *Confession* set the boundaries for Clark's philosophy beyond which he would strive not to venture. But Clark's strict adherence to the *Confession* proved to be the cause of repeated controversies. His adherence to its Calvinist foundations led to conflict with the administration at Wheaton College, and his reading of the *Confession* that "God has neither parts nor passions" supported his sometimes controversial view that God has no emotions. Notwithstanding the controversies his adherence to it engendered, Clark remained convinced of the truth of the system of doctrine contained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a truth centered in biblical revelation alone.

Uncompromising in his thoughts, and unwilling to back down from philosophical challenges, Clark made few friends in higher circles of American theologians. He was not a self-promoter; nor did he actively seek a popular audience. In fact, he once admitted to a fellow church minister to being the world's worst diplomat. Instead, Clark was content to develop his thoughts quietly and in the relative isolation of his academic posi-

7. The Auburn Affirmation was written in 1924 by a Modernist movement in the PCUSA that sought to prevent five fundamental doctrines from becoming requirements for ordination in the church.

8. Clark's position, known as theological anthropopathism, is the standard position of Reformed orthodoxy and argues that just as the physical features attributed to God in the Bible (hands, wings, etc.) are anthropomorphisms (attribute of human form or other characteristics to anything other than a human being) given to allow man to understand, so also God's emotions in the Bible are anthropopathisms (the ascription of human feelings to something not human); likewise, not attributes God has, but figures of speech.

9. GHC to Robert Strong, May 9, 1942. PCA Archives, 309/56.
tions – thoughts which he published in an extensive set of books. Clark's participation in theological controversies earned him some press, alternately some notoriety and fame; but he was ultimately viewed as being on the losing side of these controversies because many of his views remained in the minority within the institutions where he labored. Clark's students often carried on his views, but few could completely understand them as few had the academic training to understand their philosophical complexity. At Westminster Theological Seminary, Clark's views were pushed aside in the wake of the Clark-Van Til Controversy, and the views of his rival, Cornelius Van Til, were promoted instead. That American religious historians have neglected Clark speaks more to circumstance (to his place in the practical power structure of the church, and to the myopia of fast-paced American religious life) than it does to the strength or weakness of his arguments.

In many ways, Clark's personality matched his philosophy. He insisted on proper logic in the classroom, and the very idea of being logical became his most well-known attribute. His rigorous insistence on correct logic made his writings eminently clear, but often frustrated those whom he knew personally. At times students were afraid to ask him questions as they suspected he would respond with a critique of their logic. Additionally, Clark's dedication to his logical philosophy alienated the administration of Wheaton College where he was teaching and brought a complaint against his ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Yet despite the frequent attribution to him of a personal "coldness" to match his "cold" logic, he was known also as an incredibly kind man and even a jokester. His kindness was perhaps best shown in his willingness to teach students after class in his home and in his dedication to his family and church. His extant audio lectures are replete with jokes. For many who shared remembrances of him for this biography the first thing they often recalled was his comedy.

Clark's true import, however, is that, in an age of increasing secularization and rising atheism, he put up an intellectual defense of the Christian faith. This faith, he believed, was a system. All of its parts link together, a luxury of no other philosophy. The Scriptures exhort us to "Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). This requires that we love God fully with our minds and study His Word. Only from God's revelation can we be assured of the truth of our reasons.

The supporters of Clark at present are few in number and lacking in high-profile academic posts, but those who comprehend his life's work recognize the power of his arguments. His theology has something to teach us, as does his life itself. If we ultimately reject Clark's views, we should do so only after thoroughly grappling with them. And if we are honest with
ourselves, we will discover much in his works that challenge fundamental beliefs, whether they be beliefs in science, philosophy, or mainstream Christianity.

To address the entirety of Clark's philosophical writings would require a volume far larger than the present one. I have endeavored therefore to discuss only those topics which I have deemed to be integral to Clark's life and philosophy. Certainly, zealous "Clarkians" will find fault in that I have insufficiently addressed Clark's views on philosophical topics such as "common ground," traducianism, or the noetic effects of sin (among countless others he addressed). I must therefore beg the reader to find fault not in what I haven't written, but in what I have.

I am proud to say that Gordon Clark's writings helped keep me solidly grounded in the Christian faith when I was looking for a defense of it. Clark was not a compromiser, and this is perhaps why I have gravitated so much to him. His uncompromising stance shows a Christianity which is in fact intellectual, not relying simply on appeals to emotion or experience. It is my hope that the readers of this biography are strengthened in their confidence of the truth of the Christian faith through the arguments made by Gordon Clark and life he lived out.
Chapter 1

The Presbyterian Heritage of
Gordon Clark

Clark—an English surname ultimately derived from the Latin clericus meaning “scribe,” “secretary,” or a scholar within a religious order, referring to someone educated.

GORDON HADDON CLARK (1902–1985) was born into the Christian tradition of Old School Presbyterianism. Known for requiring ministers to subscribe to the system of Protestant Christian doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), Old School Presbyterianism shaped Clark's understanding of the world. In his career as a theologian and a Christian philosopher, Clark defended the Confession and sought to keep his own philosophical views in line with its teachings. In fact, it could be said that he was a philosopher of the Westminster Confession, truly a Presbyterian philosopher.¹

Historical circumstances initially set Clark on this course. In fact, he was the son of a Presbyterian minister who, in turn, was the son of a Presbyterian minister. For two generations then, starting with his paternal grandfather, James Armstrong Clark (1831–1894), Presbyterian ministry

¹. The term “Presbyterian” is derived from the Greek word presbuteros, meaning elder or pastor. Churches in Scotland and England took the name “Presbyterian” to distinguish their style of elder-led church governance from the hierarchical Church of England. Presbyterian denominations also adhere to Reformed theology, exemplified by John Calvin’s teachings.
was of central importance to the family. While Gordon Clark never met his
grandfather, who died before Gordon was born, he did travel as a child with
his parents to visit relatives in western Pennsylvania where the family had
lived since shortly after James arrived from Scotland in 1854.2

Digging into the Clark family line, we can see how he inherited the
Christian doctrines that shaped the core of his thought. Basic knowledge of
his grandfather, James Clark, survives in a fifteen-page handwritten autobi-
ography written sometime in the late nineteenth century.3 Because the con-
tent of the autobiography ends abruptly in 1858, and other sources on his
life are scant, we can only piece together the basic contours of James' life.4
What we do know shows that he was deeply committed to the Presbyterian
faith. James was born December 4, 1831, to William Baldwin Clark5 (1791–
1858) and Jean Armstrong (1796–18??) in Hawick, Scotland, and baptized
at Hawick's East Bank Associate Church.6 As a child, he was affected by the
Disruption of 1843, which fractured the established Church of Scotland.
In this seminal event in Presbyterian history, some 450 ministers of the
church's total of 1,200 ministers broke away and formed the Free Church

2. In the possession of the Clark family, Gordon Clark's baby book relates that as a
child, Gordon traveled with his parents to visit relatives living in western Pennsylvania,
where some of the family had lived since shortly after James Armstrong Clark arrived
from Scotland in 1854.


4. A notable reference in James Clark's autobiography is to one of his mother's an-
cestors: "My great-great-grandfather was John Armstrong of Glenlacky Hall, famous
in the history of the border warfare." This John Armstrong, known as Johnnie of Gil-
nockie, was a well-known border reiver, or raider, on the borderlands of Scotland and
England in the early sixteenth century. Operating from lands scarred by centuries of
war, Johnnie and Clan Armstrong disdained to take orders from either the King of
England or the King of Scotland. To keep the region in fear and his income flowing,
Johnnie pursued the centuries-old *modus operandi* of late-night horseback raids and
blackmailing towns with threats of burning them down. His wealth and reputation,
however, roused the jealous ire of seventeen-year-old King James V of Scotland who
deemed the reivers' forays a threat to peace with neighboring England. In the summer
of 1530, James V issued a royal writ of safe passage to Johnnie Armstrong and his fol-
lowers to attend peace talks over a hunting expedition. However, upon their arrival,
they found they had been tricked. Thirty-seven men, including Johnnie Armstrong,
were captured and hanged at the chapel of Caerlanrig, a few miles south of Hawick,
Scotland. The "Ballad of Johnnie Armstrong," commemorates the infamous reiver. See:
Fraser, *Steel Bonnets*, 225–236.

5. Two books in the Gordon H. Clark Collection at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary
library contain the signature of William Baldwin Clark. These books are *The Intuitions
of the Mind and Defence of Fundamental Truth* both authored by the prominent Scottish
philosopher James McCosh.

6. The Associate Church (the "Seceders") was formed from the "First Secession" out
of the Church of Scotland in 1733.
of Scotland. The secession came as a response to the state’s encroachment upon the spiritual affairs of the church. Although James was only twelve years of age at the time of the Disruption, he recalled in his autobiography that at that time he had “religious impressions & dispositions” and “took sides against the establishment.” By the time he was fourteen years of age he had “taken sides with the Calvinist docs” and “made a fair offer in argument on the five points [of Calvinism].” Soon after the Disruption, James’s parents chose to join a Free Church congregation and James’s father, William, was elected as an elder. A few years later, James left home to attend the Free Church Normal College in Edinburgh.7 Following his graduation, he became a teacher at the Free Church Normal School in Yarrow, Scotland (1851–1854).

Historical knowledge of Presbyterianism came to Gordon Clark through family stories of the church in Scotland and in the United States. In fact, for generations, Clark family history was largely tied up with the history of the church. Although Gordon Clark’s grandfather James arrived on American shores in 1854, James’s brother Will had preceded him by a few years. Will found in the United States a “very large field of usefulness” for the ministry. Inspired by the potential for ministry in the U.S., James resigned his teaching position in Scotland and followed his brother’s path across the ocean.8 On April 24, 1854, just weeks prior to leaving Scotland, James married Margaret Scott (1835–1881), satisfying his mother’s wish that he would not emigrate alone. Once in the United States, he taught bookkeeping and was the principal of a business college which he owned and operated in Philadelphia for a year before selling its assets and returning to college as a student. He enrolled first at Franklin College in Ohio, but left in 1855 to attend Allegheny Seminary where he studied theology, graduating in 1858. Upon his arrival in the U.S., James joined the Associate Presbyterian Church, an ethnically Scottish denomination with roots reaching back over a century in the United States.9 When, in 1858, this church merged with other Scottish Seceder and Covenanter churches in America to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA), James, who had been licensed to preach in the Associate Presbyterian Church in 1857, joined the new body in short order and was ordained in 1859. He preached for the remainder of his life in the UPCNA at a number of churches in Butler County, Pennsylvania. After the death of his first wife, Margaret Scott,

7. The Free Church Normal College was founded in 1845 to train teachers in the Free Church of Scotland.
9. The Associate Presbytery of Philadelphia was constituted on November 2, 1753. McBee and Stewart, History of the Associate Presbyterian Church of North America, 17.
in 1881, James married Frances N. Wilson in 1884. In total, he had two daughters and seven sons.\textsuperscript{10}

Among the children born to James Armstrong Clark and his first wife Margaret Scott was the father of Gordon Clark, David Scott Clark (1859–1939). Although few records remain providing details of David's early life, it is possible to provide a basic outline of his academic track.\textsuperscript{11} According to United Presbyterian Church records, David graduated in 1884 from Mount Union College in Ohio, received an M.A. from the same college in 1886, and was awarded an honorary DD in 1908.\textsuperscript{12} He also studied at Princeton Theological Seminary (1883–1885), as well as at the Free Church College in Edinburgh (1885–1886), before returning to Princeton where he graduated in 1887 with a Master of Divinity degree.

David's learning would prove influential in Gordon Clark's upbringing. David equipped his son with a set of competencies that other young students would not learn until seminary, including knowledge of Presbyterian history, church doctrine, and the nature of recent events in the church. From his father, Gordon learned about the influence of Princeton Theological Seminary on the American religious scene. David based his views on first-hand experience. As a student at Princeton in the 1880s, he witnessed the institution at the peak of its historical influence. In the first one hundred years of the seminary (1812–1912), it had graduated nearly 6,000 ministers, 1,000 more than any other seminary in America, and these students spread Princetonian ideas far and wide.\textsuperscript{13} Leading the seminary at the time of David's attendance were the prominent theologians A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). These two improbably-named men stood firm on the doctrine of the Bible's inspiration and authority, an essential element of the seminary's conservative theology that came to be known as “Princeton Theology.”

Alongside Princeton Theology, the seminary was also a stronghold for Old School Presbyterianism. The term Old School Presbyterianism is traced back to 1837 when a schism tore the Presbyterian Church in the United

\textsuperscript{10} Minutes of the Thirty-Seventh General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 786–787.

\textsuperscript{11} A single extant letter from David's early years, dated July 18, 1880, is a letter of recommendation from James A. Brush, David's professor at Mount Union College, Ohio. In the letter, Brush writes to a prospective employer that David is a student in good standing who is "industrious, faithful, and thorough" and is seeking a teaching position. The letter is in the Clark Collection at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library, 1/53.

\textsuperscript{12} DD is a Doctor of Divinity, traditionally an honorary degree used to recognize the ministerial accomplishments of the recipient.

\textsuperscript{13} Noll, “The Princeton Theology,” 24.
States of America into two camps. Known as the Old School-New School controversy, the resulting schism separated the two “schools of thought” from 1837 to 1865. In this episode, as throughout much of Presbyterian history, the church faced a difficult question regarding the extent to which subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, that is, a profession of belief in and promise to teach and defend its doctrines, should be required of ministers. The theologians of the New School embraced revivalism and modified a number of the historical Calvinistic doctrines. The Old School theologians, on the other hand, were largely suspicious of the New School’s views and advocated subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as a check on their perceived deleterious effects. The two schools officially merged in 1865, but factions within the church were still visible decades later.

David S. Clark found his pastorates in Philadelphia and so Gordon Clark grew up in a city which had long been a hub of Presbyterianism in America. In fact, the very first presbytery (or session of church elders) in the American colonies was formed there in 1706, and the Presbyterian Church in the USA chose to hold its first General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1789. One hundred years later, in 1889, David accepted a call to Wissinoming Presbyterian Church, just outside of Philadelphia, for his first position as a minister. It was at this church that David Clark met Miss Elizabeth Yates Haddon (1878–1931). In retelling his father’s story, Gordon Clark wrote, “One day a girl appeared in church wearing a red hat and apparently the attraction was so obvious that she never wore it again. They were married in 1895 and I was born in 1902.” In 1894, David took charge of the Memorial

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14. *Revival*, as Protestant theology has used the word for 250 years, means God’s quickening visitation of his people, touching their hearts and deepening his work of grace in their lives. It is essentially a corporate occurrence, an enlivening of individuals not in isolation but together. See: Ferguson and Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, 588.

15. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, formulated in 1646 as part of the *Westminster Standards* (including also the Shorter and Longer Catechisms), provides a systematic summary of the teachings of the Bible according to traditional Reformed Presbyterian theology. Although subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* places a number of requirements for belief on those seeking ordination in a Presbyterian church, it also serves as an upper limit on these requirements. These requirements apply to officers of the church only (pastors, elders, and deacons) and not to the laity. Under this arrangement, standards of belief are set which give unity to the leadership, while preserving freedom for the laity to attend and become members of the church without necessarily agreeing to the WCF *in toto*.

16. David S. Clark was officially ordained and installed as pastor at Wissinoming, Pennsylvania, on May 10, 1889.

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Collegiate Chapel and, in 1899, organized a church at the same site on the corner of Nineteenth and York streets. The congregation, which changed its name to Bethel Presbyterian Church, flourished under David’s tenure, so that by 1912 it counted 340 members.\textsuperscript{18}

Shortly after the founding of Bethel Presbyterian Church, Gordon Haddon Clark was born to the Rev. David Scott Clark and his wife, Elizabeth Haddon Clark, on August 31, 1902.\textsuperscript{19} He was their only child. Growing up in the shadow of Bethel Presbyterian Church, Gordon gained from his father the wisdom of years of practical experience as a Presbyterian minister as well as insight into writing for publication and inspiration for academic work. The elder Clark wrote three theological books, including a commentary on the book of Revelation titled \textit{The Message From Patmos}.\textsuperscript{20} He also penned multiple position pieces for Presbyterian journals.\textsuperscript{21} As an instructor in doctrine at the Presbyterian School for Christian Workers (Tennent College) in Philadelphia from 1917–1929, and later as an instructor in philosophy at Eastern University,\textsuperscript{22} also in Philadelphia, David Clark kept one foot in the academic world. By all indication, Gordon’s respect and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Directory of Bethel Presbyterian Church. See also: Hallock, “Among the Churches,” 113.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} He was given the name Gordon after the popular British Army Major-General and Christian evangelist Charles George Gordon (1833–1885), known for a number of military campaigns, including training and leading a Chinese army to victory in the Taiping Rebellion in the 1860s. Lois (née Clark) Zeller and Dr. Dwight Zeller, interview by Douglas Douma, Sangre de Cristo Seminary, 29 May 2014.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} David S. Clark, \textit{The Message From Patmos} (Reading, PA: Christian Faith and Life, 1921); \textit{––} \textit{A Syllabus of Systematic Theology} (Reading, PA: Christian Faith and Life, 1921); \textit{––} \textit{Protestant Unbelief, or Rationalism Past and Present} (Reading, PA: Christian Faith and Life, 1937).
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Eastern University existed c. 1927–1935. It should not be confused with the Eastern University located in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, which was then called Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
\end{itemize}
admiration for his father was deep, and the ultimate inspiration he gleaned from his father as role model cannot be overestimated.23

Presbyterianism also ran deep in the Haddon family, Gordon Clark’s maternal line. The Haddons came from English Presbyterian stock in the county of Devon, England. Gordon’s maternal grandfather, Thomas Deacon Haddon (1834–1914), was not a minister, but had mastered biblical Greek in his free time apart from his work as a wool carder.24 25 Gordon’s uncle, Charles K. Haddon (1867–1935), was also a churchgoing man, a supporter of prohibition, and, for fifteen years (1906–1921), the vice president of the Victor Talking Machine Company, a leading manufacturer of phonographs and phonograph records.26 The company was founded by Charles’s close friend Eldridge Johnson and later successfully defended itself in a court case on patent infringement raised by Thomas Edison. Shortly after Charles retired, he traveled around the world twice, first on the R.M.S. Samaria in 1923, then on the R.M.S. Franconia in 1927. After each voyage, Charles published the letters he had written and received while abroad.27 Charles’s wealth not only afforded his world travels but also made it possible for his father (Gordon Clark’s maternal grandfather), Thomas Deacon Haddon, to retire at sixty years of age and devote much of his remaining years to studying the Bible.28

Gordon Clark embraced his Presbyterian heritage. When he was a child his father taught him the Westminster Shorter Catechism—a question and answer summary of the basic beliefs of the Presbyterian church. He also followed his father’s interest in theology by reading from the many books in their home library.29 Local neighborhood children associated Clark so strongly with the church, that they gave him the nickname “Clerg,” a

23. The effect of this bond can be gauged by Clark’s attempt to have his father’s sermons published following his father’s death. See: Peter de Visser of Eerdmans Publishing to GHC, 10 July 1939, PCA Archives, 309/59. See also: B. D. Zondervan to GHC, n.d. circa 1939, in the original papers of Gordon Clark, A.E. o.4, 1/128.
25. Carding is a manufacturing process which disentangles and cleans wool to produce long continuous fibers. Though the Haddon’s had Presbyterian roots, Thomas Deacon Haddon himself was a member of the Plymouth Brethren. Clark, “Gordon Clark Remembrances.”
dig at his father's status as a member of the clergy. Looking back on his Presbyterian heritage later in life, Clark recalled:

Well, I've known about Scottish Presbyterianism from both sides of my family; I guess you call it heritage. So many of us are blindly proud of our heritage without knowing what it is. But in my experience I think heritage is like a bedtime story of grandpa's reminiscence. It's really kind of a naive thing like the Jews remembering the wilderness and the walls of Jericho. It's to give you a respect for courage as well as a feeling of worth as a descendant of Abraham.

With the family's income dependent on David's job as a pastor, Clark grew up fairly poor. He noted in a handwritten document of his recollections that there was one time when the church was nine months in arrears paying his father's salary. He also noted that they did not have electricity in their house until about 1914. It was only after Clark was in college that the family received a great boon when Gordon's wealthy uncle Charles (Elizabeth Haddon Clark's brother) gave them checks at Christmas. Each Christmas in the late 1920s and early 1930s Charles gave Clark and his cousins $100 checks. To Clark's mother he gave checks of $1000. Charles was also the financial source of Clark's cherished childhood dog Victor, named for the phonograph company.

As Clark grew to adulthood, he deepened his involvement in his father's church by teaching Sunday school lessons and later was appointed the Sunday school superintendent, a post he held for ten years.

Clark also benefitted from the cultural opportunities abounding in the city of Philadelphia. He first professed to be a Christian at a campaign of the popular Presbyterian evangelist-preacher and former professional baseball player Billy Sunday, when his tour came through Philadelphia in early 1915. This revelation may come as a surprise to many who knew Clark later in his life, as Clark's own methods of evangelism diverged greatly from
those of Billy Sunday; Clark emphasized the intellect, whereas Sunday, following the methods of the Second Great Awakening revivalists, appealed to his audience's emotions. Also in Philadelphia, Clark was fortunate to see a performance of the famed composer, John Philip Sousa. Clark himself had an interest in music, for a time taking up the cornet.  

Clark's public school education was fairly standard, but it also provided him some advantages. He attended the all-boys Northeast High School of Philadelphia. The school, founded in 1890, was originally known as the Northeast Manual Training School; but by the time Clark attended (1917–1920) it had changed its name, removing the “Manual Training.” Although the school retained some hands-on courses after the name change, its main focus became the liberal arts and college preparation. In keeping with that focus, Clark studied a number of languages, including French, Latin, and Greek (not biblical or Koine, but Attic Greek, which was commonly taught at secular high schools in that period). With just two exceptions—a “deficient” in both Latin and Freehand Drawing in his senior year—his report cards show that he received a fairly even mixture of good, fair, and excellent marks.

Given the influence of his family, church, and school, Clark developed into a young man knowledgeable in the Scriptures and the Presbyterian tradition. By the time he left for college at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), he had a strong Christian faith, was well read, and was conscious of his Presbyterian identity. In many ways, this made him a prime candidate to be an uncompromising scholar and elicited opportunities to delve deeper into philosophy, a subject that required the language and logic skills he had already acquired as a youth. At Penn, Clark improved his knowledge of foreign languages, and as a top student in French language he received the Alliance Française medal from the French language honorary society. He also studied Hebrew under James Alan Montgomery (1866–1949), whom Clark thought was one of the best living scholars then working against biblical criticism. About Professor Montgomery, Clark once wrote, “[He was one] to whose very slender six-feet-five we students all looked up.”

36. His cornet was a Christmas gift from his uncle Charles. Clark, “Gordon Clark Remembrances.”
39. Biblical criticism is the discipline of investigating the nature of Scripture from the viewpoint of the Bible having fully human origins. In other words, it is the naturalistic treatment of the Bible as a historic document.
40. Clark, Johannine Logos, 8.
undergraduate years, Clark was elected a member of the prestigious honor society, Phi Beta Kappa, but later admitted in a job application to Wheaton College, a college which frowned upon anything even resembling a secret society, to having attended only one meeting and even then just to accept an award.41

In 1924, at the age of twenty-two, he received a bachelor’s degree in French and proceeded to the graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied philosophy. Although he was interested in attending Princeton Theological Seminary, like his father before him, Clark believed modernizing trends at the seminary made it an uncongenial place for true Christian study.42

Clark thrived during his graduate years under the impressive philosophy faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. There were four main professors under whom he studied: Edgar A. Singer Jr. (1873–1955), Isaac Husik (1876–1939), Henry Bradford Smith (1882–1938), and William Romaine Newbold (1865–1926).43 All four of these men had received their doctorates in philosophy from Penn and had taken faculty positions at the university, a path Clark would soon follow. Professor Singer was a philosopher of pragmatism and former student at Harvard of the influential American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910).44 For years after leaving Penn, Clark remained in correspondence with Singer, likely distilling some of these conversations into his own monograph critiquing William James’s philosophy.45 It was also at Penn that Isaac Husik, a noted historian of Jewish philosophers, introduced Clark to Aristotle’s De Anima, about which Clark chose to write his dissertation. Clark studied logic at Penn under Henry Bradford Smith, the author of several logic textbooks.46

41. “In 1926 a fraternity here elected me an honorary member. I accepted the honor and have not attended since.”—Application for appointment as professor of philosophy, Wheaton College, signed by Gordon H. Clark, 5 March 1936.
42. “It was my purpose, when I chose to teach philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania rather than study theology at your Seminary, to defend and promulgate an Evangelical faith in Christ. The door has indeed been opened. I do not regret my choice.”—GHC to JGM, 25 October 1928, WTS Archives.
43. Newbold, PhD., 1891; Singer, PhD., 1894; Husik, PhD., 1906; Smith, PhD., 1909.
44. Clark and Nahm. Philosophical Essays, vi.
45. Clark, William James.
Clark was impressed by Smith. He wrote, "I find H. B. Smith's First Book in Logic very satisfactory."47

It was, however, William Romaine Newbold, Clark's advisor for his first two years, of whom he was most fond. This attraction was likely due in part to their shared Christian convictions within the mostly secular philosophy department and university. In addition to being a talented academic, Newbold had eccentric study interests including Gnosticism, hypnosis, telepathy, and cryptography—even attempting to decipher the famed, and still to this day undeciphered, Voynich Manuscript.48 Newbold demonstrated his affection for Clark in giving him a book inscribed: “To Gordon Haddon Clark, in whose mind the mind of William Romaine Newbold took much delight.”49

Newbold's premature death in 1926 affected Clark deeply, both personally and professionally. Clark spoke at Newbold's memorial service; he was the only student given that honor.50 He later recalled the circumstances in which he was offered a teaching position "upon the death of my beloved superior."51 In Clark's 1929 doctoral dissertation, Empedocles and Anaxagoras in Aristotle's De Anima, he praised Newbold for being a "fountain of inestimable value during my first two years of study in Greek philosophy."52

With all of the new intellectual thoughts and challenges at Penn, it was appropriate that Clark begin to test himself also as a teacher. In 1924, as a graduate student, he began teaching undergraduate philosophy courses. In 1926 he inherited a course on the history of the philosophy of Christianity

47. GHC to C. Gregg Singer, 6 August 1941, PCA Archives, 309/53.
48. The Voynich Manuscript is an illustrated codex, or book, hand-written in an unknown language and including numerous strange drawings. Though its provenance before 1912—when it was purchased by the Polish book dealer Wilfried Voynich—is mostly unknown, it is generally thought to date from the fifteenth century and to have originated in Italy. With the trust of Wilfried Voynich, Newbold began study of the manuscript in 1919 and made news in 1921 when he made a number of fantastic claims including that he had deciphered parts of the manuscript. Agreeing with Voynich's supposition, Newbold claimed that the manuscript was written by Roger Bacon (1214–1294) and that Bacon had invented the telescope and drawn the arms of the Andromeda galaxy. The entire theory was discredited by their colleague, John Manly, in 1931, after both Newbold's and Voynich's deaths. See: Newbold and Kent, The Cipher of Roger Bacon, xi-xxxii. See also: Kennedy Churchill, The Voynich Manuscript.
50. Program for the Memorial Meeting in Honor of William Romaine Newbold PhD, LLD. (1 December 1926), found stuffed inside the front cover of a Bible belonging to GHC, Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library.
51. GHC to Ned Stonehouse, 8 August 1929, WTS Archives.
from Dr. Newbold. Clark continued teaching throughout graduate school with just one break to study in Heidelberg, Germany, in the summer of 1927. After the University of Pennsylvania accepted his dissertation, Clark attended the University of Paris (commonly known as the Sorbonne) during the spring and summer of 1930. His knowledge of modern and ancient languages allowed him to effectively study in both Germany and France, as he was able to read each country’s philosophers in their own languages. He continued to stay conversant in French and German throughout his life, later corresponding with a pen pal in Germany to help retain his German language skills, and also ensuring that his two daughters learn French. He returned to Penn in the fall of 1930 to continue teaching.

The philosophy department at Penn inspired Clark to think critically and form his own defense of the Presbyterian faith, but his time there also shaped his life in other lasting ways. During his graduate years at Penn, he met his future wife, Ruth Schmidt, who was also studying at the university. They found they had much in common. They were both native Philadelphians, had both attended public high schools (Clark at the all-boys’, and Ruth at the all-girls’), and were both conversant in French. Remarkably, Gordon’s father had baptized Ruth when she was a child. This baptism took place despite Ruth’s family’s membership at a Methodist church. It is unclear why her baptism occurred in the Presbyterian Church other than the family’s speculation that it might have been because of David Clark’s popularity as a pastor. Two books Gordon gave to Ruth, which are now in the Clark Collection in the Clark Library at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary, indicate the blossoming of Gordon and Ruth’s relationship. One, dated 1925, was simply given “to Ruth,” while a second inscription, dated 1927, is much more warmly inscribed to “My darling Ruthie.” While at Penn, Ruth earned both a bachelor’s (1928) and a master’s degree (1932) in botany. Gordon and Ruth married in March of 1929 and remained together for forty-eight years until Ruth’s death in 1977. The couple had two children, Lois Antoinette (b. 1936) and Nancy Elizabeth (b. 1941).

53. Rudolph, ”A Truly Great and Brilliant Friend,” 100. See Also: GHC to JGM, 25 October 1928, WTS Archives.

54. Very little information could be found regarding Clark’s time at the Sorbonne. It seems likely that at least one reason for his attendance was to study Plotinus under the French philosopher, Émile Bréhier. A copy of Bréhier’s La Philosophie Plotin noted as purchased by Clark in March 1930 is extant in the Clark collection, Sangre de Cristo Seminary library.

Following their wedding, the Clarks went on a honeymoon at a chalet in Dorset, Vermont, owned by Bishop Robert Livingston Rudolph (1865–1930), a professor at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia and Bishop in the Reformed Episcopal Church.

Clark was very close to Bishop Rudolph and his son Robert Knight Rudolph (1906–1986), both of whom spent their careers teaching at Reformed Episcopal Seminary. Clark first came to know of Bishop Rudolph when Rudolph bought up nearly the entire stock of Clark’s father’s theology textbooks. Clark came across the elder Rudolph again at the Philadelphia Philosophical Society and persuaded the bishop, thirty-seven years his senior, to agree to his position as a “five-point” Calvinist. Robert K. Rudolph, the bishop’s son, enrolled in Clark’s undergraduate philosophy courses at Pennsylvania, and, as the younger Rudolph was far closer in age to Clark, became and remained a close lifelong friend. When the University of Pennsylvania reduced Clark’s pay as a result of the Great Depression, he utilized his connection to the Rudolphs and taught a few additional courses at the nearby Reformed Episcopal Seminary.

While teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, where he remained until 1936, Clark was the founder, and then adviser, of the university’s chapter of the League of Evangelical Students, an early forerunner to institutions like Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Reformed University Fellowship. He wrote articles for their magazine, The Evangelical Student, helped to organize chapters at other colleges, and once was the toastmaster at an evening banquet for the League’s Eastern Regional Conference. But it was not only at the university that Clark was active in his Christian mission. He also was a ruling elder at his father’s church, and preached on occasion when his father was absent from the pulpit. In addition, from 1935 to 1938, Clark was a guest at least six times on the “Mid-Week Forum Hour” with host Erling C. Olsen on radio station WMCA, a program broadcast from New York City and carried on stations throughout the Northeast. On this forum, he defended Christianity on topics such as the historicity of “The Resurrection” and “Is Faith in the Bible Reasonable? His involvement in Christianity-promoting activities engrossed his life.

58. Jones, The Evangelical Student. See also: “Dr. Clark to Address League Next Monday,” The Wheaton Record, 5 March 1937.
59. Extant sermons of Gordon Clark for Bethel Presbyterian Church range in date from 1922 to 1939, PCA Archives.
60. Mid-Week Forum Hour with host Erling C. Olsen, WMCA New York (six radio
Clark’s family background and education set the stage for his involvement in Presbyterian church politics as an Old School defender of the Westminster Confession of Faith in a controversy then enveloping the church. However, before addressing the church issues in which Clark became involved, the next chapter will address the intellectual influences on Clark beyond his Presbyterian heritage.
Chapter 2

Gordon Clark’s Intellectual Influences

“If one goes back to the Westminster divines, to Calvin, even to Aquinas, and especially to Augustine, he will find that human nature is regularly divided into intellect and will. The point is important because faith in Christ is not an emotion but a volition. One does not feel for Christ, he decides for Christ.”

—Gordon H. Clark, Lecture on Logos

Gordon Clark was influenced not only by the Presbyterian tradition in which he was raised, but also by the philosophers whom he read and studied at the University of Pennsylvania. Though many philosophers avoid reading the Bible, and many Christians eschew “worldly” philosophy, Clark read from both traditions; he was both a Christian and a philosopher. He read widely in both Christianity and philosophy to the effect that he learned to defend Christianity with a clear understanding of the alternatives. In his approach to his writings, he sought to demonstrate the logical consistency of Christianity while exposing the logical inconsistencies of other philosophies.

2. As a disciple of Clark’s later argued, the Christian position was not that philosophy in general should be opposed, but rather that one should oppose false, worldly philosophy. “Paul is warning us, not about all philosophy, but about non-Christian philosophy.”—Robbins, foreword to Three Types of Religious Philosophy, vii–viii.
3. Clark’s early interest in the relationship between Christianity and philosophy is evidenced in a 1932 letter he wrote to J. Gresham Machen in which he inquired, “Do you know of a subject of investigation which combines interest in Greek Philosophy
Clark wrote on both Greek philosophy and Christian thought, often addressing their intersection. He was a prolific writer, producing at least forty published books and more than 200 articles during his career. His writings can be placed conveniently into four categories:

1. Writings on ancient Greek philosophy 1929–1941

Clark’s first publications appeared shortly after he earned his PhD. These writings concerned topics he had studied in philosophy classes in graduate school. Prior to the early 1940s, most of Clark’s writings concerned philosophy, not Christianity directly. In addition to his dissertation, *Empedocles and Anaxagoras in Aristotle’s De Anima* (1929), he was involved in the writing of four books on philosophy—two as author and two as contributor: *Readings in Ethics* (1931), *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy* (1934), *Selections from Hellenistic Philosophy* (1940), and *A History of Philosophy* (1941). Later Clark produced a fairly popular textbook, *Thales to Dewey*, a general overview of the history of philosophy.

In thinking about philosophical matters, Clark looked not to the latest trends but to the classic writers. He critiqued the spirit of college students who preferred to study only the latest theories to be “in the know,” rather than studying the theories of history’s greatest thinkers. He wrote, “There is a tendency to regard college as a young gentleman’s finishing school with consequent superficiality. . . . This view in my opinion leads to the acceptance of every new idea simply because it is up to date.”

It was the ancient Greeks, particularly the philosopher Plato and his students, that most caught Clark’s attention. Fundamentally, Plato argued that there was more to the world than what could be ascertained from the

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4. Although Clark died in 1985, the Trinity Foundation continued to print and release previously unpublished writings by Clark up through 1993. The Trinity Foundation has also printed several compilations of previously published material by Clark.

5. One book reviewer commented that Clark’s philosophical scholarship was well respected even in non-Christian circles, saying, “Gordon H. Clark is recognized as a scholar not only among believers, but he has won the acclaim of the pagan world in the field of philosophy. Though they do not agree with him, they admire him for his point of view. It has been my pleasure to hear his name extolled in university circles by men who are not Christians.”—Keiper, review of *Thales to Dewey*, 34.

6. GHC to JOB, 5 March 1936, PCA Archives.
senses. He posited a supra-sensible world, a plane of existence where the true forms behind sensory objects lie. In Plato’s realm of forms, ideas exist independently of physical nature. This view appealed to Clark because he could agree that true forms of a sort existed, not in some other realm, but in a similar way in (or as) the very mind of the God of the Bible.

CLARK, PLOTINUS, AND DIVINE SIMPLICITY

In his earliest writings, Clark focused his work on the philosophy of Plotinus (AD 205–270), a prominent philosopher in the tradition of Plato. Clark aggressively studied Plotinus, reading his entire works (the Enneads) in the original Greek, and described the school of Plotinus as the “flower and culmination of all Greek philosophy.”

Nevertheless, Clark rejected a key aspect of Plotinus’s philosophy: his doctrine of God, or what Plotinus called “the One.” For Plotinus, the One was not only supreme, totally transcendent, and indivisible, but was also without distinctions and beyond all categories of being and non-being. Clark believed that the biblical view of God was at variance with such a frozen picture of the divine. Rather, he held that the God of the Bible is a living, willing being. Clark wrote, “God is a living God, not a Plotinic One.” And similarly, “Plotinus explicitly denied will to his One; but will is one of the most prominent aspects of the biblical Deity.” Furthermore, Clark believed the biblical view of God included distinctions (these distinctions being the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He wrote, “For Christians . . . the doctrine of the Trinity precludes a simplicity that would reduce God to a

7. Suprasensible (adj.): not perceptible by the senses; beyond the experience of the material world. In many of his dialogues, Plato refers to supra-sensible unchanging entities he calls forms (or ideas) in which man participates to be able to understand the sensible particulars of the world that are in constant flux.


9. Clark, Augustine’s City of God.

10. GHC to J. Oliver Buswell, note on Nature and Will, 3 April 1937, Wheaton Archives.

Thus it was clear to Clark that one must not confuse the Christian concept of God with pagan Greek philosophical concepts of God like that of Plotinus.

In Clark's view, the God of the Bible is not simple in the Plotinian sense of lack of distinctions, because distinctions are necessary to differentiate the three persons of the Trinity. Yet Clark did believe that God is simple in the sense that His attributes are identical—what theologians call the doctrine of "divine simplicity." Especially in his later works, Clark argued in favor of divine simplicity. In Clark's *The Incarnation* (1988), he called "honorable" the view that "all attributes are identical in God." Clark also argued for divine simplicity in his unpublished systematic theology (c. 1977) where, concluding a chapter on "God," he wrote, "God therefore is his substance; his substance is his attributes; all his attributes are one; and this One is God."17

Though Clark accepted the doctrine of divine simplicity, it is challenging to understand how he reconciled it with his epistemology. If it is...
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not too much to anticipate the controversy detailed in later chapters of this biography, Clark took the position that for man to know anything at all, he must know at least some of the same objects, the same propositions, that God knows. At first glance, the doctrine of divine simplicity might seem to indicate that man, unless he becomes divine, cannot know that which God knows. The challenge arises: either man knows what God knows, thus sharing at least one of the attributes of God, and therefore, by divine simplicity, is God; or man does not know what God knows and therefore knows nothing at all, i.e. skepticism.

Clark, however, held that it was possible for man to know the same propositions as God knows without sharing identically the attributes of God. For Clark, while the object of knowledge of both man and God is identical, the mode of man’s knowledge differs from the mode of God’s knowledge. The mode of man’s knowledge, Clark maintained, is discursive, whereas the mode of God’s knowledge is intuitive. In other words, man learns one item at a time, but God knows all things and always has. Though this mode distinction may not provide an exhaustive solution to the challenge mentioned above, it must be seen an integral part of Clark’s answer.

The importance of the doctrine of divine simplicity as it applied to Clark’s own life and career should become evident in the chapters in this volume (Chapters 6–8) on the controversy which bears Clark’s name. Though the term “divine simplicity” itself was not mentioned in the controversy, Clark’s opposition held that his epistemology violated the Creator-creature distinction, a distinction intimately related to God’s simple nature.

AUGUSTINE, CALVIN, AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

Far above Plato or Plotinus, it was thinkers in the tradition of Reformed Christianity that influenced Clark’s life and thought. Like many theologians of the Reformation, Clark was in large part an Augustinian—a follower of St. Augustine (AD 354–430)—and as such, took many of his ideas directly from the ancient church father.19 Clark was reading Augustine in depth soon after he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1932, he sought the advice of Ned Stonehouse, professor of New Testament at Westminster

19. Robbins, “America’s Augustine.” Note also that John Robbins wrote that Clark did not accept all of Augustine’s thought. “While Clark vehemently disagreed with much of what Augustine taught, he was indebted to Augustine for some central insights in theology and philosophy.”—John Robbins, foreword to Lord God of Truth, ???
Theological Seminary, on a question regarding Augustine, and in 1934, he wrote again to Stonehouse mentioning that he was “slowly ploughing through 511 pages of double columns” of Augustine’s *City of God*. According to Clark’s former student Dr. Kenneth Talbot, “Dr. Clark always spoke to me about his earliest influences of St. Augustine. He believed any theological or philosophical student needed to read Augustine’s writings.”

The influence of Augustine on Clark can be seen in the many elements he adopted from Augustine’s writings including a type of idealism, his divine illumination theory, and a rejection of empiricism. Augustine was the first Christian thinker to integrate Plato’s idealism with Christianity. Whereas Plato held that there was another realm in which the forms or ideas resided, Augustine, like the pre-Christian Jewish philosopher Philo before him, identified the location of this realm as the mind of God. Augustine took the theory a step further in arguing that the basic items in God’s mind were not ideas, but propositions. Unlike Platonic ideas, propositions have a truth value; that is, they can be either true or false. Clark accepted Augustine’s theory wholeheartedly.

In Clark’s *Lord God of Truth* (with Augustine’s *De Magistro* or *Concerning the Teacher* printed alongside), Clark’s reliance on Augustine’s epistemological theory of “Divine Illumination” is evident. In his theory, Augustine argued that truth comes only from the *Logos*, our divine teacher, and not from our own independent efforts. Clark in like manner wrote, “Ideas are in God, and the mind can perceive them only there.” In a lecture later in his life Clark explained Augustine on this topic:

> I would recommend that you read Augustine’s treatise called *De Magistro*. This is the original refutation of logical positivism and the language philosophies that are common today . . . By the time you get through you will see that ink marks on a paper, or sounds in the air, the noise I’m making, never teach anybody anything. This is good Augustinianism. And Protestantism is

20. GHC to Ned Stonehouse, 6 October 1932, WTS Archives.
21. GHC to Ned Stonehouse, 21 February 1934, WTS Archives.
22. Former Clark student Dr. Kenneth Talbot, telephone interview by Douglas Douma, 2014.
24. “Is all this any more than the assertion that there is an eternal, immutable Mind, a Supreme Reason, a personal, living, God? The truths or propositions that may be known are the thoughts of God, the eternal thought of God.”—Clark, *Christian View of Men and Things*, 321.
26. Ibid, 16.
supposed to be Augustinian, at least it was in its initiation. And it was the most unfortunate event that Thomas Aquinas came in and replaced Augustinianism with Aristotelianism and empiricism which has been an affliction ever since. But the point is that ink marks on a paper, and the sound of a voice, this sort of thing never generates any idea at all. And Augustine’s solution of it is that the Magister is Christ. Christ is the light that lighteth every man that comes into the world. This is not a matter of regeneration. This is a matter of knowledge. And Christ enlightens the unregenerate in this sense just as well as the regenerate. If an unregenerate man learns anything at all, he learns it from Jesus Christ and not from ink marks on a paper.”

Augustine’s theory of divine illumination, depending on God’s involvement in knowledge acquisition, is at odds with the theory of empiricism which holds that man learns on his own through his senses. One modern introduction to Augustine’s *On Faith in Things Unseen* explains, “[The purpose of Augustine’s writing] is to refute that crass empiricism which would admit no faith in the truths of revelation because they cannot be ‘seen,’ that is, perceived by our sensory experience.” Though Clark referred to Augustine as an anti-empiricist, he also noted that Augustine had not “purged his thought of all empirical elements.”

Augustine’s thought permeated the Reformation through reformers like Martin Luther (1483–1546), who was himself an Augustinian monk. It was in part due to Augustine’s insights that Luther began to diverge from the accepted Roman Catholic teachings. Yet among Reformation thinkers, it was not Martin Luther but John Calvin (1509–1564) who most influenced Clark. Clark praised Calvin as “Paul’s best interpreter.” In Calvin, as exemplified in *The Institutes*, Clark found a thoroughly systematic and consistent Christianity which he embraced. Furthermore, Clark saw Calvin’s epistemology as akin to his own in that Calvin looked to the Scriptures as the sole source of knowledge. Clark argued that Calvin rejected sensation

31. Referring to a commentary of Calvin’s, Clark wrote, “Calvin seems here to limit knowledge, or right knowledge, to what may be deduced from the assertions of Scripture. Scripture is the only rule of right knowledge. Calvin is not willing to designate the changing theories of science as knowledge. Calvin may indeed be right.”—Clark, *Colossians*, 23.
as the basis of knowledge and was fond of quoting Calvin's definition of knowledge: "I call that knowledge, not what is innate in man, nor what is by diligence acquired, but that which is delivered to us by The Law and The Prophets."

The system which Clark admired in Calvin was most thoroughly and fully developed in the 1640s with The Westminster Confession of Faith. The influence of The Westminster Confession of Faith on Clark led him to write What Presbyterians Believe (1956) in which he walked through the Confession point by point. As a Presbyterian minister, Clark took seriously his ordination vow to the system of doctrine contained in the Confession. The nature of the confession, having been formulated and signed by hundreds of theologians, meant that its teachings were of no one's private interpretation of Scripture. The Confession also was written at a time when the biblical thought of the Reformation had reached its apex and maturity.

The Calvinistic and confessional tradition of the Westminster Confession of Faith was continued in the Old School Presbyterianism of Princeton Seminary. Clark was influenced greatly by the theologians of Princeton. Among these was Charles Hodge about whom Clark wrote, "Charles Hodge, I think I may say, is the greatest theologian America has so far produced." Also among the Princeton theologians who influenced Clark were Charles Hodge's son A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and professors less well known today, Francis Landey Patton and William Benton Green.

Thus, labels befitting Clark include Christian, Augustinian, Calvinist, and Presbyterian. But in addition to these labels Clark was a Machenite, a follower and supporter of J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), the leader of the continued Princeton tradition in the 1920s and 1930s. Machen was a

32. "The disciples heard a message, and saw Jesus. Calvin saw the difficulty, though perhaps not so clearly as contemporary factors force it on us today. At any rate, Calvin considers an opponent who insinuates that the passage is nonsense because 'the evidence of the senses little availed the present subject, for the power of Christ cannot be perceived by the eyes.' Calvin does not reply with a defense of sensation but rather refers to John's Gospel 1:14, 'We have seen his glory.' For says Calvin, 'He was not known as the Son of God by the external forms of his body, but because he gave illustrious proofs of his Divine power... Calvin does not instantiate these proofs, but he clearly rejects the idea that 'seeing with the eyes' is literal sensation.'—Clark, First John, 10.


34. Clark, The Trinity, 68.

35. Individual published copies of nine sermons of Francis Landey Patton are in the Clark collection at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary, Clark Library. Given the early date of these sermons (all from 1879), they were quite possibly passed down from David S. Clark ("The Person of Christ," "The Doctrine of Sin," "Retribution," "The Objective Side of Salvation," "The Subjective Side of Salvation," "The Means of Grace," "The Divine Purpose," "Faith," and "The Kingdom of Grace").
personal friend of Clark. In addition to twenty-two extant letters between
Clark and Machen, there are a number of Machen’s books in Clark’s per-
sonal collection. Clark became involved in the Machen-led struggle for a
new reformation in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. His role in this struggle
is the topic of the next chapter.

36. These items are presently in the Gordon H. Clark collection at Sangre de Cristo
Seminary’s Clark Library. Some are personally inscribed by Machen. Titles include the
following: J. Gresham Machen, History and Faith (1915); —— The Origin of Paul’s Reli-
gion (1921); —— Christianity and Liberalism (1923); —— What is Faith? (1925); —— The
Virgin Birth of Christ (1932); —— Christian Faith in the Modern World (1936); —— The
Christian View of Man (1937); —— God Transcendent and Other Sermons (1949); ——
What is Christianity? (1951); and —— Machen’s Notes on Galatians (1972).
Chapter 3

Gordon Clark and the Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

“For reasons which will appear as you read the document, I am enclosing a copy of a very delightful letter which I have just received from the Rev. Professor G. Engel, D.D., of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pyongyang, Korea. What he says about your nominating speech in the election of moderator is certainly well deserved, so far as the speech is concerned. I know I am not worthy of that speech, and yet every time I think of it it gives me new joy and courage.”

—J. Gresham Machen to Gordon H. Clark, 20 August 1936

THE AUBURN AFFIRMATION

During the years he was a student and then a teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, Gordon Clark participated in contemporary doctrinal and organizational struggles within the Presbyterian church. In these struggles, Clark always sided with the conservative group of his denomination and endeavored to keep the denomination true to the Westminster Confession.

Like other American churches in the 1920s and 1930s, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) was embroiled in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. This controversy, as the name

1. JGM to GHC, 20 August 1936, WTS archives.
implies, was fought by men of two distinct theological persuasions, the fundamentalists and the modernists, each of whom were seeking control of the denomination. The modernist faction generally accepted Darwin's theory of evolution. They believed in the supposed progress of science to solve all social problems. In matters of religion, they were attracted to the so-called “higher” methods of biblical criticism, which denied that the Bible was free of error and placed human experience above biblical revelation as man's ultimate authority. Modernism, then, threatened the unity and fidelity of the church because it provided an alternative set of explanations of the world that contradicted traditional Christian beliefs.

Although modernism grew in support substantially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its ascendance was not without resistance. The fundamentalist movement arose to combat modernism's influence in the church. The fundamentalists first appeared as a named group in 1909. In that year were published the first volumes of *The Fundamentals*, a series of booklets written by conservative biblical scholars to address crucial biblical topics. Fundamentalists generally held to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy—the teaching that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is free from error. Though members of the fundamentalists came from a number of denominations, perhaps the most prominent among them was Princeton professor B. B. Warfield, under whom Clark's father had studied. Warfield was a strong proponent of biblical inerrancy. The Clarks (David and Gordon alike) followed in Warfield's footsteps on this doctrine.

Although there were events foreshadowing the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy at the turn of the twentieth century,\(^2\) the controversy truly erupted in 1923, when, in response to the pressures of modernism's growing influence, a fundamentalist group within the PCUSA adopted a motion at the general assembly calling for stricter requirements on the ordination of pastors. These requirements, known as the Five Fundamentals, called for pastors to faithfully uphold the doctrines of the inerrancy of Scripture, Christ's substitutionary atonement for man, the historicity of the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the authenticity of Christ's miracles.\(^3\) The fundamentalists knew that if the church were to limit ordination to only those who believed these central tenets, modernism would face an uphill struggle in the church. It would be incorrect to say, however, that the fundamentalists created the divide in the church with this stance. Rather, they recognized that the divide already existed and dug

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2. Examples of this foreshadowing include the 1903 revisions to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the 1906 merger of the PCUSA and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

a trench to defend their historic position while clearly identifying their opponents.

Though Clark was only twenty-one years of age in 1923, *The Presbyterian* published two articles by him that show his position on the controversy. In the first article, "What Shall We do?" he wrote, "If the church's adherence to Christ is going to discourage young men from entering the ministry, fine! Tell [prominent modernist leaders] Drs. Fosdick and MacColl that we want to discourage that type of young men."4 And in the second article, "How Long?" Clark wrote, "When a presbytery ordains men who deny the virgin birth; when the church with schisms is split asunder, with heresies distressed the cry naturally goes up, How long, O Lord, how long?"5 Clark, without any doubt, sided with the fundamentalists.

In 1924, the modernist faction within the PCUSA responded to the Five Fundamentals with their own statement, the *Auburn Affirmation*. The name for this document came from its association with Auburn Theological Seminary in Auburn, New York, where it was composed. The *Auburn Affirmation* rejected the new requirements for ordination in the PCUSA. From an initial group of thirty-two signatories, it grew to receive the support of over 1,300 (out of approximately 10,000) PCUSA pastors nationwide. Its central message was that:

There is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept “from error.” The Confession of Faith does not make this assertion; and it is significant that this assertion is not to be found in the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed or in any of the great Reformation confessions. The doctrine of inerrancy, intended to enhance the authority of the Scriptures, in fact impairs their supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ.6

When the *Auburn Affirmation* first appeared in print, Clark was an undergraduate senior at the University of Pennsylvania and a ruling elder in the PCUSA. Though Clark opposed the *Affirmation* from the moment he read it, he only attacked it in print ten years later in an article that redubbed it the "Auburn Heresy" and described it as a "vicious attack on the Word of God." Clark knew the *Auburn Affirmation* challenged a critical doctrine of Christianity: the inerrancy of Scripture. In his view, it was absurd to argue that the doctrine of inerrancy impaired or weakened the biblical message. In

fact, it was a contradiction, he thought, to say that something truly inspired by God also contained error. On this point Clark wrote, “If [the signers of the Affirmation] say that they believe the Bible is the Word of God, and at the same time claim that the Bible contains error, it follows, does it not, that they call God a liar, since He has spoken falsely?” Ultimately for Clark, the Auburn Affirmation was a sign that the modernists had “excommunicated the orthodox.” This, he felt, necessitated action on the part of the fundamentalists to recover the orthodoxy of the church.  

In 1932, Clark added his name to the counteroffensive against modernism in the PCUSA when he joined the new Reformation Fellowship, a national organization to reform the church according to the Westminster Confession of Faith and other historical standards of the Reformed faith. Clark’s father also supported the reform movement and welcomed the Reformation Fellowship in 1934 when they held their annual meeting at his church. Soon the younger Clark was made a member of the Reformation Fellowship’s executive committee. In one document he sent out to members of the Fellowship, he called out by name those who were in positions of responsibility and trust in the denomination who had signed the Auburn Affirmation. In October of 1934, Clark joined fellow Reformation Fellowship members Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths (1900–1957) and Murray Forst Thompson (1906–1988) in filing six charges against eleven ministers at the Presbytery of Philadelphia who had signed the Auburn Affirmation. The charges, written by Griffiths, declared the Auburn Affirmation to be in direct contradiction to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Since the ministers had subscribed to this confession at ordination, they were alleged to be in contempt of their vows. For this reason, Clark, Griffiths, and Thompson argued that the offenders ought to be defrocked. When the charges were dismissed at their presbytery a month later, Clark protested the decision. He argued that the charges had been illegally dismissed as the protest vote had first passed, and only later failed on an illegal second vote when some members of the presbytery had left the meeting thinking the matter was settled.

9. “This letter announces our annual meeting to be held 8:00 P.M., October 30, 1934, at Bethel Church, 19th and York sts.”—Trustees to members of the Reformation Fellowship, 25 September 1934, PCA Archives.
10. Clark, “Who Controls our Church?”
11. Rian, Presbyterian Conflict, 58.