

A Response to W. Gary Crampton

James N. Anderson

I recently learned that a review of my book *Paradox in Christian Theology*¹ appeared in the December 2009 issue of *The Trinity Review*, the periodical distributed by the Trinity Foundation and previously edited by the late John Robbins. The review, which is highly critical of the book, was written by W. Gary Crampton, a regular contributor to *The Trinity Review*.

It's not at all surprising that the review is overwhelmingly negative. The Trinity Foundation, whose mission is to preserve the legacy of Gordon H. Clark, isn't exactly known for its sympathy toward anything that smells even vaguely Van Tilian.² What's more, 'paradox' is a four-letter word for Clarkians. It was Clark, after all, who memorably insisted that a theological paradox is nothing more than "a charley-horse between the ears that can be eliminated by rational massage." So one would hardly expect a book with the title *Paradox in Christian Theology* to be praised in *The Trinity Review*, unless that book were subtitled *There's No Such Thing and It's a Good Thing Too*.

In all seriousness, however, I found Dr. Crampton's review to be quite reckless in its treatment of the book and the topics it addresses. If anything it tells the reader more about Dr. Crampton and the agenda of the Trinity Foundation than it does about the book it discusses. My initial inclination was to ignore it altogether. But since I've received a number of emails inquiring whether I plan to respond, I've finally decided to do so, since it will serve several purposes.

A Poor Review and a Worse Refutation

It's important to note at the outset that Dr. Crampton's article isn't intended to be merely a review of my book, that is, a summary of the book's content with some evaluative comments.

¹ James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology* (Paternoster, 2007).

² Cornelius Van Til and his admirers are routinely excoriated in the pages of *The Trinity Review* as purveyors of heterodoxy and irrationality, despite the fact that the theological agreements between Van Til and Clark far outweigh their differences.

Rather, it's meant to be a full-blown *refutation* of the book; it aims to persuade its readers that the claims made in the book are both false and theologically heterodox. Attempted refutations set the bar higher than reviews. But Dr. Crampton's article falls far short of scholarly standards for both reviews and refutations, as I will now show.

If you haven't already read the review, I encourage you to read it now.³ Imagine that you've never read my book (which won't be difficult for most readers) and ask yourself this question: Does the review tell me what Anderson's *main claims* are in the book? Does it tell me what his *conclusions* are?

I think it's fair to say that it does. Dr. Crampton accurately reports the two core claims of the book: first, that the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are paradoxical (in the sense that they *appear* to be logically inconsistent); and secondly, that it can be rational for a Christian to believe those doctrines, their paradoxicality notwithstanding.

But now ask yourself a second question: Does the review tell me, even in summary form, what *arguments* Anderson gives for the main claims of the book? Does the review give me any indication of the *reasons* Anderson gives for the conclusions he reaches?

I think it's fair to say that it does not. Dr. Crampton's summary of chapter 2 ("The Paradox of the Trinity") reports the *topics* I discuss, the *theologians* I discuss, and the *conclusion* I reach, but says nothing about the *arguments* I give for that conclusion. It simply quotes my conclusion (that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is paradoxical) and declares, "This is an astonishing statement." (p. 2)

Is that it?

Chapters 3 and 4 ("The Paradox of the Incarnation" and "Responding with Paradox") receive exactly the same treatment—even down to the "astonishing statement" dismissal. But I ask, is this any way to responsibly review a book? How does it help the reader to gain anything close to an informed opinion of the book? I daresay the fact that Dr. Crampton finds my conclusions astonishing tells his readers rather more about his predispositions (and those of his fellow

³ Available online: http://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/Review_291_Crampton_Anderson_Review.pdf

Clarkians) than it does about the issues treated in my book. At any rate, those readers might be less inclined to find my conclusions astonishing had they been apprised of the *arguments* I gave for my conclusions.

Part II of the book receives no better treatment. Once more, Dr. Crampton reports the topics I discuss and the conclusions I reach, but gives barely any indication as to *why* I reach those conclusions. One would hardly know from his review that I actually give *detailed arguments* for my claims! It's not as though the review summarizes the reasons I give for my conclusions and then indicates where my reasoning goes awry. Rather, it doesn't attempt to explain my reasoning at all.

It's true that Dr. Crampton gives his own reasons for *rejecting* my conclusions (reasons I'll evaluate in due course). But if you're going to offer a competent scholarly refutation of someone's claims, you need to do more than that. It's not sufficient to give your reasons for denying his *conclusions*. You must also explain why his *arguments* fail. The reason for this should be obvious. There are always arguments *for* and *against* any viewpoint, and it's more than possible that the arguments for it outweigh the arguments against it. Thus it's more than possible that the reasons I give for my conclusions are stronger than the reasons Dr. Crampton gives against them. His review is doubly deficient in this respect. It doesn't merely fail to *refute* my arguments; it doesn't even *report* my arguments.

On the question of what constitutes a competent refutation, I can do no better than to quote John Frame:

Note therefore that when you seek to refute someone's position, it is never sufficient merely to set forth arguments for an alternative (and incompatible) view. Many modern theologians, for example, argue against the orthodox view of Scripture by presenting arguments for liberal constructions, without even considering the biblical evidence that motivated the orthodox view in the first place. Many pro-abortionists talk on and on about women's rights, the tragedy of rape, and so forth, without giving any serious attention to the nature of the fetus, the most crucial datum in the anti-abortion case. A prolifer might be unable to refute the pro-abortion arguments, but he will not on that account abandon his position. He may rightly suspect that something may be wrong in

the abortionist's case, for he is so certain of the arguments that produced his own view. *In such situations it is best, then, not only to argue an alternative view but also to refute the arguments that produced the view you are seeking to overthrow.* Even then, of course, an opponent convinced of the rightness of his cause may take refuge in the possibility of your being wrong. But the more you cast doubt on those considerations that weigh most heavily with your opponent, the more adequate your argument will be.⁴

It's disappointing to find a representative of the Trinity Foundation, which prides itself on its logical approach to theological issues, arguing no better than the modernists and pro-abortionists that Frame describes.

Fallacious Argumentation

It's rather ironic that a critical review devoted to exposing my position as irrational and illogical contains so many logically fallacious arguments. For example, Dr. Crampton counters the conclusions of the first part of the book—that attempts to remove the paradoxicality of the Trinity and the Incarnation invariably pay for it by sacrificing orthodoxy—by asserting that Gordon Clark “propounded a rational, Biblical view of both doctrines.” (p. 2) Of course, this begs the very question at hand. Is the reader simply to take Dr. Crampton's word for it? How can this have any force without, first, explaining the problem faced by orthodox Trinitarians, and second, explaining (even in summary) how Clark solved that problem?⁵ Adding the assertion that Robert Reymond's systematic theology “also sets forth rational explanations of the Trinity and Christology” takes us no further forward.

Continuing in the same vein, Dr. Crampton states that in the Westminster Confession of Faith “we find a rational, orthodox teaching” on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. As an argument against my position, this either begs the question (by simply *assuming* that paradoxicality entails irrationality, an assumption I refute in the book) or else commits the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi* (irrelevant conclusion). I'll be the first to agree that the Confession

⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R Publishing, 1987), p. 258, emphasis mine.

⁵ See below for my evaluation of Clark's proposals.

offers “rational, orthodox teaching” on those doctrines; after all, my book is a *defense* of the rationality of those orthodox doctrines!⁶

A further example of irrelevance appears later on in the review. After reporting that I closely follow Alvin Plantinga’s theory of epistemic warrant, Dr. Crampton parenthetically notes his interest that “in contradistinction to Anderson, Plantinga does believe that there are orthodox formulations of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation which are not inconsistent” (p. 3). Leaving aside the misleading characterization of my own position (I don’t claim that the orthodox formulations are *genuinely* inconsistent) it’s hard to see the relevance of this observation except perhaps as a weak appeal to authority. No doubt Plantinga believes lots of things that I don’t. Am I somehow inconsistent because I share his views about epistemic warrant but not his views on other matters?⁷ Isn’t what matters the *arguments* offered for any particular view?

Remarkably, Dr. Crampton’s review is replete with weak appeals to authority. I’ve already noted the question-begging references to Clark and Reymond, but these aren’t isolated exceptions. Three times Dr. Crampton employs an innovative form of argument that effortlessly converts a conditional claim into an unconditional claim by the mere addition of a parenthetical assertion:

If Dr. Lloyd-Jones is correct (and he is), then any religion that is full of logical paradox is a “false religion.” (p. 3)

If Reymond’s analysis here is sound (and it is), then Anderson’s RAPT “warrant” for holding to the concept of logical paradox is “unwarranted.” (p. 4)

⁶ Dr. Crampton bolsters his appeal to the Confession with a quotation from Gordon Clark informing us of what the Westminster theologians and the Reformers believed on the issue of theological paradox. But this is a fallacious appeal to authority, for Clark is hardly an objective interpreter here. It says something that even Clark’s testimony is insufficient as it stands, but has to be augmented with bracketed glosses from Dr. Crampton.

⁷ For example, Plantinga holds to a libertarian view of human freedom. If I endorse Plantinga’s epistemology must I also endorse his view of free will, on pain of inconsistency? Clearly the two issues are logically distinct. The same goes for Plantinga’s epistemology and his view of theological paradoxes.

But if Gordon Clark is correct (and he is) that “dependence on... paradox... destroys both revelation and theology and leaves us in complete ignorance,” then [Anderson] has done disservice to the God of the Word and the Word of God. (p. 4)

This form of argument—let’s dub it *argumentum ad assertum parathenticum*—can be generalized as follows:

1. S says so-and-so.
2. If what S says is correct, then Anderson is wrong.
3. S is correct (so say I).
4. Therefore, Anderson is wrong.

It doesn’t take a professional logician to see that this form of argument can be considerably simplified:

1. Anderson is wrong (so say I).

But perhaps this is too hasty; perhaps what this simplified form lacks is the force of *cumulative* authority. It’s not *just* that Dr. Crampton disagrees with me; it’s that his disagreement is also shared by other Reformed worthies. Well, no doubt there are Reformed theologians who see matters differently than I do on the issue of theological paradox. I’ll be the first to admit it. But what does *that* prove? Very little, of course. Certainly it implies no more than the fact that there are Reformed theologians who see matters differently than Dr. Crampton—on this issue and on many others.

I could go on to discuss other question-begging appeals to authority in the article, such as the paragraph devoted to Jonathan Edwards’ opinions, but the point has been made.⁸ The core

⁸ It’s worth noting that Edwards clearly rejected Dr. Crampton’s view that there are no unrevealed mysteries in the Bible. Consider, for example, this passage from Edwards’ “Unpublished Essay on the Trinity”: “But I don’t pretend fully to explain how these things are and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made and puzzling doubts and questions raised that I can’t solve. I am far from pretending to explaining [sic] the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it. I don’t intend to explain the Trinity. But Scripture with reason may lead to say something further of it than has been wont to be said, tho there are still left many things pertaining to

problem is that whenever Dr. Crampton appeals to these authorities, he doesn't do so in such a way as to show that *their* arguments are better than *my* arguments. Arguments just don't make an appearance either way. The dialectic (as he presents it) is all assertion and counter-assertion. I find it odd that a writer who champions the power of human reason to dispel all theological mysteries would rely so little on reasoned argumentation and so heavily on appeals to authority.

Eisegesis: Confessional and Biblical

A further problem with Dr. Crampton's analysis is his habit of reading his own views into the authorities he cites. This is particularly true of the two most significant authorities to which he appeals: the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Bible. I've already mentioned one misguided appeal to the Confession. Another example occurs later in the review, when Dr. Crampton refers to the Confession's teaching on divine sovereignty and human responsibility:

This doctrine, these [Westminster] theologians went on to say, may be a "high mystery" (i.e., difficult to fully understand), but it is in no way paradoxical (i.e., impossible to reconcile).

But note what the Confession (3.8) actually says:

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

Contrary to the impression given by Dr. Crampton, the Confession says *nothing at all* about whether the doctrine is paradoxical or not (although one might well ask *why* it is described as a "high mystery" if it is entirely amenable to human reason). It simply doesn't speak to the issue,

it incomprehensible." (Full text available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html>) I am indebted to Derek Ashton for bringing this passage to my attention.

either in regard to this particular doctrine or in regard to Christian theology in general. You can search the Confession (and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms for good measure) for any condemnations of the core claims of my book, but there are none to be found.⁹

While I would be concerned if my claims were incompatible with the Westminster Confession, it is still a subordinate and fallible standard.¹⁰ Far more concerning to me is the charge that Scripture contradicts my claims about the paradoxicality of certain Christian doctrines. I'm pleased to report, however, that Dr. Crampton comes nowhere close to sustaining that charge. Instead we find him reading his own views into Scripture rather than engaging in responsible contextually-sensitive exegesis. He rests his case on two particular passages:

[T]hat logical paradox exists in Scripture is denied by a number of passages. According to 1 Corinthians 14:33 "God is not the author of confusion." God's Word to us, says the apostle, is not both "Yes and No," but in Christ it is "Yes... to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:18-20). (p. 3)

If this is the strongest biblical support that can be assembled against my proposal, I have little to worry about. Consider each passage in turn. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is writing specifically

⁹ Dr. Crampton states that "of course" it would not be possible to handle "with special prudence and care" any doctrine that "cannot be reconciled by the mind of man." Yet once again, no argument is offered for a claim that is far from self-evident.

¹⁰ It's rather surprising to find Dr. Crampton appealing to the Westminster Confession in his attempt to charge me with deviation from Reformed orthodoxy, given that Gordon Clark himself openly deviated from the Confession on some major points of doctrine. For example, in his book *The Incarnation* (The Trinity Foundation, 1988) Clark argued that the Definition of Chalcedon is fatally flawed (p. 15) because the term 'person' was never adequately defined at the time. But of course, chapter 8 of the Confession simply repeats the language of Chalcedon, so the Confession must be no less fatally flawed. Clark offered his own idiosyncratic definition of 'person' (on which more below) but this definition is clearly incompatible with the Confession, since the Confession states that Christ is "one person" (a claim Clark rejects on the basis that it lacks any useful meaning). Furthermore, Clark claimed in the same volume (pp. 51-52, 57-61) that the terms 'being' and 'substance' are vacuous and that it is incoherent to claim that God is 'infinite', thereby putting him at odds with a number of statements in the Confession (e.g., 2.1, 2.3, 8.2). Clark forthrightly criticized the Westminster divines for their "Thomistic addition" to the Confession (p. 58). Debates over who is more 'Reformed' are beside the point, but I daresay that Clark's exceptions to the Confession are more substantial than mine.

about the importance of *order in worship*. How are we supposed to extrapolate his statement into an *a priori* rejection of biblical paradoxes? I imagine Dr. Crampton's point is that since the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, it follows that nothing in Scripture could possibly be confusing. But clearly this is too strong a claim. After all, Dr. Crampton earlier noted Peter's statement (2 Peter 3:16) that some of the things Paul writes are hard to understand. Who hasn't found themselves occasionally confused by some of the things Paul says in his letters? Even the most gifted Reformed expositors have been left perplexed by some of Paul's expressions. Dr. Crampton's deduction entails a doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture that goes far beyond what the Reformers and Westminster divines were prepared to affirm! They ascribed perspicuity to "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation," whereas Dr. Crampton apparently wants to ascribe perspicuity to *everything* in Scripture.¹¹

To be fair, Dr. Crampton does make a brief attempt to argue that his take on biblical perspicuity is none other than that of the Confession:

It is important to understand that when the *Confession* says that "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for *salvation*, are clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other," it is not referring merely to conversion and justification. In a Reformed worldview, "salvation" relates to all of life, sanctification as well as conversion. The Bible teaches us about redemption, but its teachings are not exclusively redemptive. (p. 3)

It's quite correct to say that salvation "relates to all of life" and that the whole Bible is given for our sanctification. But it's a *non sequitur* to deduce from those claims that all biblical teachings are equally clear or that no biblical teachings could be logically perplexing. Moreover, Dr. Crampton's position is simply implausible on the face of it. If his application of 1 Corinthians 14:33 is correct, why has there been so much debate over certain issues in Christian ethics even among confessional Reformed scholars (e.g., Sabbath observance, the regulative principle of

¹¹ Dr. Crampton might want to ask why the Westminster divines spent so much time debating theology with one another if *everything* in Scripture is as clear as he implies.

worship, the permissibility of lying to preserve life)? Aren't these issues relevant to sanctification? Surely they are; but what we're to believe and observe on these points isn't "clearly propounded in some place of Scripture or other" in the way that (say) the deity of Christ is clearly propounded. Evidently Dr. Crampton's reasoning has gone awry.

Likewise, if his argument were sound we should expect to encounter no difficulties in harmonizing the Gospel accounts of Christ's ministry. Yet we do. The finest evangelical scholars have devoted countless hours of study to resolving them, but not all of them have been adequately resolved to date. (Note well: I am not for one moment implying that there are any *genuine* contradictions between the Gospels; since I'm firmly committed to biblical inerrancy, I maintain that any apparent conflicts must be *merely* apparent. My only point is that by Dr. Crampton's reasoning there shouldn't even be the *appearance* of conflicts between the Gospels; there shouldn't be any difficulties *at all* on that front.)

What about 2 Corinthians 1:18-20? Paul's point here is simply that "God is faithful" (v. 18). He keeps his word. He doesn't promise and not fulfill (Numbers 23:19). So the Corinthians, and indeed all believers, can put their full trust in the promises of God (v. 20). Now, I ask, how does *that* rule out the possibility that the biblical doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are paradoxical? Dr. Crampton doesn't explain. He simply cites this passage as though it were quite obvious that it constitutes a refutation of my book. But surely that won't do. In the absence of any cogent argumentation, it's hard not to draw the conclusion that Dr. Crampton is merely reading his own theological biases into the words of the apostle Paul.

Dr. Crampton appeals to other verses of Scripture in the course of his article, but since he evidently intends to rest the weight of his refutation on 1 Corinthians 14:33 (cited three times) and 2 Corinthians 1:18-20 (cited twice) I have focused on addressing these two passages. I leave it to the reader to observe how the other verses he cites, when interpreted in context, present no threat at all to the claims I make in my book.

Reymond's "Insuperable Obstacles"

As I've noted, many of the critical assertions in Dr. Crampton's review are supported either by fallacious arguments or by no arguments at all. However, toward the end of the review he does present three direct objections to my position (or at least, what he takes to be my position). These objections are borrowed from Robert Reymond, who has "posed three insuperable obstacles to the notion that the Bible contains logical paradox." I will now address these in turn.

First, as noted above, the issue of what is and what is not a logical paradox is totally subjective. Therefore, to claim universally that such and such a teaching is a paradox would require omniscience. How could anyone know that his teaching had not been reconciled before the bar of someone's human reason? (p. 4)

There are a couple of problems with this objection. Since my book defines a paradox as "an apparent contradiction" it certainly follows that there is a subjective element to paradox. Appearances, in the nature of the case, are always appearances *to someone* (i.e., a conscious subject). Does it follow that the issue of whether there are theological paradoxes is "totally subjective"? Not at all. One might as well argue that the issue of whether the sky appears blue is "totally subjective". Subjectivity does not entail subjectivism.

Furthermore, I don't claim that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation have not been "reconciled before the bar of someone's human reason." What I do claim is that no Christian theologian or philosopher to date (Gordon Clark included) has offered precise and intelligible formulations of those doctrines that are both *biblically orthodox* and *free from any apparent logical difficulties*. I don't rule out that some bright mind will one day come up with such formulations—and I'd be among the first to celebrate that accomplishment—but our track record thus far suggests that we ought to temper our expectations. In any case, this is beside the point. The argument of my book is simply that a Christian can rationally affirm those doctrines *even if they are paradoxical to him now*. The mere fact that a biblical doctrine strikes one as paradoxical is not sufficient grounds to conclude that it cannot be rationally affirmed. Reymond's first objection doesn't touch the position I defend in the book.

Reymond's second "insuperable obstacle" is that it's impossible (so he claims) to determine whether a paradox is a *real* contradiction or a *merely apparent* contradiction. What's remarkable about Dr. Crampton's endorsement of this objection is that *I address it directly in the book* (see, e.g., pp. 250-56). Indeed, it's such an obvious objection that it would have been astonishing if I had not done so. Why then doesn't Dr. Crampton mention my response to it? One suspects that either he didn't read the book closely enough himself or he's banking on his readers never consulting the book for themselves.

The same goes for Reymond's third objection, according to which a defender of theological paradox cannot consistently reject a proposition as false on the grounds that "it 'contradicts' the teaching of Scripture" or "it is in some other way illogical". In keeping with the rest of the review, no obvious support is offered for this objection; once again, assertion stands in for argumentation. In any case, it suffices for me to point out that I deal with this objection (and its variants) in chapter 7 of the book.

I conclude that all three of Dr. Crampton's objections to my proposal fall flat: the first because it misses the target altogether; the second and third because they're already addressed in the book.

Why I Am Not a Clarkian

Since Dr. Crampton cites Gordon Clark's formulations of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation as counterexamples to the claims in my book, I should give some explanation as to why I find them unsatisfactory. I chose not to interact with Clark's formulations in my book because, in my judgment, they are not among the most sophisticated or influential in the field. His view of the Trinity is essentially a form of social trinitarianism, a model I discuss and reject as unsatisfactory in chapter 2 of the book (see pp. 36-47). I've explained elsewhere the specific shortcomings of Clark's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹²

As for the paradox of the Incarnation, Clark's solution is to reject the positive statements of the Definition of Chalcedon as vacuous and to offer his own definition of 'person' as "a composite

¹² See here: <http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2005/08/van-tils-serious-trinitarian-theology.html>

[or complex] of propositions".¹³ On this view, Jesus Christ turns out to be *two* persons: "a divine person and a human person".¹⁴ This proposal is designed to alleviate the logical difficulty of attributing both omniscience and partial ignorance to Christ. I concur with Clark that it wouldn't be fair to charge him with the heresy of Nestorianism, since Nestorius clearly didn't employ anything like Clark's definition of 'person'. (Who does?) However, the problem with Clark's formulation isn't that it is heretical. The problem is that it's downright incoherent.

After offering his novel definition of 'person' Clark explains: "As a man thinketh in his (figurative) heart, so is he. A man *is* what he *thinks*." Leaving no doubt as to what he means, he later adds: "a person is the propositions he thinks."¹⁵ But this is obviously incoherent, since it presupposes a distinction between the thinker ("he") and his thoughts ("the propositions"). It's no more coherent than the claim that a person is the clothes he wears! In fact, Clark's definition is circular, because the *definiendum* ("a person") is referred to in the *definiens* ("the propositions he [i.e., the person] thinks").

In any case, how can a composite of propositions *think* in the first place? Aren't propositions *objects* of thought rather than *subjects* of thought, as Clark himself recognized?¹⁶ Even more problematically, how can a composite of propositions *suffer* or *be crucified* or *thirst*?¹⁷ The difficulties don't end there: Clark's apparent identification of propositions with human thoughts is undermined by the observation that two people can think one and the same proposition. Clark must either distinguish propositions and thoughts, or else conclude that persons share proper parts. Furthermore, Clark's attempt to distinguish persons on the basis of first-person indexical propositions suffers from explanatory circularity.¹⁸ (What does the 'I' in the

¹³ Gordon H. Clark, *The Incarnation* (The Trinity Foundation, 1988). For Clark's criticisms of Chalcedon, see pp. 14-15, 75. For his definition of 'person', see pp. 54, 64.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78. This statement of Clark's view comes from the book's editor, John Robbins.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 69, 73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

proposition “I was incarnated” refer to if not a *person* whose existence is logically prior to that proposition?)

So much for the philosophical problems of Clark’s analysis of the doctrine of the Incarnation. How does it fare theologically? Does it do justice to the biblical teaching about Christ? Clark recommends that we think of Christ in terms of “two persons” rather than the “two natures” of the Chalcedon formula. What then accounts for the *unity* between the two? Chalcedon’s answer is straightforward: it’s the unity of personhood. What is Clark’s alternative? As far as I can tell, he offers none.¹⁹

But this inevitably invites a host of awkward questions. Who exactly is the “one mediator” of 1 Timothy 2:5? Who or what is the referent of the name “Jesus Christ” in the New Testament? Did Clark think that “Jesus Christ” referred collectively to two ‘persons’: God the Son and Jesus of Nazareth? Why then do the biblical writers use the pronoun ‘he’ rather than ‘they’? The answer should be obvious: the biblical writers weren’t working with anything like Clark’s quirky notion of personhood. Rather, they were working with the everyday notion of personhood reflected in personal pronouns: an individual with the capacity for thoughts, intentions, and actions.

There are further criticisms that could be raised against Clark’s position, but these should suffice to show why I and others find his formulations of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation inadequate on both theological and philosophical grounds. Indeed, Clark’s failure to offer formulations that are both non-paradoxical and faithful to the biblical data serves as further confirmation of my thesis.

A Low View of Scripture?

Let us return to the criticisms of my book in Dr. Crampton’s review. The overall impression given by the review is that the position I defend implies a low view of the Bible:

¹⁹ At least, he offers none in *The Incarnation*, which of all his works is where we would expect to find it. The book was written shortly before its author’s death in 1985.

To insist on the existence of logical paradox in the Bible is to hold, at least implicitly, to a very low view of the infallible, inerrant Word of God. (p. 4)

[W]ithout in any way intending to do so, he has done disservice to the God of the Word and the Word of God. This does not glorify God. (p. 4)

Any stumbling in this area will lead to (at least) a fall into Neo-orthodox nonsense. (p. 4)

This is a serious charge to level at another Christian. Serious charges demand serious arguments. I have shown that Dr. Crampton hasn't come close to satisfying the burden of proof this charge places upon him. Moreover, it ought to be clear to any attentive reader of my book that his charge is without foundation. Not only do I argue in chapter 5 for the traditional Reformed view of divine inspiration of the Bible and rebut an argument against biblical inspiration in chapter 7, but my case for the rationality of affirming paradoxical Christian doctrines in chapter 6 *depends crucially on a very high view of Scripture*. In other words, not only am I concerned to preserve a high view of Scripture, but I make a high view of Scripture a central plank of my argument! Yet one wouldn't know that from reading Dr. Crampton's review alone, precisely because my arguments barely get a mention.

Concluding Observations

Let me be absolutely clear. The problem with Dr. Crampton's review is not that it is strongly critical. I welcome well-informed, well-argued criticisms of my proposals.²⁰ No, my problem with his review is that its criticisms are neither well-informed nor well-argued. It falls short both as a review and as a refutation.

Nevertheless, its shortcomings notwithstanding, the review does serve a useful purpose insofar as it makes clear the epistemological outlook of the Trinity Foundation. The motto of the Trinity Foundation is concise and commendable: "The Bible alone is the Word of God." Dr. Crampton's review casts Gordon Clark and his followers as the defenders of Scripture and yours truly as an unwitting enemy. But readers of *The Trinity Review* should not be deceived. Clarkian opposition to the claims defended in my book aren't based on a responsible exegesis of the Bible, but

²⁰ For example, see: <http://proginosko.wordpress.com/2010/02/09/this-is-the-voice-of-the-mysterians/>

rather on *a priori* extra-biblical presuppositions about how God must reveal himself and about the capacities of the human mind. Of course, we all come to the Bible with philosophical presuppositions—that’s unavoidable. The question is whether we will force the Bible to fit those presuppositions or allow it to correct (if necessary) those presuppositions.²¹

I believe it’s clear from Dr. Crampton’s review that his presuppositions are not well supported by the Bible. (If they were, it wouldn’t be so difficult for him to find biblical support for them without having to press-gang verses into doing philosophical work that goes far beyond their contextual meaning.) The fact is that the Bible doesn’t directly address the question of whether or not biblical doctrines could present to us as paradoxical. It seems the only way to answer that question is to consider the biblical doctrines themselves, to see whether they really are susceptible to formulations that avoid paradox without distorting what the Bible actually says (e.g., about God’s trinity or Christ’s divinity and humanity).

In conclusion, I invite readers of *The Trinity Review* who really want to get to the bottom of such matters to do three things: (1) to study the biblical doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, particularly with respect to the logical challenges they present; (2) to critically evaluate the formulations offered by Gordon Clark, asking in particular whether they do justice to the biblical data; and (3) to critically evaluate not only the claims I make in my book, but also the detailed arguments I offer in support of those claims. I’m confident that even if informed readers do not finally agree with my conclusions, they’ll grant that my book deserved better treatment than it received in *The Trinity Review*.²²

²¹ Gordon Clark is quite correct when he states, “It must forever be kept in mind that a theologian’s epistemology controls his interpretation of the Bible. If his epistemology is not Christian, his exegesis will be systematically distorted.” *The Incarnation*, pp. 46-47. It must be added, however, that in order to have a Christian epistemology one must also allow the Bible to inform and control one’s epistemology from the outset, without making unwarranted (and uncorrectable) assumptions about what the Bible can and cannot teach.

²² My thanks to Steve Hays, Paul Manata, and Derek Ashton for helpful comments on an earlier draft.