

BOOK REVIEW

of

Gordon H. Clark,

A Christian Philosophy of Education, volume 10 in the works of Gordon Haddon Clark,
The Trinity Foundation, 2000.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Who should be interested in a Christian philosophy of education? All of us should be! Is there really a *Christian* philosophy of education? Yes! Why should we be interested? And what is that Christian philosophy of education? This book answers those questions. These issues are not just for school administrators, teachers, and College of Education professors. Many people talk about what is being taught, or not taught, in public schools. Many have become concerned enough to home-school their own children. Many put their children in a private school, and carefully compare alternative schools before making such a decision. Many do the same when it comes to higher education. Many think the issues are mainly academic expectations and rigor. Many are more concerned about having a Christian emphasis placed in the classroom, and fear that public schools are too committed to a naturalistic philosophy if not openly hostile to Christianity. But are those the real issues? Or do they flow from more basic considerations? What really should be the fundamental commitments of an educational program? What really are the goals of an education? Is it mainly to be prepared to go on to college and get a well-paying job? Is it to be socially well-adjusted to function in a pluralistic society? Who should be making these basic decisions? Is it primarily the responsibility of government employees or trained educators? And how should those who have this responsibility make these decisions? What should these decisions be based upon? One of the main conclusions of this book is that these decisions should not be left to others, and if they are each of us must be able to have great confidence in those that do, and that they have the right basic commitments guiding them. This book, in the first edition, was published in 1946, long before there was much of any Christian school movement or home-schooling as we have it today. Yet Clark clearly spells out the concerns and provides a solid foundation.

The book has eight chapters: "The Need for a World-View," "The Christian World-View," "The Alternative to Christian Theism," "Neutrality," "Ethics," "The Christian Philosophy of Education," "Academic Matters," and "From Kindergarten to University." In this edition of the book there are five appendices: "The Relationship of Public Education to Christianity," "A Protestant World-View," "Art and the Gospel," "How Do We Learn?," and "Can Moral Education be Grounded in Naturalism?". In the Preface Clark writes that "instead of being a welcome subject of study, Protestantism faces constant attempts to prevent its being heard; and the impression is sedulously cultivated that the problems have all been settled, and Calvinism has nothing worthwhile to say. The result naturally is that historic Protestantism is dismissed thoughtlessly."

In chapter 1 Clark writes "If the educators had any view of the chief end of man, they would find it easier to locate the proper place of a liberal education. Whether it be the views of an individual professor or the policy of a faculty, all will be confusion unless founded on an unambiguous world-view. But this is what modern education does not have." He continues "If there is any possibility that education can be productive of good, that possibility depends on the inclusion of morality in the curriculum. But what is morality? How are moral norms discovered and known? Do they or do they not require a theological foundation? The present volume, as its title suggests, asserts the need of a theological basis for morality; but the sole point intended at this juncture is that a knowledge of child psychology, including of necessity a view of the origin and nature of man, the relation between education and government, and the inclusion or exclusion of morals and theology, requires an intelligent educator to have a rather well-developed philosophy or world-view." And in 1946 Clark could write, and if true then how much more-so today, "If some form of education prepares people to detect slanted news and thereby prevent a social climate where hate propaganda is accepted, it is not the present form of American education." So what kind of education does Clark propose?: "There is only one philosophy that can unify education and life. That philosophy is the philosophy of Christian theism. What is needed is an educational system based on the sovereignty of God. . . . What is needed therefore is a philosophy consonant with the greatest creed of Christendom, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*."

On page 55 Clark writes of public schools, "Obviously the schools are not Christian. Just as obviously they are not neutral. The Scriptures say that the fear of the Lord is the chief part of knowledge; but the schools, by omitting all reference to God, give the pupils the notion that knowledge can be had apart from God. They teach in effect that God has no control of history, that there is no plan of events that God is working out, that God does not foreordain whatsoever comes to pass. . . . public schools are not, never were, can never be, neutral. . . . The school system that ignores God teaches its pupils to ignore God; and this is not neutrality. It is the worst form of antagonism, for it judges God to be unimportant and irrelevant in human affairs. This is atheism."

Later in the book, Clark addresses more practical matters. What should the content of instruction be? How best should instruction be carried out according to Biblical principles?