

BOOK REVIEW

of

Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things*, fourth edition,
The Trinity Foundation, 2005.

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

There appears to be a growing awareness on the part of at least some evangelical thinkers that Christians need to perhaps give more thought to how Christianity applies to all areas of life. Nancy R. Pearcey in her excellent book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, Crossway Books, 2004, had much to write about the importance of a worldview, and the whole thesis of her book is that Christianity has impact upon all aspects of life. D.A. Carson, in his book *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, Zondervan, 1996, also has much to write about how Christianity should and must make a greater impact upon our pluralistic society than what it currently does. But it would seem to me that most Christians who take these ideas seriously will likely soon be confronted by serious questions about just what is the impact that Christianity should have upon various aspects of society. Not that Pearcey and Carson ignore such questions, but both seem to expend their energies calling attention to the fact that our Christianity should impact all aspects of our lives rather than explaining just how Christianity should make that impact. The new edition of Gordon Clark's *A Christian View of Men and Things* provides the foundation that seems lacking in Pearcey and Carson, without detracting from those excellent books. When we ask just what impact should Christianity have on our society, we probably initially think of current events. We want to know what political party or candidate should we support. We want to know whether a particular war is just or not. We want to know if the teaching of evolution in public schools is ethical or not. We perhaps want to know how to "prove" the existence of God to a friend who wonders about it, or whether it makes any sense to try. While it is true that many Christians have addressed some of the fundamentals underlying these issues here and there, not many have addressed them in detail. Augustine did, and so did Aquinas, but not many others. Fortunately, Clark does in the book under review.

Although the topics of this book may seem academic and impractical, yet because they form the foundation for allowing our Faith to impact the world around us, in that sense the topics of this book are very practical. And yet, "Even devoted Christians fail to see any close connection between their faith and other matters of interest. Similarly in the colleges, not only have the specific courses in theism been dropped, but the Christian presuppositions that previously pervaded the entire curriculum have been abandoned, and the philosophy that most influences the students in all departments is humanism or naturalism." Assuming we want to be clear thinkers, and assuming we want to know how to interpret and apply the Scriptures as we read them and meditate upon them as we are instructed to do, then having a grasp of the Christian view of men and things seems like a good idea.

"The naturalistic philosophy that engulfs the modern mind is not a repudiation of one or two items of the Christian faith leaving the remainder untouched; it is not a philosophy that is satisfied to deny miracles while approving or at least not disapproving of Christian moral standards; on the contrary both Christianity and naturalism demand all or nothing: compromise is impossible." "Our preferences, our standards of morality, our purpose in life accord with a theistic worldview or they do not. And if they do not, we are acting on the assumption, whether we admit it or not, that there is no God to hold us responsible." This is what Stephen Charnock, in his *Existence and Attributes of God*, calls practical atheism.

So how should one approach the fundamentals underlying these issues? How does one get started? According to Clark, you are almost immediately confronted with having to make some basic assumptions or commitments. This approach, according to Clark, is really unavoidable, even if you may be unaware of it. The approach is presuppositional. When dealing with the truly fundamentals, he seems to be correct. One may be a skeptic, a relativist, an empiricist, etc., but that is always the starting point, never the conclusion. Therefore, the presuppositional approach is to take the starting point and test it for self-consistency (no contradictions). This may seem daunting on one level, and quite simple on another. Daunting in that it means becoming quite familiar with all contrary starting points to your own, and simple because all that is needed is to show self-contradictions to rule the assumed position out. Clark does this with many common starting points, such as the prevalent materialism / humanism of our day, or the skepticism underlying post-modernism, and quite readily shows them to be self-contradictory. Only the starting point of Biblical Christianity provides (if one assumes that there can only be one self-consistent system of thought, then *only*) a self-consistent view of the world. Christians know this from the start, but it should be helpful to know that it can stand up to the rigors of intellectual inquiry of the highest level.