

## THE "PSYCHOLOGY" OF RELIGION VAN TIL IN DIALOGUE--AND IN CONFLICT!--WITH MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Attacks leveled against Christian theism have assumed a variety of forms over the centuries. In *Psychology of Religion*, Van Til incisively applies his apologetic method to the modern psychology of religion school, which he labels "a new form of attack upon Christian truth."<sup>1</sup> Indeed it is such. This paper will seek to interact with Van Til's analysis in this area, examining key applications that can be made to modern psychology in general. Van Til lays bare the philosophical underpinnings of this recent and subtle attack on the faith, defending Christianity with his usual conviction and thorough analysis.

### What can we learn from the "psychology of religion" writers?

At the outset, Van Til makes clear exactly *what* and *how* Christians can learn from the study of this contemporary attack on the faith. Comparing that attack to World War I, he states that "we learn from the enemy *for the destruction of the enemy*."<sup>2</sup> We learn from this study *what not to do*, specifically:

"We can learn from it something very striking as to the devious paths in which human thought has gone in order to escape the necessity of facing the living God."<sup>3</sup>

This attitude is in sharp contrast to the modern "Christian" psychologists who wish to *integrate* pagan psychological theories with God's truth. Although Van Til notes an "element of truth" in the idea that ministers should know something about psychology in order to know how to approach men, he is quick to add the worthlessness of any such approach apart from the Spirit's work, and he emphasizes the crucial distinction between pagan and Christian psychology. The former deviates in crucial ways from Christian theism; it insists, for example, on the eradication of any sense of sin in children.<sup>4</sup>

Van Til's attitude here finds expression in the work of a modern author, Harold O.J. Brown, writing about ancient heresies.

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<sup>1</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 1-2. Note, too, that Van Til wrote a few years before the term "psychology" came to be equated with the theories and methods of unregenerate men. As Van Til uses the term, it refers to the study of man and must be qualified as either a *Christian* or a *non-Christian* psychology. Today, the term "Christian psychology" generally denotes an eclectic mixture composed essentially of pagan theories with a thin biblical overcoat.

Heresy has a *positive* function in the development of orthodox doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Orthodoxy is often formulated in the fires of heresy. Heresy forces theologians back to the Scriptures to sharpen their doctrines and state them in clear, systematic terms. The Chalcedonian Creed was created amidst a swirl of christological heresies that confused many in the early years of the church. Similarly, today's psychological heresies drive us back to God's Word to articulate biblical doctrines about the nature of man, his fundamental problems, and how he can change.<sup>6</sup>

## The Modern "Psychology of Religion" Movement: Overview

**History and Objectives.** The stated intention of the modern psychology of religion school is to apply the "insights of modern psychology" to the study of religion, more specifically man's "religious consciousness." In doing so, differences between Christianity and other religions are dismissed as irrelevant. However, the similarities between true and false religion are purely a matter of *formality*; both, for example, involve prayer, sacrifice, and the use of human intellect.<sup>7</sup> Psychologists of religion claim to apply the modern scientific method to their study, using "modern critical and empirical methods."<sup>8</sup>

Usually the psychology of religion movement is traced back to William James in the latter nineteenth century. Van Til, however, points out that the movement itself (Baillie in particular) traces its own roots back to Kant and Schleiermacher. This is a critical point, because it was at this time that the study of man's own consciousness was cut off entirely from God.<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher claimed that man's religious "consciousness" was one of *feeling* absolute dependence on God. His focus was highly subjective, centered on the perceptions of sinful man. But Van Til urges us to look back even further into the past. He traces the movement:

"...back to Paradise when Eve first listened to the temptation of Satan who said that she could study her religious consciousness more fairly and open-mindedly if she would cut herself loose from God."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Heresies, p. 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to George Scipione for recommending the book on heresies and making this important application.

<sup>7</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 2, 3, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 4-6.

<sup>10</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 6.

**"Religious Consciousness."** The stated object of study is man's "religious consciousness," severed from any concern with the nature of ultimate reality or truth. It is claimed that attempts to understand religion in terms of something *outside man's consciousness* are erroneous.<sup>11</sup> "Religious consciousness" is claimed to be a witness to the *idea* of God, and to be capable of interpreting itself by "principles deduced entirely from itself."<sup>12</sup> We are faced with subjectivity run wild, and a total divorce from both God and His revelation. This is a formula for disaster, antitheistic to the core.

The source of data to be studied is equally subjective, consisting of human "religious experiences" and writings. There is no place in this scheme for divine revelation. Van Til rightly notes that man's heart is deceitful in evaluating his own experience.<sup>13</sup>

**What is religion?** The psychology of religion writers define religion in terms of the feelings, attitudes and behavior called forth in man by the mysterious or sacred; questions concerning the meaning of life and what make life worthwhile; belief in the ability of something super-human to make life what it ought to be; devotion to the welfare of humanity; experiences implying the existence of a spiritual realm.<sup>14</sup> These definitions raise significant questions about underlying philosophical standards. For example, *by what standard* are we to judge what *should* make life worthwhile, or what constitutes the "welfare of humanity?" What is the *nature* of the spiritual realm? As we will note in examining basic presuppositions, the psychology of religion school avoids questions of ultimate truth and claims neutrality in its study, but cannot possibly remain faithful to such an approach.

**What should religion be?** Van Til exposes a basic contradiction within the psychology of religion school. Although claiming to be merely *descriptive*, the "descriptions" are made *normative*, erasing the theistic distinction between good and evil.<sup>15</sup> Professing to avoid the metaphysical question of God's existence, psychologists nevertheless wish to inform us as to what the essence of religion truly is; this is seen, for example, in their refusal to include certain religious experiences (the prophetic or mystical) in their descriptive analysis.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 34-35.

Furthermore, these writers insist that religion ought to include the depersonalization of God, and the "joyful submission to the inevitable."<sup>17</sup> Thus we have religion reduced to a meaningless atheism!

**"Explanations" of Christian theism.** The psychologists of religion seek to "explain" Christian theism, which they reject at the outset. They are like the liberal theologians who seek to "explain away the whole of the traditional position by psychology."<sup>18</sup> Belief in the existence of God, and the entire history of religion, are "explained" by man's "mysterious tendency" to "personalize reality,"<sup>19</sup> as well as presumed unconscious psychological conflicts:

"A clergyman who is publicly trying overmuch and overoften to prove the existence of God may be suffering from a conflicting fear that there is no God."<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps, to the contrary, it is the psychologist who suffers from a fear of facing the God who he cannot, in the final analysis, "explain" out of existence.

Similarly, psychologists seek to "explain" biblical miracles through the "happy coincidences of nature," presuming the superstitious nature of Christian believers.<sup>21</sup> The prophets of Scripture are psychologically explained away, along with revelation, conversion, and the other doctrines of Christian theism.<sup>22</sup> Even the personality of Jesus is subjected to such diabolical, psychological "explanations," grounded in the assumption that He was a mere man.<sup>23</sup>

Van Til turns these "explanations" on their head with his own biblically based *explanation* of the motives underlying them. When men hate the living God, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, they conveniently erase from their minds the memory of God; in a supposed spirit of "neutrality," they claim "that gods are no more than symbolical expressions for the laws of nature."<sup>24</sup> Through their many complex psychological "explanations," these

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<sup>17</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 106; title of Chapter 7.

<sup>18</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 105, 134.

<sup>20</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 54, 134, 162, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 146-7. Such attacks bear a striking similarity to the many forms of gospels criticism, as articulated in Dr. Robert Strimple's recent book, *The Modern Search for the Historical Jesus*.

<sup>24</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 138.

unregenerate men fulfill the words of Roman 1:18. Van Til lays bare the various anti-theistic presuppositions inherent in their methods.

### **Presuppositions: Epistemological and Spiritual Quicksand**

It is crucial to examine the presuppositional foundation of the psychology of religion, and this is exactly what Van Til does at numerous points throughout the book. Aside from the unbeliever's "presupposition" of God due to his inability to successfully escape God, the term *presupposition* is normally viewed by Van Til as a "basic heart commitment."<sup>25</sup> The unbeliever is God's enemy, and his basic heart commitment is one of hostility toward his Creator. This is a critical factor in examining the unregenerate man's study of his own condition.

**Presupposition: Neutrality.** Throughout many of his writings, Van Til hammers away at the impossibility of neutrality. Man does not seek the truth in an attitude of neutrality, with an "open mind."<sup>26</sup> Psychologists, however, falsely *claim* to merely discover and describe, without entering any sort of debate about values. Van Til uproots the deceit inherent in this assertion:

"This is the usual asseveration of neutrality that every psychologist finds it his business to make in the preface or on the first page of his book in order to proceed to break his promise either on the same page or shortly thereafter."<sup>27</sup>

The truth of Van Til's insight emerges crystal clear in a look at the writings of Carl Jung. Although claiming to study the religious "ideas" as they exist in the mind of man, this arrogant modern writer multiplies his blasphemous accusations against God the Father.<sup>28</sup> (See Discernment Publications' paper reviewing the writings of Jung.)

The claim to neutrality emerges more specifically in claims regarding the irrelevance of truth, ultimate mystery, the equality of all religions, and the equal ultimacy of good and evil.

**Presupposition: Truth is irrelevant.** The psychologists of religion abhor, as arrogant, those who claim to have laid hold of exclusive truth. Yet all the while they are equally intolerant of

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<sup>25</sup> Cornelius Van Til, p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Theory of Knowledge, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 109.

<sup>28</sup> See *Psychology and Religion*, and *Answer to Job*.

those who refuse to agree with their particular brand of paganism!<sup>29</sup> While the psychologists of religion insist that they are refusing to debate about the nature of reality, they insist that Christianity "falsifies experience."<sup>30</sup> In making such a judgment they have entered into a debate about the nature of reality, in contradiction to their claims, and in defiance of their assertion that no absolute truth exists. It is *claimed* that no absolute truth exists, and that there is no one religion that can rightly lay claim to exclusive truth. Psychological studies of religion are undertaken (supposedly) with no intent to determine the truth value of any of the objective references of which religions speaks. But one of the writers (Baillie) examined by Van Til admits the fallacy inherent in such an approach:

"If religious experience is as a matter of fact objectively determined in any degree, then any intra-subjective explanation is not only beside the point but is also definitely false."<sup>31</sup>

Truth *does* matter! If Christianity is *objectively* true--and we know that it is--then the methodology of the psychology of religion school is exploded as clearly *wrong*, seeking its explanations purely within the *subject*. Van Til is quick to point out that the very nature of religion "demands that there be only one true religion, and that all others be therefore false."<sup>32</sup> It is clear that we are immersed in epistemological quicksand.

Note carefully that the system of the psychologists of religion is internally contradictory. Professing that truth is irrelevant, these theorists meanwhile assume the *truth* of the non-theistic view of reality, making a "universal negative proposition about what lies back of history and the 'facts.'"<sup>33</sup> The psychology of religion rejects Christianity because it deals with metaphysics, and yet:

"...the metaphysics to which it holds requires it to make a universal negative statement about that which it has just professed to know nothing."<sup>34</sup>

"Professing to be wise, they became fools..." (Romans 1:22).

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<sup>29</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 98.

Carl Jung is an excellent modern example of one who has psychologized the study of religion. Despite his claims about the irrelevance of objective truth--religious "truth" exists only "psychologically" within the mind of man--he makes bold, sweeping statements that blaspheme God and eradicate every major doctrine of the Christian faith.<sup>35</sup> He is among those noted by Van Til who see value in human belief in *non-existent* deities. Such beliefs, psychologists concede, may gratify man's desire for power or social recognition, and may also have a moralizing influence.<sup>36</sup>

**Presupposition: Ultimate mystery in the universe.** Psychologists of religion assume that religion is ultimately mysterious, that every definition contains uncertainty, and that religion involves a resignation to the universe as it is, to the inevitable; all of this *necessarily* excludes Christian theism, with its insistence that there is mystery for *man* but not for *God*.<sup>37</sup> One can hardly fail to see the hopelessness in such "religion."

**Presupposition: All religions are equal.** Here is a logical corollary to the assumption that no one religion has cornered the market on absolute truth. In addition, psychologists of religion insist that *all* religions are subjective in origin, but there is no way in which they can *prove* such an assertion; it is presupposed without proof.<sup>38</sup>

It is true that many people are religious but worship false gods (Romans 1:23); religion *per se* is not coterminous with Christian faith. However, this presupposition of religious equality *cannot* co-exist with Christianity, which claims to hold title to exclusive religious truth. Van Til correctly notes the error in *assuming* that the religion of the Old Testament is the same as all other religions. Man was still accessible to God after the fall, and it is reasonable that He would utilize ordinary human language and involve the human interpretive factor in the process of revelation.<sup>39</sup> Psychologists of religion are highly biased in opposition to the Christian faith, ruling it out from the beginning of their investigation.

It is sad to note a similar "religious democracy" creeping into the writings of "Christian" psychologists. A recent book,

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<sup>35</sup> I have a paper on his bizarre christology which will be enlarged as a critique of his entire system.

<sup>36</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 84.

*Toxic Faith*, lumps together false religions with misunderstandings of Christian doctrine, then judges all by the false standards of Freud. There are some true statements in the book, but these are intertwined with gross theological error, resulting in a highly deceptive conglomeration.<sup>40</sup> An even more dangerous blurring of distinctions occurs regularly in New Age teachings.

**Presupposition: Evil and good are equally ultimate.** In the study of the inner life of man, we are clearly on ethical grounds. Van Til notes that "since the entrance of sin...man spontaneously regards evil as being as ultimate as the good."<sup>41</sup> In assuming that God did not create man, and that man is therefore not a sinner, the psychologists of religion must conclude that "evil is inherent in the universe."<sup>42</sup> They also conclude, based on the assumed equal ultimacy of evil, that since revelation involves an activity of the human mind, it must therefore include error.<sup>43</sup> This assumption of "equal ultimacy" is taken to its most extreme expression in the assumption that evil is *nonexistent* or illusory. Many New Age proponents fall into this category.<sup>44</sup>

Carl Jung is again a modern example of the disastrous theology that arises out of such antitheistic assumptions. He insists that both good and evil reside *in God*, and that Christ and Satan are brothers, both sons of God!<sup>45</sup>

This type of erroneous presupposition denies the possibility of an inerrant divine revelation, along with obscuring the reality and gravity of man's sin against God. In the system of the psychology of religion, there is no absolute universal standard by which to separate truth and error, good and evil.

**Presupposition: Autonomy.** A book could hardly be genuinely Van Tillian without some reference to man's presumed autonomy! Van Til does not disappoint his readers in *Psychology of Religion*. He identifies the starting point of the psychology of religion school as the assumption that human experience and consciousness have "sprung out of the void."<sup>46</sup> The study of man is thus torn away from the knowledge of God. The whole of man's consciousness, not merely his "religious" consciousness, is separated from God;

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<sup>40</sup> See my critique, "*Toxic Teachings*," reviewing *Toxic Faith*, by Steve Arterburn.

<sup>41</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 133.

<sup>44</sup> Representatives here include the Unity Church and the "Course in Miracles."

<sup>45</sup> *Answer to Job*, p. x, 40.

<sup>46</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 14.



man's mind is presumed to be wholly independent of God.<sup>47</sup> This contrasts sharply with the studies of Christian theism. Although there are separate theological disciplines, including anthropology, our concept of God "has a controlling significance for our study of man."<sup>48</sup> There is a fundamental epistemological problem here that is not acknowledged by the psychologists of religion.

**Presupposition: Man, apart from God, has standards by which he may evaluate religion.** This follows closely on the heels of autonomy. Van Til points out that fallen man cannot accurately assess his own condition because he judges himself by his own *false standards*.<sup>49</sup> Christians and unbelievers have in common the metaphysical situation, both being made in God's image, but "*epistemologically* they have nothing in common."<sup>50</sup> Fallen man assumes that man, *rather than God*, is the ultimate reference point.<sup>51</sup> After noting Calvin's stress on the necessity of knowing God in order to have true knowledge of *man*, Van Til relates that man has, since the entrance of sin, cut the study of his own nature from the knowledge of God.<sup>52</sup> This is precisely what the psychologists of religion do *assuming* in that their own interpretation of the facts is correct. They *assume*, for example, that the original paradise of Genesis 1-3 is mythological.<sup>53</sup> Van Til exposes the incompetence of the unregenerate consciousness to judge by its apostate standards:

"We cannot grant that it has any right to judge in matters of theology, or, for that matter, in anything else. The Scriptures nowhere appeal to the unregenerate reason as to a qualified judge."<sup>54</sup>

At the top of the "anything else" list here must be the study of man, God's image-bearer. More than in any other area outside theology, fallen man suppresses the truth about God and seeks to impose his own false standards.

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<sup>47</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 11-12.

<sup>48</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Christian Theory of Knowledge, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> Common Grace, p. 5, emphasis added. Note that the image of God, after the fall, is retained in terms of moral agency, rationality, and such, but is lost in terms of moral excellence. That image is progressively restored in the believer (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10).

<sup>51</sup> Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 81.

<sup>53</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 29.

The Christian must strongly disagree with the psychologists of religion in their fallen interpretations:

"They have made the natural man the standard of what is to be admitted as being genuine religious experience. Exactly here lies the point of dispute. We hold that the natural man is not a good judge of what is true and what is false religious experience. We hold that the natural man must himself be judged."<sup>55</sup>

The psychologists of religion, being spiritually blind and unregenerate, are incompetent to make judgments concerning religious truth and experience. Although they produce volumes of evidence demonstrating man's use of religion for selfish purposes, that is precisely what the orthodox believer *expects* to find. Because of sin's entrance onto the scene, men have for ages made "gods" in their own image. Evidence of such idolatry not only fails to disprove the position of Christian theism; rather it establishes the truth of that position.<sup>56</sup> The psychologists of religion fail to take account of man's sin in his religious activities. Indeed they cannot, being themselves spiritually blind and dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1ff).

The interpretations advanced by the psychology of religion are such as to deny the Creator-creature distinction. Even prior to the Fall, it was necessary for man to reinterpret, to think God's thoughts after Him. But since the entrance of sin:

"...all our interpretation must now be done in the light of the direct interpretation that is given us of ourselves and of our fellow man in the Scriptures of God."<sup>57</sup>

The psychology of religion school could hardly travel any further away from the interpretive methods of Christianity:

"The two types of hermeneutics are arranged in deadly combat against one another...psychology has simply replaced epistemology and is really only another name for the same search of man for the validity of his experience."<sup>58</sup>

**Presupposition: Chance and evolution.** Psychology of religion writers irrationally assume the philosophy of chance that underlies modern evolutionary thought. In doing so they disregard

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<sup>55</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 84.

<sup>57</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 53.

<sup>58</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 53.

the question of whether *God* created man or whether *man* created "gods."<sup>59</sup> It is presumed "that man, sprung from a universe of chance, nevertheless is self-explanatory."<sup>60</sup> This sort of foundation denies the Creator-creature distinction and enthrones man in place of God.

In a similar vein, it is presupposed that man was not originally a religious being, but became so only after a long period of non-religious history.<sup>61</sup> Not only is religion viewed as a gradual evolutionary development in the human race; a parallel development is proposed in the *individual*,<sup>62</sup> sharply conflicting with the biblical view of man's conception in sin (Psalm 51; Romans 5:12-21). It is claimed that man invented "gods," which were later moralized and de-personalized. Religion is claimed to be *learned* rather than instinctive, and originally a non-ethical, non-emotional activity.<sup>63</sup> One representative writer (Leuba) attempts to explain the incompatibility he perceives in Christian theism:

"The social, personal traits of God are due to man's desire for someone able and willing to protect, comfort, do justice, and otherwise gratify the needs of the heart; his impersonality is the outcome of a desire to understand rationally, logically, to see things as they are and not as we would like them to be."<sup>64</sup>

The same writer insists that there is self-deception among the church fathers, whose faith was made possible only by the *alleged* existence of a divine source of knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Van Til, however, is ready to award the psychology of religion writers the grand prize for holding the greatest number of unacknowledged inconsistencies.<sup>66</sup> Their claim to neutrality, for example, clashes with their presupposition that Christian theism cannot be true, and their claim to avoid metaphysical debate coincides with the metaphysical assumption of a universal negative.

The *Christian* view of development is that man's life grew from the simple to the more complex. Life in the Garden, particularly prior to the entrance of sin, was relatively simple.

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<sup>59</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 82, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 136.

<sup>63</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 95.

<sup>65</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 96.

Man was given one commandment. Satan introduced complexity when he infused doubt about God's Word into the situation. (So do psychologists today: Did God *really* say....? Man's sin is "explained" in many varied and complex ways.) As life grew in complexity, God's revelation to man--and His plan of redemption--progressively unfolded. It is thus not a valid objection to Christian theism to claim that man's ideas about God have *changed*.<sup>67</sup>

A closely related inconsistency is the presupposition that stability and change are equally ultimate. Under such an assumption, no knowledge or meaning is possible, and the entire psychology of religion structure falls to the ground. One of the psychology of religion writers (Wieman) admits to the meaninglessness of change apart from the existence of something that is changeless.<sup>68</sup> We again find ourselves immersed in both spiritual and epistemological quicksand, from which we can emerge only by acknowledging that eternal God of Scripture who is the Creator of this world of change!<sup>69</sup>

**Presupposition: Historical relativism and denial of the supernatural.** Christianity is grounded in the presupposition that the God of Scripture is sovereign over the history of man. The "laws of nature" studied by scientists have their origin in Him. The Scriptures relate miraculous, supernatural events in history that are intimately related to the faith. The psychology of religion school assumes that "nature" operates independently of God, and that the "supernatural" is merely an "intensification of the natural."<sup>70</sup> The miracles of redemptive history are presupposed out of existence in their view, which conveniently ignores the fact that the forces of nature are themselves the servants of God. Van Til points out that this rejection of miracles "implies the worship of man instead of the worship of God."<sup>71</sup>

The historical relativism of the psychology of religion involves looking to historical series of events:

"...not only for the facts to be explained, but also for the universal principle by which these facts will be explained."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 85-86.

<sup>68</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 88, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 88.

<sup>70</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 37, 123.

<sup>71</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 126.

<sup>72</sup> Psychology of Religion, 42.

Such a view is radically antitheistic to the core and cannot even begin to deal with Christianity's presupposition of the supra-historical God. Not that universal principles are in and of themselves antitheistic, but such universals must be received by divine revelation rather than from within the facts to be explained by those principles. And since Christian theism deals with the very origin of the "facts" themselves, and the origin of the evil in those "facts," the psychology of religion cannot substantiate its view of reality by a mere appeal to the "facts."<sup>73</sup> All facts are subject to *God's explanation*; there are no "brute facts." The psychology of religion school cannot prove the impossibility of human consciousness receiving God's truth, because to do so would necessitate a return to the very beginning of human history, a time when no written literature exists. Thus these psychologists must make sweeping metaphysical assertions while claiming to deal strictly with the "facts," in a spirit of neutrality.<sup>74</sup>

**Presupposition: Personality is strictly man's own accomplishment.** This assumption makes it utterly impossible for these theorists to speak of regeneration. Christianity views man's personality as *created by God* and thus able to be regenerated by Him. The *self-generated* personality imagined by psychologists is hardly in a position to experience regeneration.<sup>75</sup> In addition, psychologists want to define the "well-integrated" or *good* life according to their own definitions, definitions that consider the existence of God irrelevant to the question. This is anything but neutral, but rather gives expression to the antitheistic philosophical convictions underlying the entire system.<sup>76</sup> Such a view is one that makes man, not God, the ultimate standard for good and evil. Again we encounter a false claim to neutrality and an arrogant assumption of man's autonomy.

**Presupposition: Atheism.** Here is the bottom line crack in the foundation of the psychology of religion. Van Til points out that the traditional Christian view of theology is ruled out as "quite wrong and meaningless...utterly scientific."<sup>77</sup> Christianity is considered "arbitrary because it leaves out of consideration many people that are truly religious" and assumes the possibility of absolute truth.<sup>78</sup> In examining what the psychologists of

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<sup>73</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 85.

<sup>75</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 155.

<sup>76</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 109.

<sup>77</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 81.

religion would consider good religion for a "respectable citizen," Van Til notes that:

"...the psychologist, who is the authority for our respectable citizen, has assumed God's non-existence and must therefore deny that religion has an objective reference in relation to a God who does actually exist."<sup>79</sup>

There naturally follows a rejection of all Christian doctrines, and an attempt at the psychological "explanation" of guilt, sin, atonement, and the like in purely subjective terms.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, psychologists cannot disprove the existence of God, but rather rest their entire edifice on the foundation of an assumed atheism.

Defending Christian theism with his usual finesse, Van Til points out that two basic theistic presuppositions will provide us a standard of judgment by which to evaluate the psychology of religion literature. First is the metaphysical presupposition of creation, and second is the epistemological presupposition of God's revelation.<sup>81</sup> Based on this Christian foundation, we reject "historicism," "impersonal eternalism," "pure description" which assumes that all reality is on an equal level, and such as these.<sup>82</sup> Summarizing his evaluation of the psychology of religion, Van Til says:

"We throw its method overboard completely. We definitely claim that we can explain that which in the nature of the case they can merely describe, and cannot really describe."<sup>83</sup>

From this basic evaluation of the underlying structure, we can now move on to examine the relationship between the psychology of religion and modern psychology in general.

### **Modern Psychology: A Seven Step Descent into the Abyss of Irrationality**

Whatever Van Til's *personal* attitude toward psychology may have been, it is abundantly clear from his *writings* that only a full rejection of modern psychology would be consistent with the contents of his books, particularly *Psychology of Religion*.

Van Til takes us on a brief tour of nineteenth century psychology, based on the philosophy of Descartes. The human mind

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<sup>79</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 106.

<sup>80</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 107.

<sup>81</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 61-64.

<sup>83</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 64.

was severed from the body and viewed as purely intellectual, ignoring the emotional and volitional aspects. It was presumed that the mind was subject to "laws" analogous to physical laws, and thus it was treated in a rather mechanical manner.<sup>84</sup> Such an approach is clearly opposed to Christianity, separating the mind of man from God and assuming that abstract laws govern the way in which human minds relate to one another. Lest anyone assume that this intellectual thrust be equivalent to the Reformed emphasis on the priority of the intellect, Van Til corrects any such misunderstanding:

"All that Reformed theology has meant by emphasizing the priority of the intellect is that it is only through intellectual interpretation that we can communicate with one another about the meaning of reality.... Christian psychology does not place the intellect ahead of any other aspect of man's personality in the sense that one should be more truly human than another."<sup>85</sup>

After this brief description of earlier psychology, Van Til whisks us into the twentieth century, whose psychology represents "a new advance...farther than ever away from Christian theism!"<sup>86</sup> He goes on to detail seven steps of descent into irrationality, wiping out any possible communion between Christian theism and modern psychology.

**Step #1: Dethroning of the intellect.** The reign of the intellect came to an end. However:

"...the dethroning of the intellect was not done in the interest of Christian theism but in the interest of irrationalism.... Psychology...searched in the non-rational for a deeper insight into the nature of the human soul."<sup>87</sup>

This change, therefore, did not result in the *Christian* view of the intellect of man, but rather moved in a new direction equally *opposed* to Christian theism.

**Step #2: The merging of body and soul.** No longer were body and soul sharply separated as in past psychology. Although this might also *appear* at first glance to move toward Christianity, it definitely does not:

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<sup>84</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 66.

<sup>85</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 67.

<sup>87</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 68.

"Insofar as the new psychology seeks to bring soul and body into close harmony with one another, we can only rejoice. However, we should again observe that this bringing of soul and body together by modern psychology is in the interest of wiping out the distinction between them."<sup>88</sup>

Van Til makes no concession here to modern psychology, nor does he affirm its erroneous methods and presuppositions. Rather, he quickly exposes its deadly path in spite of what might appear to be a move in the direction of Christian anthropology.

Although Christianity does not view the immaterial as existing prior to the body, the distinction between body and soul is basic to Christian anthropology. To deny that distinction is to deny the special act of creation by which the first man came into existence. In the initial days of creation, God created by His spoken word: "Let there be...." But when God created man, His mode of creation changed radically. He formed the man of the dust of the earth and then breathed into his nostrils, and he became a living soul (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). To deny the body/soul distinction is also to deny the separation of body and soul that occurs at death, not to mention the future resurrection promised by Scripture (2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:52).

**Step #3: Emphasis on the child.** Modern psychology places an emphasis on the child, who is no longer viewed as a "miniature adult." Like the first two steps, this one "might have been taken in the interest of Christian theism" but it "has not actually been in the direction of Christian theism."<sup>89</sup> The Bible makes provision for children as emotional and volitional beings growing into the pattern created by God, who is the "ultimate self-sufficient personality."<sup>90</sup> As we noted earlier, psychology views personality as purely a man-made accomplishment, and their "integration of personality is an *integration into the void*."<sup>91</sup> Van Til makes an even more striking contrast between Christianity and psychology, when he considers the question of regeneration:

"Nothing could more pointedly reveal the whole difference of point of view between Christians and non-Christians on the concept of regeneration than to bring up the question of whether children can or may be regenerated. To say that they can is the height of absurdity in the eyes of the psychologists of religion...it will be seen that nothing but

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<sup>88</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 69-70.

<sup>90</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 70.

<sup>91</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 70.



a war to the death can be fought between these two positions. No compromise can ever be made."<sup>92</sup>

Well said. Modern psychology does not acknowledge the imputation of Adam's sin or the fact that the nature of man is inherently sinful from birth (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12). This is no small issue, but impacts everything else that might be said about the inner life of man. For example, Van Til notes that as Christians "we would explain the early manifestations of anger, etc., by the anti-God complex."<sup>93</sup>

The erroneous psychological view of the child can perhaps best be understood in looking at the popular "inner child" concept. The "child" is considered a continuing part of the *adult* inner man and is presupposed to be morally pure and innocent. This defies the biblical view that children, as well as adults, are morally responsible persons before God (Proverbs 20:11). The "inner child" idea has done extensive damage in its limitation of personal responsibility.

**Step #4: Emphasis on the unconscious.** This is a crucial area wherein Christianity and modern psychology enter into head-on collision. Van Til's analysis here is extremely helpful. He notes how modern psychology has subordinated the *conscious* life of man to the *unconscious*. It *buries* purpose:

"...in the lowest depths of irrationalism and therewith places it at the farthest possible remove from Christian theism."<sup>94</sup>

Initially, Van Til notes a very rough similarity between psychology and Christianity (Calvinism in particular) in that "we also believe that man was in part conscious and in part unconscious in his activity."<sup>95</sup> David prayed concerning his *unknown* sins. Our status as sinners is related to our relationship to Adam; we are not self-conscious of sin at the time of birth. Furthermore:

"The church has never limited personal responsibility to the self-conscious activity of man. The activism involved in the Arminian conception is not truly representative of the Christian position.... Both modern psychology and Calvinism emphasize the significance of the relationship of the

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<sup>92</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 156.

<sup>93</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 138.

<sup>94</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 71.

<sup>95</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 71.

individual to the subconscious and historical, while Arminianism does not.... Insofar as modern psychology has shown that the individual's conscious life is dominated by drives that come up from his unconscious life it has stood with Calvinism against Arminianism."<sup>96</sup>

But lest one receive the mistaken impression that modern psychology and Calvinism actually affirm the same view of man's "subconscious" or "unconscious," Van Til *immediately* sets the record straight. Modern psychology is actually closer to the activism of Arminianism. Arminianism is *inconsistent*, turning back to God, while psychology, *consistent* with its atheist presuppositions, "places man in a void" and considers the character of man to be solely his own human accomplishment.<sup>97</sup> Psychology is at the same time *inconsistent* by emphasizing the unconscious while maintaining man's autonomy in the accomplishment of his personality. Christianity views man as an analogical, derivative personality, who is at every point "before the background of the absolute personality of God."<sup>98</sup> The *Christian* view of man's "subconscious" is "basically opposed to every variety of theory that exists today."<sup>99</sup> It should be noted at this juncture that Van Til does not demonstrate a clear understanding of the Freudian "unconscious," which is a reservoir of repressed material and sexual drives from early childhood. The *content* of this "unconscious" thus differs radically from the "unknown sins" of David and from the knowledge of God that is suppressed by the unbeliever in Romans 1:18. The ethical nature of the Freudian "repression" also clashes with the unbeliever's "suppression" in that the former is so totally unconscious as to completely destroy culpability, whereas the latter in fact establishes man's liability to the wrath of God (Romans 1:18 again). The concepts could hardly be further apart!

Nevertheless, Van Til's argumentation is cogent and his conclusions are solidly biblical. He clearly does understand the radically different manner of understanding human responsibility. This becomes evident when he expresses concern that Christians too often spend their ammunition against psychology by arguing against the way psychology "immerses man in the meshes of drives, etc. over which he has no control." To argue in this manner, "for freedom in the blue," fails to squarely establish man's

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<sup>96</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 72.

<sup>97</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 72.

<sup>98</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 73.

<sup>99</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 159.

responsibility *before God*.<sup>100</sup> Van Til explains modern psychology's fatal error, in stark contrast to Christianity:

"The real reason why modern psychology has left no room for responsibility is found in the fact that it has taken the whole of the human personality in all its aspects, self-conscious and subconscious, and immersed it in an ultimate metaphysical void. Man cannot be responsible to the void.... We place man self-consciously and subconsciously in every aspect of his person before the personality of God.... Man *before God* is the only alternative to man *in the void*."<sup>101</sup>

The whole man was created by God, originally good but now fallen and totally depraved. Even what might be termed "subconscious" is at present "an ever-bubbling fountain of evil tendency."<sup>102</sup> The gap between modern psychology and Christian theism is fundamental in nature, with far-reaching implications for understanding the basic nature of man and helping others *change*:

"When orthodox apologists tell us that Calvinism and Freudianism resemble one another because both maintain that human nature is inherently bad, they forget some of the most basic distinctions of thought. According to Freudianism and modern psychology in general, there is no God by virtue of whom the whole of the human personality exists. According to modern psychology, man was not created perfect and man did not fall and man is not guilty before God. Thus the only resemblance that remains is a very superficial one, the fact that both say that human nature is at present actually evil."<sup>103</sup>

*Superficial* indeed! But Van Til has even more to tell us about how modern psychology is at war with Christian theism.

**Step #5: Emphasis on the "abnormal."** Van Til initially applauds the *fact* that the so-called "abnormal" is being studied, but quickly expresses his concern about the *reason* for that study, stating that "modern psychology appears once more in its antitheistic character."<sup>104</sup> Underlying the study is the assumption that the "abnormal" is as natural as the "normal." *Good and evil*

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<sup>100</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 73.

<sup>101</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 73.

<sup>102</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 159.

<sup>103</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 74.

are presumed to be equally ultimate. A glaring example of this error is seen in Jung's mutiliation of biblical reconciliation:

"In the experience of the self it is no longer the opposites 'God' and 'man' that are reconciled, as it was before, but rather the opposites within the God-image itself."<sup>105</sup>

On the contrary, the Bible teaches that man was created in a condition of original righteousness. He was created wholly rational. Thus the Christian must speak of *sin* in connection with the "abnormal." Van Til equates *irrationality* with *insanity*, noting that since the fall all men "have merited insanity because of their departure from God." Whatever rationality men yet possess is a gift of God's common grace.<sup>106</sup>

In light of the presuppositional foundation of modern "abnormal" psychology, Van Til rightly concludes that it is "indicative of a farther departure from theism than was the case with earlier psychology."<sup>107</sup> The "abnormal" is *not* a merely normal occurrence, but rather must be rooted in the biblical concept of sin.

**Step #6: Emphasis on "primitive" man.** Here again we are faced with "a new departure from Christian theism," one more irrational than ever, grounded as it is in the assumption of the evolution of the human mind. Van Til articulates the opposing view of Christianity, that:

"...man was created perfect...man was created as an adult with full rationality. This sets off the Christian position clearly and distinctly from all evolutionary views."<sup>108</sup>

According to biblical truth, the "real primitive man" is Adam, not "an independent growth out of bare vacuity" as evolutionists would have it.<sup>109</sup>

Freud's blasphemous attack on Christian theism, in *Totem and Taboo*, draws on a speculative view of "primitive man" such as Van Til describes at this point. Freud *presupposes* atheism and then proceeds to "explain" the development of theism (Christianity in particular) according to the demented imaginations of his own

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<sup>105</sup> Memories, Dreams, Reflections, p. 338. Remember that Jung views even *God* as both good and evil. Elsewhere (Psychology and Religion, p. 73-74) he advocates expanding the Holy Trinity to a "quaternity" so that evil will have its place!

<sup>106</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 75.

<sup>107</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 75.

<sup>108</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 76.

<sup>109</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 76.

mind. We need look no further for a transparent example of Romans 1:18!!

Van Til's bottom line, in considering the evolutionary philosophy underlying this emphasis on "primitive man," is once again a pronouncement of the failure of modern psychology:

"Modern psychology is deeply embedded in a non-theistic metaphysics which it has taken for granted uncritically."<sup>110</sup>

**Step #7: The correlation of human and animal behavior.** At this point, modern psychology has descended to the bottom of the pit, into "complete irrationalism" with its "elevation of the animal as a principle of explanation for man"!! Modern psychology assumes that animal behavior "sheds direct light on the behavior of man."<sup>111</sup> Considering the creation account of Genesis 1-2, particularly man's creation *in the image of God*, this is so ludicrous, so far afield from any Christian view of man, that it should hardly require additional explanation.

Nevertheless, some objectors may wish to maintain that Scripture itself notes similarities between human and animal behavior. For example, there is this teaching about industriousness in observing the behavior of ants:

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest."  
(Proverbs 6:6-8)

This passage, however, does not give psychologists a green light to study the moral nature of man, in order to gain "new insights" beyond the Scriptures, through the observation of other creatures. It is rather an *exhortation* to man *directly from God*. God created and designed the ant to act as it does, so clearly *He* may exhort His image-bearers by such a reference. That hardly means that the inner man may be better *understood* by examining the habits of ants! Nor does it give license to unbelievers to formulate theories about how the life of man can be changed, based on the lifestyles of ants and other creatures that do not bear God's image.

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<sup>110</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 77.

<sup>111</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 77. Interesting that the number "seven" in Scripture is used for completeness!

**Conclusions: The failure of modern psychology.** In wrapping up his chapter concerning the relationship between general psychology and the psychology of religion school, Van Til notes the apostate standards by which the former is governed:

"If man has come from the God in whom Christianity believes, the adult man is the standard of interpretation of all rationality in mankind...we cannot allow that the child, the abnormal person, the primitive man, and finally the animal can be put on the level with the adult as a source of explanation of life as a whole."<sup>112</sup>

It must surely be acknowledged that Van Til's analysis on these points is one which skillfully demolishes modern psychology.

### **The Role of General Revelation**

Van Til held a strong doctrine of general revelation, articulated more fully elsewhere in his writings. Since Christians naively assume that unbelievers can "read" general revelation and provide useful new insights about the nature and problems of man, it is important to look closely at general revelation and its relationship to special revelation. Van Til certainly allowed that unbelievers may at times make valid scientific discoveries *in spite of* their presumed autonomy. There are "elements of truth" in unbelieving systems,<sup>113</sup> and also a "similarity in form," although man can only describe himself accurately in relationship to God.<sup>114</sup> We will examine Van Til's doctrine of general revelation, relate it to special revelation, then make some applications and refinements that go beyond the specifics of his writings.

**Necessity of general revelation.** The Scripture is necessary because of covenant disobedience, but general revelation is necessary to reveal a "picture of unalleviated folly and ruin."<sup>115</sup> It is this picture that psychologists seek to describe, but cannot truly describe because of their rejection of the biblical doctrines of God, man, and sin.

**Authority of general revelation.** All creation authoritatively reveals God, including the consciousness of man.

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<sup>112</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 77. (More sevens!)

<sup>113</sup> Christian Theory of Knowledge, p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 92.

<sup>115</sup> "Nature and Scripture," in Infallible Word, p. 263.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and man is called to respond.

Man's scientific procedure ought to be performed in obedience to God. After the fall, however, man sees:

"...a contrast between the attitude of reason to one type of revelation and the attitude of faith to another type of revelation."<sup>116</sup>

Apostate man seeks to bury the voice of God that comes to him in both nature and in his own consciousness.<sup>117</sup> It is particularly in the study of *his own nature* (psychology) that fallen man must seek to bury God's voice *in order to escape His authority*. Since man is created in the image of God, a major distortion is required in order to achieve this apostate goal. Man must view himself as something *other than* the image of God.

**Sufficiency of general revelation.** Van Til notes that general revelation was never intended to function alone, but rather was:

"...the presupposition of historical action on the part of man as covenant personality with respect to supernaturally conveyed communication."<sup>118</sup>

General revelation is sufficient for its specific purpose, as enunciated in Romans 1, to render man without excuse for his unbelief. It is *not sufficient*, apart from God's special revelation--which *cannot be read by the spiritually unregenerate man*--to provide man with true information about himself that supplements the Scripture.<sup>119</sup> Van Til rightly notes that it was the serpent in the Garden who led man to divorce general revelation from special revelation.<sup>120</sup> In studying the inner man, such a radical separation can lead only to monumental error, as indeed it has in the writings of Freud, Jung, Fromm, and numerous others. Furthermore, Scripture declares emphatically its own sufficiency for *everything*--not some things, or most things--but *everything* pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4), thus

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<sup>116</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 265.

<sup>117</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 266.

<sup>118</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 267.

<sup>119</sup> For clarification, we are speaking here specifically of the *inner man*. Through borrowed capital, the unbeliever may discover information about the body, but not about man's fundamental sin problem or how he must live in the presence of God.

<sup>120</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 268.

ruling out the speculative imaginations of unbelievers in these specifically biblical areas.<sup>121</sup> Believers are forbidden to walk in the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1) and in addition are commanded not to *add* to God's inerrant Word (Proverbs 30:5-6).

**Perspicuity of general revelation.** General revelation remains clear for its unique purpose. Such clarity remains despite the curse.<sup>122</sup> It is important at this juncture to underscore the purpose of general revelation in removing all excuses for unbelief. For that purpose it remains clear after the fall. However, it does not have an independent clarity such that the unregenerate may study man apart from special revelation and reach correct conclusions about the nature and fundamental problems of man.<sup>123</sup> Even the Christian must proceed with extreme caution, submitted at every point to the Scriptures. As Van Til points out, the "old man" still seeks to interpret nature apart from special revelation.<sup>124</sup> This observation is helpful in understanding how the professing Christian, in his study of man, erroneously adds the theories of *unregenerate men* to the truth of Scripture. In doing so he is not consistent with his new *biblical* presuppositions.

## Conclusions

Van Til has given us a succinct summary of the utter failure of modern psychology to provide helpful insights into the nature of man and his fundamental problems of living:

"Modern depth psychology and existentialist philosophy have not seen so much as a glimpse of the depth of the iniquity of the human heart."<sup>125</sup>

Elsewhere, Van Til demonstrates more specifically what we may or may not borrow from unbelievers. He shows us a biblical analogy:

"...it is entirely consistent for a Christian to take the position that we have taken with respect to the more fundamental question of the relation of the two mutually exclusive life and world views, and at the same time be

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<sup>121</sup> Again, we speak concerning the *inner* man, concerning *godliness*.

<sup>122</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 270.

<sup>123</sup> Man is the image of God. His nature, after the Fall, is inherently sinful from birth (Psalm 51:5). His most fundamental problem is separation from God due to sin. These most basic facts are not perceived clearly or correctly by the unregenerate man, who seeks to hold down this truth.

<sup>124</sup> "Nature and Scripture," p. 274.

<sup>125</sup> Christian Theory of Knowledge, p. 53.



interested in and cooperate with scientists and historians who are opposed to the theistic system by virtue of the presuppositions. The biblical analogy that serves our purpose here is that of Solomon hiring foreign help for the building of the temple. In the case of the Samaritans who wished to help the Jews rebuild the temple, it was the business of the true Jews to reject the offer. In the case of the Phoenicians, it was the privilege and the duty of the true Jew to accept the service. *The difference is simply that in the case of the Samaritans there was an effort to have a voice in the interpretation of the plans of God for His temple.*"<sup>126</sup>

Herein lies the heart of the issue before us. We might gladly accept the discoveries of unbelievers in certain limited areas of life, where their use of borrowed capital does not so completely distort the information at hand. For example, we might receive their knowledge in areas such as computer science, auto mechanics, tax law, and such--areas not expressly claimed as sole biblical territory. Such studies are not so *directly* related to theology. But in the study of man, *the image of God*, unregenerate psychologists do indeed insist on having a voice in the *interpretation* of the behaviors they so often claim to merely *describe*. They persist in explaining the origins and causes of human attitudes, emotions, thoughts, desires, motivations, and behaviors. The psychology of religion school goes so far as to "explain" in apostate terminology the origin of man's belief in God! In all of these instances, the "explanations" are in defiance of man's covenantal responsibilities before the living God. There are no "brute" psychological facts about man. Rather, the inner man must at every point be interpreted according to the standards established by his Creator in the Scriptures.

Yet confusion abounds, due in part to the rough surface level similarities so often observed between modern psychology and a truly biblical study of man. Van Til relates that similarity to the common metaphysical situation:

"All men are the creatures of God and made in the image of God. *The form in which they express their hatred of God will still be similar to the form in which the redeemed express their love to God.*"<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Survey of Christian Epistemology, p. 218, emphasis added.

<sup>127</sup> Psychology of Religion, p. 145, emphasis in original.

We dare not be deceived by such similarities. Both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God. One was rejected and the other accepted. Both modern psychology and the Scriptures speak about man's thoughts, will, desires, and actions. *One must be rejected and the other accepted.* Neither can be divorced from its basic presuppositional foundations, despite occasional similarities that arise from the fact that apostate man continues to live in a world ruled and designed by God.

Frame has given clear expression to the *ethical* antithesis between believer and unbeliever that results in the suppression of truth about the nature of man:

"The unbeliever is operating on a basic assumption or presupposition opposite to that of the Christian. And the unbeliever has a strong motivation to interpret all of reality according to his own presupposition. Thus when the unbeliever finds in his own thinking some uncomfortable bit of Christian truth, his inclination will be somehow to twist it, suppress it, deny it, domesticate it, or simply to change the subject."<sup>128</sup>

Nowhere could such discomfort be more than evident than in man's attempt to assess and treat his own condition. His entire apostate foundation is at stake; if he acknowledges truth about himself, he is consequently forced to acknowledge the truth about the Creator whose image he bears. This is precisely what he refuses to do (Romans 1:18)!

Van Til has surely provided a valuable service to the twentieth century church in his analysis of the psychology of religion school. His analysis arms believers with the powerful ammunition they need in order to meet this modern attack on Christian theism.

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<sup>128</sup>Cornelius Van Til, p. 159.

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