

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

May
four
1942

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Clark

I cannot tell you how sorry I am about the matters referred to in your recent letter and enclosure. I have purposely kept ignorant about such problems. I had no idea things were as described, though I did get a card from Ed Elliott in which he hinted that the philosophy major had been dropped.

Naturally, without any further knowledge, and in line with my policies hitherto, I would urge you to hold on as long as possible and maintain as high standards as possible.

I wish we could offer you something here, but our budget will not permit any expansion, and our salaries are extremely small, even if there were a place.

I shall be praying for you and your family, and shall be interested in all that concerns you.

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

March
eighteen
1943

Dr. V. R. Edman
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Edman

The official record relating to Dr. Clark's appointment to the Wheaton faculty will be found in the minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Trustees held sometime in March, 1937.

As I said in my letter to the Trustees asking for my personal file material, I have a great amount of correspondence with Dr. Clark on various theological questions. You will doubtless remember that he was brought to Wheaton first as a visiting professor for one year. He was not at that time made a regular member of the faculty, since he was not clear about the premillennial point in the platform of the College. Early in the spring of 1937 he had come to the pre-millennial position, and was then made a regular member of the faculty by vote of the Executive Committee, as indicated above.

As in all such cases, the action recorded in the minutes of the Trustees is the full official record. We never specified terms of tenure when a person was made a permanent member of the faculty. Such terms were quite thoroughly discussed in the various works on college administration, and were generally understood and acted upon as occasion demanded.

Dr. Clark's adherence to the doctrinal platform of the College would be evidenced by copies of the platform signed by him from year to year and filed with other such documents.

Nothing in my files in any way modifies the above-mentioned records.

Thank you for your kind word in regard to Ruth. We are remembering you and the College in prayer.

Sincerely yours in Christ

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

March
twenty-two
1943

Professor Gordon H. Clark, Ph.D.
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

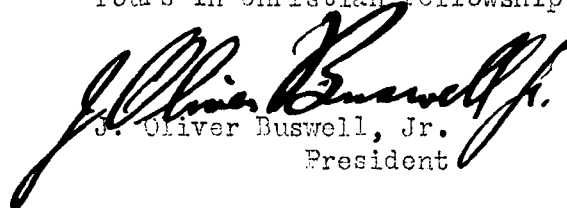
Dear Professor Clark

I am enclosing herewith a copy of a letter received last week from Dr. Edman, together with a copy of my reply. I do not know what it is all about, but I thought you ought to have these copies.

I assume that you have a copy of a memorandum which I sent you in March, 1937, notifying you of the trustees' action. If you would not mind showing that to Dr. Edman, if you have occasion to do so, it would relieve me from any criticism of failing to be businesslike or failing to make adequate records of business transactions.

Mrs. Buswell and I are praying for you and your loved ones. We know that the all sufficient grace of God will always be your strength.

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/vd
Enclosures

March 23 1943

President J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
The National Bible Institute
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Buswell,

Thank you for your recent letter. As you know (of your letter to me of May 4 1942), trouble for me has been brewing here.

Last August a committee that had investigated me wrote a report with certain recommendations. It lay without any action by the trustees until last December, when the executive committee, taking it up for the first time, adopted the report and fired me. Then after this delicate hint, it withdrew the firing action, reapproved the report, and let me resign. Enclosed is a copy of my letter of resignation.

In it I charge the trustees with a breach of contract because you, Dean Emerson, Mr. Dyrness, and Dr. Thiessen had a session with me discussing the third chapter of the Westminster Confession which explicit states the doctrine of reprobation. The trustees admit that the matter was thoroughly discussed. At that time I made it clear that I would not consent to accept a position in Wheaton if I could not at the same time be a Presbyterian. In evidence of which I could point to the fact that during your administration no complaint was addressed to me, on this subject or on any other. Now the trustees have altered the doctrinal position of the college by an explicit condemnation of chapters two and three of the Confession, or more exactly an explicit condemnation of the doctrine taught in those chapters, and they tried to compel me to deceive the students as to historical facts, and I have resigned.

Of course Dr. Thiessen, who does not scruple to use quotations that cannot be located and who reverses the order of historical events in order to make a point against Calvinism, and who without departmental meeting, committee meeting, or faculty action, had the philosophy major dropped from the catalog, cannot be expected to remember anything that would favor my position.

I am sensible of your business behavior, of your adequate records of transactions; and I have always appreciated your above-board character - a type of character that Wheaton ought now to have at its head.

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.

page two.

The present head of the school, under the cover of a carefully prearranged "revival" resembling a Buchmanite confession meeting, a revival that was thoroughly used for publicity, brought in the president of the Omaha U.S.A. seminary to recruit candidates for that church.

I trust that this information will bring you up to the current situation. If it is not sufficiently full, let me know and I shall answer your questions.

Cordially yours,

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

March
twenty-six
1943

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Clark

I should have commented on the regrettable visit of the president of Omaha Presbyterian Seminary. I take it you refer to Dr. Denise. I have somewhere a letter from him stating that after having read the Auburn Affirmation he saw nothing objectionable in it. When he said this I refused to permit him again to recruit students on the campus. I do not suppose Dr. Edman knew of his stand on that heretical document.

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

March
twenty-six
1943

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Clark

Thank you for your letter of March twenty-third. I had not read your resignation in the Guardian when I wrote you last. I shall continue to pray for you and your loved ones most earnestly, and I am sure that the grace of the Lord will be poured out for you abundantly.

I have never seen a copy of the trustees' report referred to, and for theological reasons I should like very much to have a copy of it if you could conveniently send me one.

I did not know that the question of discussions prior to the trustees' vote of March, 1937, had been raised. Since it is raised, could you let me know whether any deny that your appointment was upon the unanimous recommendation of the Executive Council (Dyrness, Emerson, Kirk, and I), Dr. Thiessen, chairman of the department, concurring. I am quite certain that this was the case. I feel certain also that the action was taken on unanimous recommendation of the faculty. If this is disputed, you would have a right to ask for copies of the faculty minutes recommending your appointment and the executive committee minutes confirming it.

On March 6, 1937, I wrote you, "Mr. Dyrness, Dean Emerson, and Dr. Thiessen told me late yesterday afternoon that you and they had reached a satisfactory working understanding. This is indeed a great victory. If a misunderstanding had to arise, it is providential that it came up at this stage."

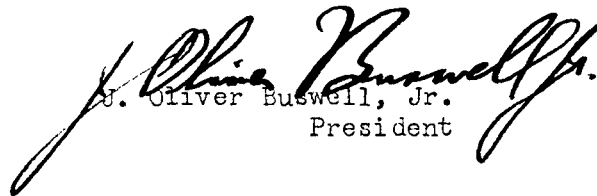
In point of theology, of course I wish you could see that chapter three of the Confession uses the words ordination and predestination to include occurrences of which this chapter specifically denies that God is the "author." This leaves plenty of room for Hodge's teaching of a difference between permissive decrees and compelling decrees.

Dr. Gordon H. Clark - page two

Chapter three really does not teach reprobation, but preterition; for the foreordination to wrath is distinctly stated to be grounded upon the sin of which God is not the author. The foreordination to wrath is never in the Westminster standards said to be grounded directly upon God's authorship.

This is an old discussion between us, but one in which I wish I might have been of help. *I mean, so that the trustees might not have condemned either the Westminster Confession or myself.* With earnest prayer for you and all of your activities, I am

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

March 29 1943

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
The National Bible Institute
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Buswell,

As you request I am sending you a copy of the report of the committee. Kindly return it to me. The college did not furnish me with copies for distribution, in fact Dr. Edman never has shown me a copy as it was finally adopted by the committee and later by the trustees. He only gave me a tentative report. I understand that on the final report one word was changed. Instead of saying that I teach that God is the author of sin, they used the word 'originator' of sin. As you will see by following through the usage of the word 'author' in the Confession, it means 'approver.' Of course I do not hold that God approves sin; on the contrary he punishes sin and makes it the legal basis of condemnation.

Making sin the legal basis of condemnation, however, does not remove from the Confession the doctrine of reprobation. God from all eternity foreordained some to everlasting life and also foreordained some to eternal death. Read carefully chapter three, section three. If that is not reprobation, then you must be using a definition I do not know.

As for permissive decrees, I have never found anyone willing to define permission. And Calvin himself shows the folly of trying to escape the teaching of Scripture by inventing permissive decrees. Cf. Institutes III, xxiii, 8 and II iv, 3.

It is always pleasurable to have a theological discussion with you, but time is short now. The point of the present trouble is that I made my position clear when I came here, even submitting a published article on Determinism and Responsibility, and that no requirements were made of me beyond those published in the catalog. The trustees, at the first meeting in which they discussed my case, altered the doctrinal position of the college and fired me. Then they rescinded the firing and hoped for my resignation. It looks to me like a breach of contract.

Cordially yours,

April 12 1943

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
The National Bible Institute
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Buswell,

I take it that your letter of April 5 is an admission that I was employed on the understanding that my views should have an open hearing in the college, and in particular that I was not employed subject to any such restrictions as those set down in the report of the special committee, later adopted by the executive committee and by the trustees as a whole.

May I merely repeat that I had submitted my article on Determinism and Responsibility before my employment; that I openly advocated Calvinism, both during my year as Visiting Professor and after my election to Associate Professor; that I made clear to you that if Dr. Thiessen's wish to stifle Calvinism were to be granted I would not accept the appointment to Wheaton. Such in my mind were the terms of employment. Of course it was all verbal - I thought I could trust men who were so vocal in their profession of Christianity; if I had suspected the true character of the trustees I would have asked for a written contract. And I am always ready to admit that you kept the terms of the verbal contract. I have no complaint to make against you.

Your letter gives me another complaint against the trustees. If they repudiated the policies under which I was employed by dismissing you, they ought to have made the change of policy known to the faculty. In not doing so, they acted, in my opinion, dishonestly. And I am quite convinced that they are guilty of breach of contract. If our conversations did not constitute a contract, then there has been no contract at all, for I was employed by word of mouth. There was no written document signed by two parties.

Thank you for your kind regards and earnest prayers.

Cordially yours,

THE NATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

April
five
1943

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Clark

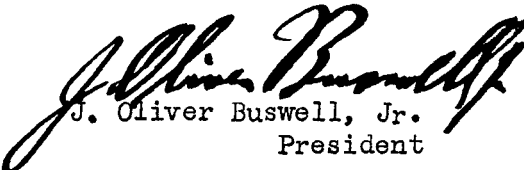
Thank you for your letter of March twenty-ninth, and for the enclosure which I am returning herewith.

I should like to discuss permissive decrees, but I gather from your letter that you are too burdened just now. Please let me know whenever you are free to read a few comments on the subject.

May I make a suggestion? When the board of trustees put me out of the college, in effect they repudiated my ideas of academic freedom, of individual responsibility for the purity of the church, and of other important matters. Wrong as I believe they are, I do believe the trustees of a college have a right to change policies and discontinue services rendered. I feel quite certain that no court would hold that my attitude toward your academic freedom had the force of a contract. I held that certain Arminian views, and certain absurdities believed by Dr. Higley, should be tolerated, and I sacrificed much to defend the rights of faculty members to teach views which I strongly disbelieved. I am deeply convinced that you do not correctly interpret the Westminster Confession, the ninth chapter of Romans, and Calvin's Institutes, but I believe your views should be openly heard if academic freedom means anything at all. If I were still in charge of administration I am sure you could count on my consistency with former policies, but I do not believe you can hold the board of trustees responsible since the policies referred to were not reduced to the form of a contract binding their future actions.

I am sure you know of my deepest sympathy and most earnest prayers on your behalf.

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

P.S. I am taking the liberty of sending copies of this letter to the members of the committee who talked with you, since I feel that I must clarify my position on the question of a possible contract. J.O.B., Jr.

April
twenty
1943

Dr. V. R. Edman
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Edman

I had intended to keep entirely clear of internal matters at Wheaton, though of course I am ready to assist Christian brethren wherever possible. After both you and Dr. Clark had written me relative to the question of his contract relationship with the College, I expressed myself on that subject in my letter of April fifth to Dr. Clark, copies of which were sent to the members of your committee dealing with this question. Since then I have heard from you and Dr. Ironside, as well as Dr. Clark, but I do not feel that I have anything more to say on that point.

There is another phase of the question mentioned in your letter and in my letter recently received from Dr. Ironside which I think it is my duty to discuss briefly. The question is the alleged unusualness of Dr. Clark's views. You express it in the words "His position ... is held by very few." As a matter of fact, the distinctive complex of views which he holds has always been held by a very respectable minority in the evangelical church.

(1) Supralapsarianism is defined in Webster's dictionary as the doctrine "that God's decree of election determined that man should fall, that the opportunity might be furnished of the redemption of a part of the race ..." This view (see Hodge Systematic Theology, Volume III, page 317) was held by Twiss, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly which drew up the Westminster Confession and Longer and Shorter Catechisms. Though the majority of the Westminster Assembly held infralapsarianism views, there have always been important spiritually-minded leaders in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches holding the opinion advanced by Dr. Clark. The great Abraham Kuyper of the past generation, whose work on the Holy Spirit has been an inspiration to all of us, was a supralapsarian. That view is found among Dutch Reformed and Christian Reformed leaders in America today.

(2) Double predestination is a very common view among Reformed and Presbyterian theologians who feel that if we do not recognize the ground and reason and cause of the lost condition of the lost in God, we would be implying that the ground and reason and cause of the salvation of the saved is in man. I trust that your committee recognized that this view at least is not at all unusual.

(3) The impassibility of God is usually discussed in systematic theologies under the heading "immutability" or "unchangeableness." Whereas the majority of evangelical theologians are opposed to Dr. Clark's view on this point, yet most of them take great pains to discuss it. The article by Caspar Wistar Hodge in Volume V of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia entitled "Unchangeable" is almost entirely given over to the answering of such views as Dr. Clark holds.

quite untrue.

The same is true of the discussion of "Immutability" in Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology, Volume I, page 390ff. In the ancient church Tertullian, in rejecting the patripassian heresy (see Against Praxes, chapters 29 and 30), assumes that all sound Christians would be shocked at the thought that God could experience any such thing as suffering. On a similar point, Augustine (On The Gospel of John, Tractate XXIII, paragraph 9, says, "God is not a mutable spirit. ... pass beyond all mutable spirit, beyond all spirit that now knows, now knows not; that now remembers, now forgets; that wills what before it willed not, that wills now what before it willed; either that suffers these mutabilities now or may suffer them; pass beyond all these. Thou findest not any mutability in God; nor aught that may have been one way before, and is otherwise now. For where thou findest alternation, there a kind of death has taken place; since, for a thing not to be what it was, is a death." Leo I, Bishop of Rome 440-461 A.D., in his famous letter to Flavian which furnished the basic statement for the orthodox creed of Chalcedon (accepted in substance by all evangelical denominations) said, "The Lord of the universe took the form of a servant, the impassible God became a suffering man." The great church historian, Philip Schaff, in commenting upon the decisions of the ecumenical council of Chalcedon, 451 A.D., regards Leo's view as that of the whole church and refers to the divine nature of Christ as being "impassible."

The renowned Professor A. E. Taylor, of Cambridge, made the sharp statement that if God does not know the difference between yesterday and tomorrow he does not know as much as I do. This statement is found somewhere in his two volume work, The Faith of a Moralist. I quoted this with approval shortly after the book was published. I said that time and events and pain (not physical, of course) and joy are, to God, actual experiences. I met with considerable hostility on this point, not only from the faculty of Westminster, but also from Wheaton students, many of whom had been taught from childhood that time and temporal experiences are not experiences of God, but that God lives in "an eternal now." There are multitudes of devout believers who are quite shocked by the statement that God actually experiences emotional feelings.

The above-mentioned points are, I believe, the principal points on which exception has been taken to Dr. Clark's teaching. Although I disagree with him in these matters, I must give my testimony that his views are those of a very honorable minority throughout the whole history of the church. I believe they are views with which educated Christians should be familiar. My thesis that God's immutability is not static but dynamic (the view of the Hodges and the evangelical majority, I think) can be presented far more effectively if the opposite view is thoroughly understood and intelligently rejected.

These remarks may or may not be helpful. I am writing them in the interest of a sympathetic attitude toward Dr. Clark.

Very sincerely yours

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b
cc to Dr. Clark and the committee

P.S. I dictated this last week, but it has been unavoidably delayed. J.O.B.Jr.

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340 WEST FIFTY-FIFTH STREET

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

May
eight
1943

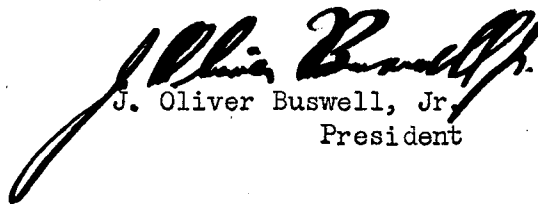
Dr. Gordon H. Clark
610 Howard Street
Wheaton, Illinois

Dear Dr. Clark

I have been studying your letter of May fourth, in which you say that I did you an injustice in stating that Caspar Wistar Hodge's article on "Unchangeable" is "almost entirely given over to answering of such views as Dr. Clark holds." I am extremely sorry. I would not intentionally do you any injustice. I have just re-read the article referred to. I had in mind certain conversations and correspondence which I had with C. W. Hodge before his death, and read the article in that light. Although I think my analysis might be defended, and C. W. Hodge was certainly opposed to the quotation from Augustine with which you say you do agree, yet I can see how the article could be read in a very different light, and I can understand your feeling that my interpretation was not correct.

My purpose in writing my letter of April twentieth was to show that your views are not so strange and unusual. If you find support in C. W. Hodge, that strengthens my point.

Yours in Christian fellowship


J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
President

job/b

cc to Dr. Edman and members of committee.