Chapter Summaries: *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* by Clark, Chapter 1

In chapter 1, Clark basically asks the question, “Is Christianity a religion?” He explores the definition of religion, God, and even Christianity. He does not define religion after some discussion, except perhaps in a colloquial sense, because the word defies definition. At the end of this chapter, Clark prefers to be very particular in his definitions, and defines Christianity according to the Westminster Confession.

In discussing the definition of religion, Clark attempts to explore the unity and multiformity of the various aspects of religion. There are a number of religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and even secular humanism. But with vastly differing religions, Clark reviews the literature to determine a common core. There are two ways to define religion: either using the psychological approach, or the comparative approach. Beginning with the psychological approach, Clark examines religion on the basis of the intimate familiarity of the experience. Some writers say that emotion is the common core. Religion is some sort of emotional experience. He explores a few writers’ views on conversion. He concludes, however, that there are several reasons why psychology cannot discover what religion is. One reason is that the descriptive accounts of emotions are concerned only with surface phenomena. Additionally, no purely psychological description of experiences, no emotion, no particular state of the affective consciousness, nor any combination of them, can be singled out as the uniform and definitive element in religion. There is nothing distinctively religious about emotions. Some say personal integration is the essence of religion, but if this were so, it would follow that the integration of purposes, emotions, and sentiments achieved by Hitler and Stalin cannot by
any empirical method be judged to be inferior to any other. The psychological method therefore fails to discover, to define, and to explain religion, and at the same time it fails to justify its claim to scientific impartiality.

The comparative model compares other religions such as Christianity and Hinduism to see what they have in common. Clark first explores the question, “Is God essential to religion?” He finds it hard to come to a conclusion about god (or God) since there are so many various and contradictory definitions of God. If the term God is broadened as to include the usage of both Spinoza and the animists, Clark argues, the term and the definition of religion in which it is used become meaningless. In order to discover the common element in all religions, it would first be necessary to distinguish religions from all other non-religious phenomena. Again, Clark discovers this is harder than it appears. If there is no common quality, emotional or intellectual, why are these phenomena uniformly classified together and called religion? The only comprehensive results, Clark argues, of attempting to define religion is now the vagueness of the meaningless statements.

Finally, Clark discusses Christianity. He is very specific in defining it as what is commonly called Calvinism, as described by the Westminster Confession. While many would disagree with this (Romanists), Clark nevertheless specifically uses this definition.
Chapter Summaries: Religion, Reason, and Revelation by Clark, Chapter 2

Chapter Two is an examination of the relationship between reason and faith. This chapter has basically four sections. First the Roman Catholic view will come under the heading of Reason and Faith, and discuss the natural theology and faith of Thomas Aquinas. The second section is Reason without Faith, and will summarize modern Rationalist and Empirical philosophies from Descartes to Hegel. The third section is Faith without Reason, and will review irrationalism that followed Hegel, including mysticism, Neo-orthodoxy, Nietzsche, and Instrumentalism. The fourth section is Faith and Reason, and will discuss revelation from God and its relation to reason.

In the first section, Clark reviews the Thomistic naturalistic theology and the cosmological argument. Faith and reason in Thomistic philosophy are separate and in some sense incompatible. If one has rationally demonstrated a proposition then it is impossible to believe in it on bare authority. One now has the proof, which leaves no room for faith. Thomas attempts to prove the existence of God using purely rationalistic proofs. Clark provides several refutations of Thomas’ cosmological argument:

1. A poorly argued philosophical background and definition of motion that is borrowed from Aristotle.

2. Thomas uses the existence of an Unmoved Mover to prove this Unmoved Mover.

3. There is no logical step or steps that go from the Unmoved Mover to the Christian God, or any god for that matter.
4. Thomas argues that any term which applies to God cannot be used univocally with man, and therefore his terms have different meanings in his syllogisms. God’s existence cannot be proven or demonstrated on the basis of observation in nature. Clark shows with a number of reasons that the cosmological argument is invalid.

The second section is called Reason without Faith, and in this section Clark explores and refutes the idea of truth and knowledge strictly from logic (as the rationalists define reason) or from sensation or experience (as the empiricists define reason). The Roman catholic church and worldview lost its monopoly over the minds of the people due to two man movements: Protestantism, and the Renaissance. The Renaissance became hostile to Christianity, as Clark shows. English Deism sprang from this movement, to posit a god that was creator but not involved in his creation. It was a natural religion that was discoverable by reason. Later, Rene Descartes became the father of rationalism. All knowledge was to be deduced from axioms; no appeal to sensation as permitted. The consistent application of the laws of logic were alone sufficient. However, Kant did his best to explode the ontological argument, and Clark shows that rationalism in the 17th century meaning of the term, was a failure. Reason without faith not only provides no religion, but it also does not support knowledge of any kind.

Clark next in this section explores and refutes empiricism. Reason takes on a different meaning, that of sensation. Clark reviews Kant, Hegel, and some of their critics to show that, like reason as logic, reason as sensation cannot produce anything fixed and
certain, and therefore cannot be used to ascertain real knowledge nor any religious
knowledge.

The third section consists of an examination of Faith without Reason, or irrationalism. If reason as logic or sensation won’t provide knowledge, then forget reason altogether, they argue. Clark briefly reviews several types of mysticism, and their disparagement of the intellect. Clark traces the influences of Karl Marx and more importantly Soren Kierkegaard. Marx had diagnosed the sickness of society as an economic malady, but Kierkegaard asserted that the social reform which was needed was not economic, but spiritual and religious. For Kierkegaard, God is truth, but truth exists only for a believer who inwardly experiences the tension between himself and God. If an actually existing person is an unbeliever, then for him God does not exist. God exists only in subjectivity. Additionally, with Kierkegaard, it was not the what (doctrines, propositions, etc.) that mattered in religion, but the how. A pagan who prayed to an idol with passion was truly praying to God as opposed to a Lutheran who had all of the right knowledge but prayed in a false spirit.

In this section, Clark reviews briefly the contributions of Nietzsche, William James, and Emil Brunner and his neo-orthodoxy. Nietzsche and James stand outside the Christian tradition and are examples of the collapse of human reason apart from knowledge given by divine revelation. Brunner equates truth and error, and because he gives them equal authority has repudiated the law of contradiction and ceased all meaningful conversation. Irrationalism is self-contradictory, self-destructive, and intellectually dead.
The final section deals with Faith and Reason. In this section, Clark suggests that we neither abandon reason nor use it unaided, but acknowledge a verbal, propositional revelation of fixed truth from God. Only by accepting rationally comprehensible information on God’s authority can man hope to have a sound philosophy and a true religion. Clark reviews such terms and faith and reason, including the Hebrew Biblical term for “heart.” He also examines the Scriptural and unscriptural views of intellectual activity under trust and assent. The Bible teaches the unity of the person, that today’s faculty psychology is unscriptural, that the OT term for “heart” is far more intellectual than its use in the present day, that faith is an inner or mental act, not properly compared with a physical act, that Hebrews shows the necessity of creeds, and that belief in a creed is both intellectual and voluntary.
Chapter Summaries: Religion, Reason, and Revelation by Clark, Chapter 3

Chapter three is a discussion by Clark on inspiration and language. The first part of this chapter provides some background on the issues surrounding verbal plenary inspiration of the Word of God, and the second part is a discussion on the role of language and language theory. It very briefly reviews some literature on language, its nature, origin, possibilities, and relation to inspiration. Additionally, there is also a question of method, and whether divine revelation as the prerequisite of all knowledge, offers a solution to the problems of language.

Initially, Clark reviews the Bible’s claims about itself as revelation from God. He recommends Gaussen’s book Theopneustia as a proper starting place for this subject. It is very clear that the doctrine of inspiration is not based on one or two obscure verses, but on texts from nearly every book of the Bible. Clark also reviews the dictation objection, and refutes this century-old objection by first reiterating what the doctrine of inspiration really is, and then by addressing the issue in terms of God’s sovereignty and decree.

Clark explores contemporary theories of religious language, from stating that religious language is meaningless, to language is symbolic, and to the outright dismissal of inspiration because language is unsuitable for this type of communication. Clark refutes the idea that all language is symbolic by showing that some language and sentences must be strictly literal for any communication to make sense, even on a day to day basis. A purely naturalistic origin of language cannot be sustained. In addition, to call all language symbolic is to empty of all significance the commonly recognized distinction between the literal and the figurative. He also shows that some idea of
language must have been placed within man by God in order for nonspatial concepts such as the soul or God to have even arisen within the vocabulary of man. Religious language is not essentially different from language on other subjects of interest. Religious language does contain various genres such as figures of speech and analogies, but it also contains prose that are literal in meaning that explain the figures of speech in propositional form. Unless religious language is meaningful, literally true, and thoroughly intelligible, it is meaningless and unintelligible. All other theories of language are themselves nonsense and make themselves impossible. It is only a theory of inspiration and some innate language that God has given man that make language understandable and possible.
Chapter Summaries: Religion, Reason, and Revelation by Clark, Chapter 4

Chapter four is a discussion on revelation and morality. Ethics, what is right and wrong, good and evil, has been a subject of philosophy for centuries. Every thinking person must reflect on the principles that guide his conduct. Questions about which of two incompatible lines of action to follow demand the attention of all people. How one resolves these questions of values, good and evil, and right and wrong is the subject of this chapter. Clark reviews Utilitarianism and Instrumentalism, and then concludes the chapter with a review of Christian ethics.

Clark refutes utilitarianism after clarifying it with a number of definitions. In 19th century England Jeremy Bentham proposed a theory of utilitarianism, which basically states that everyone seeks nothing but pleasure, and one ought to seek not only his own pleasure, but the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. He proposed that one could measure the amount of pleasure that each act provides, and using math basically determine which act was good and which was not. However, Clark argues that descriptive science can discover no reason for aiming at the good of all society. No mathematical theory can quantify all of the choices of one person, let alone the entire human race, to determine what will provide the greatest good for the most people.

Immanuel Kant come up with a system of categorical imperatives, which was a theory of a priori duty; a moral precept was such because it was a categorical imperative, universal maxims. However, a serious problem arose when determining what constituted a categorical imperative and what did not. How does a maxim become such?
John Dewey taught instrumentalism, which depended upon an empirical and scientific ethic. Much of his ethic had to do with capital punishment. He alleged that society had just as much to blame for the criminal as the criminal was, and he advocated that a criminal should not be punished, but rehabilitated and paroled. In addition, he also advocated very strict controls of government over business. He held that nothing was intrinsically good or bad, nothing is valuable in and of itself, but that all beliefs, values, and actions are instrumental. They are judged by their consequences. If they solve human problems, they are good consequences. Clark notes, however, that if nothing is inherently good, then how can man choose anything? Suicide would be just as much an option as perseverance.

Clark ends this section of the book with a discussion of Christian principles, beginning with the concept of God as the Divine Legislator. One cannot argue the truth of Christianity on the basis of ethics; one must defend its ethics on the basis of its theological truth. The ethics is not a premise, but a conclusion. Theology is basic. The Ten Commandments, he notes, rests on certain presuppositions, such as the authority of God and His Written Word. Ethics requires definite information on what is right and wrong, and such information can only be revealed by a living and communicating God. The secular notion of changing morality presupposes a belief in a changing god, which raises theological issues. The Christian God is immutable, as is His Word. Sovereignty is one of the most important aspects of God as it relates to ethics. God does not will the good because it is independently good, but on the contrary the good is good because God wills it. The idea of sovereignty solves all of the major problems of secular ethics.
Chapter Summaries: Religion, Reason, and Revelation by Clark, Chapter 5

Chapter Five is Gordon Clark’s book God and Evil: The Problem Solved. It has recently been republished as a stand-alone booklet. The central issue which Clark addresses is the age-old question, If God is all-good, and if God is all-powerful, then why are sin and suffering in the world? In other words, how can the existence of God be harmonized with the existence of evil? Clark analyzes the historical answers to this dilemma, and comes to a conclusion using logic and Scripture. Clark’s answer to this situation does not deny any of the Scriptural characteristics of God as held by historic and orthodox Christianity.

Historically, Clark argues that most of the answers to this dilemma center around the proposition that if God is good and wants to eliminate sin, but cannot, He is not omnipotent. If he is omnipotent, and can eliminate sin, but doesn’t, then He is not good. Therefore, God cannot be both omnipotent and good at the same time. Some religions pose the theory that the universe must be the work of two independent, conflicting deities. Some pose that God is not the cause of everything, but only some things. Some pose that evil is not really real, but metaphysical, and so since it is not real, then God is not the cause of evil. However, historically, the answer to this question has generally entailed a limited deity. At some point, God is not the omnipotent and omniscient being that is clearly defined in the Bible.

Because of this dilemma, theories of free will have emerged to explain sin and the causes of sin. Free will has doubtless been the most popular explanation for the cause of sin and the problem of evil. God is all-powerful, but He has adopted a hands-off policy
that allows human beings to act apart from His divine influence. Clark, in his explanations, is careful to define his terms. He defines “free will” as the theory that when man is faced with incompatible courses of action, he is able to choose any one as well as the other. We choose evil of our own free will, and God does not make us do so. Therefore, we alone are responsible for sin and not God. Early views of free will postulated that man could just as easily choose one thing as another. He could just as easily choose to sin and not to sin. Free will may indeed do wrong, but we cannot blame God for that. Without the will to do wrong, we would not have the will to do right, so the theory goes. However, this is contrary to Biblical Christianity. The ability to equally do good or evil is not taught in the Bible. Augustine summarized it this way: Before the fall it was possible not to sin. In heaven, it will be impossible to sin. However, in the present world, it is not possible not to sin.

Free will is usually put forth to alleviate the responsibility of sin from God, but it does not. Some people suggest that God allows, or gives permission, to people to commit sins. However, if God is omnipotent, then nothing in the universe is independent of God. Therefore, permission has no meaning. Additionally, as said before, the Bible denies free will.

Clark spends a considerable amount of space in a 40 page essay on the idea of free will in Reformation Theology and the idea of determinism. Clark states that all choices are determined, according to Scripture. One example he gives is Acts 4:27 – 28. It is clear that God predetermined beforehand what would happen in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Clark demonstrates that Reformation Theology insisted and
insists that God is sovereign and that choices are determined ahead of time. This is not simply a Presbyterian doctrine either. Many theologians for centuries have explicitly held to this doctrine of God’s eternal decrees. The Westminster Confession is clear on this position, as well are some Baptists and Anglicans, as examples.

There are other considerations that impact the fundamental question as well. For instance, if man has free will, and things can be different, then God is not omniscient. If God is both omniscient and omnipotent, then what God sees in the future will indeed happen. If what he sees can be changed or modified, then God is not either omniscient or omnipotent. If God did not arrange the universe the way it is, then who did? If there is someone else outside of God that is arranging the universe, then the doctrine of creation must be abandoned. Additionally, if the universe is not God’s creation, then God’s knowledge of the universe, both past and future, cannot depend on what God intends to do but on what God observes. He would be no better off than we would be. Therefore, the Bible can be consistent in creation, omnipotence, omniscience, and divine decree, but these are incompatible with free will.

Free will, however, was introduced, as Clark states, for a very specific purpose. It was necessary to maintain human responsibility for sin and of preserving the righteousness of God. However, Clark answers the “responsibility” question by further defining and examining the Will of God the relationship between God and His will. The term “will” as Clark defines it, is God’s divine decree. For instance, if a man gets drunk and shoots his wife, many will say that is not God’s will, but Clark argues that it is. The scriptures leave no room for doubt. But some will ask, how can murder be the will of
God? Isn’t murder against the Ten Commandments? Clark answers with his definition of “will.” He also explains that the morality requirements that God commands are what ought to be done, but they do not cause it. God’s decretive will causes every event. It was against the law that the Jews crucified Christ, but God decreed it before time nonetheless. The term “will” when used loosely also can refer to God’s revealed will and His secret will. Some things God reveals to us, sometimes in a progressive nature, but this revealed will does not contradict His ultimate secret will.

One of the issues that is raised in the context of free will and God’s divine decrees is that assumption by many Arminians that these decrees reduce men to mere puppets, since their actions are predetermined. Clark, using John Gill and some other resources, differentiates between free will and natural liberty, also called free agency. The natural liberty means that the will is not determined by physical or physiological factors. On the other hand, free will means that there is no determining factor operating on the will, including God. Free will means that either of two options is equally possible. In contrast, free agency still includes the view that all choices are inevitable, but none of them are coerced or under compulsion outside of the preference of the mind.

Choice and necessity are therefore not incompatible. Choice, as defined by Clark, is a mental act that consciously initiates and determines further action. The ability to have chosen otherwise is irrelevant to the definition. Clark states that a choice is still a deliberate volition even if the choice could not have been different. Clark explains that it is not even possible to know if a choice could have been different because we ourselves are finite creatures and not conscious of our limitations. We have no idea what is truly
motivating our choices, whether it might be a deep internal emotion, parental training, or even God. The conclusion of this section is that in order to fully know that our wills are determined by no cause, we would have to know every possible cause in the universe. In other words, we would have to be omniscient. We would have to be God.

Clark then comes back to responsibility. He states that free will is not the basis of responsibility. At its most basic level, knowledge is the basis for responsibility. However, at a deeper level, responsibility must be defined in a way that takes into account our sin, so imputation must be a factor, as well as our everyday volitional actions. Clark defines responsibility as meaning that a person can be justly rewarded or punished for his deeds. This implies that this person must be answerable to some person, because responsibility presupposes a superior authority that rewards and punishes. Since God is the highest authority, then responsibility ultimately depends on the power and authority of God.

So the question then is, can God punish a man for deeds that God himself has predetermined will happen beforehand? Clark answers that question by stating that God is not only the creator, judge, and the governor, but He is also the moral legislator. It is His will that establishes right and wrong, good and evil, and justice and injustice. Whatever God does is by definition just and right. If God punishes man, then man is justly punished, and therefore man is responsible. We determine what is just by observing what God does. What He commands men to do or not to do is by definition just.
Clark is coming to his conclusion, but a few more things need to be said. Many will argue that this view of God makes God out to be the cause of sin. They are correct. God is the ultimate cause of everything. Nothing is independent of God. However, does the phrase “cause of sin” mean the same as the ‘author of sin?’ Clark states, no. God is the ultimate cause of sin, but He is not the immediate author of sin. God does not commit sin. Clark’s explanation, as does the Westminster Confession and a number of other Reformed theologians, takes into account secondary causes. While man’s actions are determined, man commits those acts. Therefore, he is immediate cause of sin, but his acts are made certain by the decrees of God.

Finally, God is neither responsible nor sinful, because there are no superior entities that God can be responsible to or laws that He can be held accountable to. He cannot be sinful, because by definition whatever God does is just and right. God cannot sin, and because he causes man to sin does not mean that God sins. There is no law above God that judges Him or states that decreeing sinful acts is sinful. Man is responsible because God calls him to account. Man is responsible because God can punish or reward him for his actions. God, on the other hand, cannot be held responsible because there is nothing higher than God. There are no laws which He could disobey.