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THE NATURE OF MAN AND GUILT:
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING DERIVED FROM
AN ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHIES
OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL AND ERICH FROMM

by

Robert Mansfield Nuermberger

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ABSTRACT

THE NATURE OF MAN AND GUILT: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING DERIVED FROM AN ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHIES OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL AND ERICH FROMM

By Robert Mansfield Nuernberger

Motivated by the theory of guilt neurosis pro,ounded by O. H. Mowrer, this study probes the nature of man and guilt by comparing and contrasting the opposing philosophies of Cornelius Van Til, philosopher, and Erich Fromm, psychoanalyst, who have both written extensively on these subjects. Their positions are analyzed in the belief that the counselor's attitude toward and treatment of guilt would be determined largely by the philosophical position assumed on the nature of man.

Van Til's system of thought is analyzed in terms of his position on basic presuppositions, theology, reality, knowledge and ethics. Van Til holds that there are only two possible alternatives that are logical to hold and that these are mutually contradictory. Christian man assumes a two-layer theory of being and reality. His primary presupposition is, first, the existence of the God of the Old and New Testaments, a God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth; his second corollary presupposition is that of the creation of the world,



including man. Non-Christian man assumes the ultimacy, autonomy and creativity of the human mind. This presupposition rules out any sovereign God who controls or maintains the world, and depends upon a universe of chance. Paradoxically, this assumption implies that man must also hold to a deterministic cause-and-effect in order to leave room for rational thought. It further demands, says Van Til, that man must have exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge of reality in order to interpret available phenomena.

A detailed study is made of Van Til's theological position, focusing on his doctrines of God, man, Christ, salvation, revelation, the church and eschatology, and on his concepts of reality, knowledge and ethics.

Fromm's theories of reality and ethics are presented. Fromm deals with man's ultimacy and autonomy on the framework of an evolutionary scheme of reality. Man is capable of penetrating to the essence of phenomena, of discovering truth apart from outside sources, and has the potential for growth. Antithetically, man also has the potential for decay and degeneracy. His orientation around either growth or decay is determined by hereditary tendencies and the process of socialization. Man has transcended from the animal world and finds himself alienated from his origins. Fear drives him to project concepts of God; he yields up his independent spirit to authoritarianism and commits idolatry. The way to freedom and reunion with the world is to develop his autonomy and



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his capacities for love. Man must save himself guided by social humanitarianism.

The study concludes with a commentary on Van Til and Fromm, pointing out their basic areas of agreement and disagreement and drawing certain conclusions in terms of methodology implications for counseling theory, selection of counselors, research implications and personal observations.



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Much credit belongs to my wife, Lois, and to my daughters, Paula, Leslie and D'Arcy, who suffered long and gave moral support during all the years of study.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the nature of man and guilt as these bear upon the process and research in counseling. The method will be an analysis and comparison of two opposing viewpoints, that of Cornelius Van Til, the philosopher, and of Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst. Van Til's life work has been that of developing a consistent Christian Weltanschauung encompassing the nature of God and reality, which includes the concepts of being, fact, time, epistemology and ethics, while Fromm, out of a Jewish background, has written extensively in the areas of psychology, philosophy, religion and ethics from a position which he identifies as Socialist-Humanistic. This comparison of a theologian and a psychologist is made in the interests of an experiment; certainly, the profitability and validity of such a comparison could be debated.

MOWRER'S THEORY OF GUILT NEUROSIS

The study originated from an interest in the work of O. Hobart Mowrer, whose theory of guilt neurosis has excited fervent reactions within the counseling, education and religious professions.¹ He proposes that mental dysfunctioning results from excessive and enduring subjective

¹As an example of reactions to Mowrer, refer to the American Psychologist, November, 1960, "Comments" section.



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distresses occurring whenever there are objective disruptions in an individual's relationships with "significant others," such as parents, spouses, children, employers, or in abstract relationships with one's community, society, or God. Although the influence of Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationships are clear in Mowrer, the latter's theory suffers from a lack of philosophical cohesion and scientific testing, and has therefore been criticized as less theory than speculation. However, the clinical research is beginning to cumulate from a variety of sources.² Further, Mowrer's assaults on cherished traditions, theories and institutions, coupled with his use of theological language to define secular concepts, has aroused suspicion and rejection. As London says,

This suggests an extension of Newton's Third Law to human behavior, in which one useful index of the seminal quality of a new theory would be the extent to which it is publicly reviled. If so, then the theory of the origin and treatment of neurosis put forth by O. H. Mowrer may deserve more serious attention than any such theory since Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, for in the two generations that lie between them, no other mental health theorist has been subjected to such voluble and vituperative criticism.³

THE STRUCTURE OF HIS THEORY

Structurally, his theory is quite simple, concentrating on behavioral malfunctions and the educative aspects of therapy. He uses three categories in describing the development of mental breakdown.

²Cf. New Evidence Concerning the Nature of Psychopathology, an unpublished resume² of research reports available from Mowrer, 330 Gregory Hall, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois.

³London, Perry, The Modes and Morals of Psychotherapy, p. 134.



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1. Subjects

Mowrer says that severe mental disruption occurs only in persons who have experienced some form of emotional investment with significant others.⁴ Violations of these interpersonal relationships creates subjective distress because of the patient's capacity of "conscience."⁵ London states that the theory applies to learned functional disorders but not to persons whose environment lacks close relationships with significant others.⁶ However, the statement that subjective distress is caused by a "capacity for conscience" is not an explanation in itself.

2. Sequence

He stresses that mental dysfunctioning is actively self-initiated and maintained through a sequence of overt behaviors culminating in those emotions and symptoms associated with psychopathology.⁷ The necessary sequential conditions are:

- (a) "Ab-normal" behavior, defined as "deviation from the established norms of the individual's reference group or groups."⁸ Mowrer hyphenates "ab-normal" to differentiate it from abnormality in the commonly held

⁴Mowrer, 1964, p. 28.

⁵Mowrer, 1961, p. 17f. "Changing Conceptions of the Unconscious."

⁶London, op. cit., p. 136.

⁷Cf. to Mowrer, "The Behavior Therapies, with Special Reference to Modeling and Imitations." American Journal of Psychotherapy, Vol. XX, No. 3, p. 439-461. July, 1966. Hereafter referred to as Mowrer, 1966d.

⁸Ibid., p. 448.



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sense of illness or disease and to indicate that the neurotic misbehavior is abnormal, not the emotions arising from that misbehavior. "Given a knowledge of the individual's total life situation, these emotions, however turbulent or painful, are seen as essentially reasonable, normal, and, if responded to in the right way, potentially helpful."⁹

- (b) Concealment of the deviancy. Anxiety is stimulated by either the recognition of breaches of sociality produced by the deviant behavior or by the absence of punishment. Conflict is induced by the fear that others may discover the behavior and respond negatively through punishment or by withholding social esteem."¹⁰
- (c) The individual maintains his conflict through continued secrecy, while the conflict is further reinforced by the continuing pressures of the inhibited impulses. The assumption is that the ego is captured by the Id, not by the superego.¹¹
- (d) Trapped on the one hand by revulsion over his behavior and his fear of exposure and, on the other hand, by his

⁹Ibid., p. 449.

¹⁰Mowrer, 1964, p. 72f.

¹¹Ibid., p. 185.



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desire to express his id impulses, the individual "comes into a state of chronic insecurity."¹² If he becomes overwhelmed by the intensity of the conflict, he breaks down.

3. Symptoms

Mowrer defines these as the "individual's own attempt at self-cure."¹³ Mowrer holds that most patients and therapists assume "that the basic problem is wrong emotions or bad 'nerves,'"¹⁴ whereas, in fact, the patient's emotions are quite normal. It is his conduct which is "ab-normal."

The above constitutes, for Mowrer and his associates, the essence of the neurosis, which he prefers to call an "identity crisis" or "sociosis."¹⁵

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF HIS THEORY

So far the theory is similar to the classical drive-reduction theory of adjustment. But London finds "three critical points at which it differs in content from other theories of breakdown, whether dynamic reinforcement theories or associationist theories, and whether oriented towards insight or action."¹⁶

First, Mowrer hypothesizes that once the primary drives are minimally satisfied, the secondary drives achieve more functional

¹²Mowrer, 1966d, p. 448.

¹³Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 449, p. 456.

¹⁶London, op. cit., p. 137.



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significance, especially where they are crucial in human relationships. However, in some cases the individual has totally suppressed his primary drives which usually have priority over secondary drives in order to satisfy the secondary even though he knows that death might result from such suppression.

Secondly, while other theorists emphasize purely mental phenomena as the major sources of conflict, Mowrer proposes that a person's overt misconduct is usually the real source. The covering of his cheating behavior by further deception produces a deep sense of guilt and erodes his character.¹⁷ If guilt is present in awareness, then it is always founded on some past action. Although Mowrer allows for the traditional Freudian concept that guilt feelings can arise from ideas, thoughts and impulses originating in the Id that are unexpressed in overt behavior, he believes that generally some referent in real guilt can be discovered, that somewhere the person committed acts that transgressed his own social context or religious convictions and which now prey upon his conscience.¹⁸ He calls this guilt "real" or "rational" as opposed to the "false" or "illusory" guilt that might arise from unexpressed Id impulses. The ethical standards violated may be merely one's personal concepts of human decency. It is noted here that Mowrer often uses pseudo-theological phrases to define these secular concepts. For

¹⁷Mowrer, 1964, p. 135.

¹⁸Mowrer, 1966d, p. 456; Mowrer, 1966b, p. 1.



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example, "God" does not necessarily refer to a real person, but is

the idealized objective of the socialization process. 'Sin' is used to mean the overt behavior that violates sociality, that is, transgression. 'Guilt' is used to mean what it means in law: the objective existence of transgression or sin, as well as the subjective state that describes the recognition of such behavior.¹⁹

Therapists should consider guilt feelings as valid and treat the person accordingly. Failure to deal with this seriously, he says, may be the main reason why commonly accepted therapeutic procedures have produced so few positive results, and may have actually been harmful.²⁰

Thirdly, and most significantly, although Mowrer accepts the existence of ego defenses, he not only maintains that therapy research has failed to show that repression is central to neurotic development, but that recent research has firmly established the centrality of suppression.²¹ Tracing the effects of real guilt in neurosis and psychosis,²² he concludes that both problems develop as the Id captures the Ego, forcing suppression of the Superego. Anxiety arises because of the "unheeded railings and anger of conscience."²³

A vital fourth difference, not mentioned by London, is Mowrer's thesis that psychopathology is the product of undersocialization whereas

¹⁹London, *op. cit.*, p. 139

²⁰Mowrer, 1966d, p. 449; 1966c, p. 24.

²¹Mowrer, 1964, p. 184f, 188f, 225f.

²²Mowrer, 1966a, p. 13-23.

²³*ibid.*, p. 31



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Freud conceived of psychopathology as the result of too intensive, over-extended socialization in combination with a powerful Superego.²⁴

THERAPY TECHNIQUES

To facilitate "cure," Mowrer has devised a sequence of four techniques that reverse the behavioral sequence leading to breakdown.

First, clients learn best when they see an example or model of appropriate behavior, as shown by Bandura (1965). Consequently, the therapist opens himself to the client as he expects the client to do in return, and teaches the client to acknowledge his overt transgressions, reveal his secrets and take responsibility for his guilt.²⁵

Secondly, as soon as possible, the client's referent group is enlarged to include others with whom he shares his true self.²⁶ If feasible, the group might consist of significant others, perhaps the entire family.²⁷ Thus the client becomes reintegrated with his social community which gives him his identity.

Thirdly, the client is encouraged to make restitution, or payment for his "sins,"²⁸ on the order of the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance. The client must endeavor to reconcile himself to those against whom he

²⁴Hall, Calvin, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, p. 31-35.

²⁵Mowrer, 1966d, p. 451; 1966b, p. 38.

²⁶Mowrer, 1966b, p. 14; 1964, p. 89.

²⁷Mowrer, 1964, p. 82.

²⁸Ibid., p. 97.



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has transgressed, or else to compensate for his transgressions with actions that are constructive for society.

Lastly, since the client formerly hid his transgressions, and publicized his good works and traits, which amounts to a loss of psychic energy and weakening of character, he is now encouraged to hide his good and publicize his transgressions. The latter is done in an appropriate fashion, i.e., deep crimes or perversions, sins, or weaknesses may be confessed to a small group of significant others, which might be the therapy group, and lesser sins revealed to the general public. It is unnecessary, however, to reveal one's whole self to the world.

Mowrer does not say that he necessarily wishes to strengthen or increase the strictness of the conscience, rather, "All I had said was that perhaps the neurotic's great need was to have his conscience released."²⁹

ANALYSIS OF MOWRER

If Mowrer is correct, then his theory has wide implications for psychotherapy and research. It is commonly accepted that the results of traditional forms of psychotherapy roughly match the rate of "spontaneous remission." Part of the problem may be inadequately conceived studies and the perpetuation of certain myths prevalent in psychotherapy (Kiesler, 1966). But if the neurotic's problem is at the level of wrong actions rather than wrong emotions, then such efforts as conditioning,

²⁹Mowrer, 1961, p. 27.



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psychoanalysis, medication, surgery, reassurance, hypnosis, or electroconvulsive shock might be misplaced.

Mowrer says that his position is not new, but was anticipated by Runestam (1932), Boisen (1936) and Stekel (1938), and is rapidly gaining adherents in a variety of fields. Parlour, et. al., (1967) have begun to use these concepts in therapy groups.

Understandably, there is much opposition to this position because it openly attacks the classical psychoanalytic theory of neurotic and psychotic development. This, coupled with Mowrer's "genius for sensing the rawest intellectual nerve of his audience and then addressing himself to it"³⁰ has elicited the wrath of many theologically and psychologically-oriented adversaries! The problem may also arise from Mowrer's failure to establish an integrated philosophical base from which to generate his theory of personality development, which is similar to the situation in empirical research of generating hypotheses without theory. Chronologically, this has resulted, not because Mowrer began with a philosophical position, but because over the years, he has made a transition in thought largely based upon his personal experiences with neurosis and psychosis, readings in literature, and experiments in psychology. His present theory is emerging a posteriori, and lacks solidity at present. A further problem is that his definitions of sin, conscience, guilt and personality attempt to bridge theology and psychology, without doing justice to either.

³⁰London, op. cit., p. 135.



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This study was conceived in terms of the above considerations, i.e., the need for developing an integrated concept of the nature of man out of which would flow an understanding of conscience, sin and guilt. It is confined just to these issues, and is not designed as an experimental study for testing the constructs presented.

Religiously-oriented practitioners who traditionally emphasize "real" or rational guilt as a basic problem of man, see it as producing direct, weakening effects upon his body, mind and spirit. They conceive of "cure" as coming through acknowledgment of sin, atonement by God, and forgiveness experienced. Historically, their confidence in this approach has been weakened by the impact of Freudian psychology, behaviorism and other humanistic approaches. While they look upon the new movement sponsored by Mowrer with interest, they feel cautious about accepting his position wholeheartedly because of his antagonism to orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, many members of the psychological fraternity consider Mowrer's position regressive.

PROBLEMS IN CONCEPTUALIZING GUILT

The notion of guilt presents us with a complex variety of problems which have tremendous bearing on the process and research in psychotherapy today. Should we consider guilt as an entirely subjective phenomena resulting perhaps from societal conditioning, subconscious tensions or unrealistic fears, or is there as Mowrer claims, always an objective referent in previous misbehavior?



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1. Moral Aspects

There are moral aspects to the problem of guilt. If the individual acts contrary to society's moral standards, he may do so out of the sort of perverseness that Edgar Allen Poe³¹ said was inherent in every man, or he may feel that he acts in "freedom" and "responsibility." Is he then to be judged as "right" or "wrong," or is it a matter of indifference? These questions are at the heart of the moral revolution in every modern society, and there are obvious conflicts between those persons striving for personal independence who fear tyranny and depersonalization and those who are concerned with the maintenance of law and order and who fear anarchy and chaos. Character disorders provide additional complications. Psychopaths seemingly are able to commit a variety of heinous crimes without feeling the least guilty or remorseful, and yet they could eloquently argue that they have acted in responsibility and freedom; or that they merely "lost control" and should really not be held responsible.

2. Legal Aspects

Then there is the whole area of legal considerations. Is an individual always guilty of certain transgressions against society, and if declared guilty, can society always punish or condemn? At what point is the individual considered incompetent? How does society establish culpability? Is it possible to establish culpability in a world of chance

³¹Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," a poem dealing with guilt reactions. Cf. Bibliography.



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and relativism, or do absolutes provide the only adequate foundation?

3. Therapeutic Aspects

In the counseling process, the counselor's attitude as well as the client's may well determine the course of therapy. Suppose that the client experienced powerful guilt feelings. On his part, the counselor may ask whether these feelings emanate from inner tensions alone or from overt actions, and if the latter, whether these actions warrant such intense feelings. Perhaps the counselor is unsympathetic with society's restrictions and prescriptions regarding these specific overt actions, philosophizing that most moral standards are relative, transitory and harshly restrictive. Will the counselor then ignore the overt behavior or try to persuade his client that his fears and guilt feelings are groundless or irrational and then schedule a program of therapy designed to change his client's perceptions? On the other hand, the counselor may be sympathetic with society's standards and concentrate on changing his client's behavior to adjust, at least partially, to society's mores.

We might also ask whether the client will experience any repercussions within himself in the absence of strong guilt feelings, that is, even though he does not feel guilty about certain overt behavior, is there a sort of inner mechanism which subtly reacts to that behavior, effecting him negatively? If we theorize that neurotic conflict presupposes an outraged superego, then the subject faces two alternatives: either to heed the railings of the superego and change his overt behavior, or to



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suppress the superego and maintain the behavior. In the latter instance, he runs the risk of deadening sensitivity to his feelings and perhaps dulling his awareness of objective phenomena as well. This would imply that, contrary to prevailing notions in the counseling field, the effective life is enhanced by a sensitive conscience, so that the keener the conscience, the greater the awareness of inner feelings, which would vindicate Mowrer's theory. On the other hand, a sensitive conscience could lead to severe conflict, and if the individual strongly desired to maintain behavior which he felt violated the standards of his society, or even of his own lowest standards of decency, he could choose to suppress his conscience in order to alleviate the conflict. In this case, he might become cynical, pseudo-sophisticated, or hostile to any religion or ethic which pointed out his responsibilities.

Again, the above considerations point out the extreme complexity of the problem of conscience, the attendant symptoms of conflict, and the need for some base of operation from which to make judgments and develop testable hypotheses.

CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS WITH GUILT

Guilt from both the subjective and objective viewpoints is a major concern in literature, philosophy and religion, as well as psychology. Berdyaev confesses in his autobiography, Dream and Reality (1951), that all his life he has been victimized by guilt feelings that incline toward pessimism and apprehensiveness of lasting happiness. He says, "Every



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joy in my life has been accompanied by a sense of guilt and wrong."³²

The modern classic on this type of guilt feelings is Kafka's novel, The Trial (1953). The hero is arrested for a crime of which he professes innocence. Nevertheless, he feels guilty, though he never knows why. In all of his frantic efforts to get help, he is unsuccessful in getting to know the nature of his crime. At the end he is condemned and executed, though in the process he breaks down psychologically, committing acts that reveal his capabilities for larger crimes.

Quite a different approach was used by Dostoyevsky, especially in his Crime and Punishment (1953). There, the hero, Rodya, has actually committed two murders and is finally broken by his own conscience which causes him to flirt with danger by repeatedly returning to the police authorities to discuss the crimes. Finally, it is his love for his mother and another woman that brings him out of a delirium to confess and receive clemency, and after eight years in prison he accepts religion in lieu of his driving individualism. Dostoyevsky repeats the theme of the guilty conscience in The Brothers Karamazov (1960), where the son, Ivan, longed for his father's death.

The playwright, Sartre (1947, 1956) and the novelist Faulkner (1965) use the concept of guilt widely. In Graham Green's novels (1960), hidden fear pursues the main characters. The feelings of estrangement and guilt underlie much of the poetry of T. S. Eliot (1962, 1963).

³² Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, p. 60.



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Senator Munson, one of the major characters in Allen Drury's Advise and Consent (1961) reflecting on the cold war conflicts endangering the world, attaches universal sharing of guilt to the liberals who made it easy for the Russians by constantly yielding to them, to the embittered conservatives who closed the door to compassion and understanding, to the jealous military, the self-righteous scientists, the compliant press, ambitious politicians and a largely complacent citizenry. He thinks,

Nobody could stand forth now in America and say, 'I am guiltless. I had no part in this. I did not help bring America down from her bright pinnacle.' For that would be to deny that one had lived through those years, and only babies and little children could say that.³³

Even the psychologists have not always agreed with Freud (1923, 1953, 1959). Stekel (1950) laid great stress on the part guilt plays in neurosis development, stressing that neurosis is the disease of the bad conscience, and taking issue with Freud's theory that morality is really a reaction formation against the evil in man. Shneidman and Farberow (1957) feel that patients with suicidal tendencies alleviate their guilt conflicts by threatening or attempting acts of self-punishment.

In theology, although liberalism had moved away from guilt and atonement in Christianity, it was Karl Barth (1956), the founder of neo-orthodoxy, who stressed that guilt was the sure sign of man's depravity, and thereby created the twentieth century revolution in religious thought

³³

Drury, A., Advise and Consent, Cardinal ed., p. 33.



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and a reconsideration of the ancient Biblical doctrines. The late P. T. Forsyth (1905) was no less emphatic that the center of Christianity and man's dilemma lay in the problem of sin and guilt; it was this problem, he states, that revelation solves.³⁴ On the other hand, some argue that man's guilt is really nothing more than his sense of "nothingness," while others such as the death-of-God adherents stress that it is rather a sense of man's humanness. Buber (1958) holds that it is the result of estrangement of the I-Thou relationship that ought to exist between man and his world. Bultmann (1958), desiring to preserve the relationship between the I-Thou as essentially between the "I" of man and the "Thou" of God, thinks of guilt as real and in need of forgiveness by God, which he performed through Christ:

Forgiveness does not mean that the sin is to be compensated for (the man is wholly disobedient); it can only be forgiven. When a man accepts forgiveness, he condemns himself most severely, he really bows his head under the judgement of God. And as his character as sinner signified that he failed in the decision and became another man, a condemned man who had lost his freedom, so forgiveness means that he is to become a new man through God's grace, that he has his freedom once more, that God does not abandon His claim upon him but also does not deprive him of His grace--that God means to bring him out of remoteness into nearness to Himself.³⁵

THE DESIGN OF THIS STUDY

It appears that the debate regarding the genesis, function and resolution of guilt will continue until certain basic issues can be resolved.

³⁴Forsyth, Faith, Freedom and the Future, p. xli.

³⁵Bultmann, Jesus and The Word, p. 201.



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First, there seems to be the unfounded assumption that whenever we discuss man, we are all talking the same language and mean the same things regarding his nature or the nature of man's contextual, phenomenal world. This is quite apparent in the wide-ranging contemporary debate on freedom-determinism where inadequate definition of terms unnecessarily complicates and prolongs the argument. Secondly, the terms conscience, sin, transgression, and guilt, depend upon a given concept of the nature of the phenomenal world and of man and of his relationship to that world.

It is felt that Mowrer's research points in the right direction, but if Mowrer's theory is essentially correct, it needs some broader philosophical base for integration and power. The natural starting point is the nature of man, which is related to the larger concepts of the nature of being and reality.

In order to constrict this study to a reasonable size, it has seemed advisable to assume a position presently held within Christian philosophy and place it in juxtaposition to an opposing view, that the contrast and comparison might clarify the differences, benefit from any similarities, and indicate the implications for counseling. The study deals with constructs which might prove fruitful for development and testing in later research.

Two men have been chosen whose concepts of man differ markedly. The theological-philosophical position of Dr. Cornelius Van Til will be reviewed and taken as a base from which to consider the concepts of



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Dr. Erich Fromm regarding the nature of reality, man, conscience and guilt. The rationale is that Van Til represents a classical tradition of Reformation Theology, and has a keen interest in the psychology of religion, while Fromm is a neo-Freudian psychoanalyst with an interest in philosophy.

Van Til's position is precise and clear, having been carefully honed throughout forty years of teaching and writing. Perhaps more than any other Christian apologist, he makes an assault upon all non-Christian or partially Christian theories of man, for which he has been criticized by his own colleagues within Reformation Theology. In response, he argues that by taking a thoroughly Biblical stance, he sharpens the distinctions between Christianity and non-Christianity which provides the only proper ground for dialogue.

Van Til classifies his theological position as "Reformed," a term applied to the Calvinistic school to differentiate that from Lutheran theology, Arminian theology, and the more inclusive "Evangelicalism," all appearing as aspects of Protestant Reformation Theology which developed a reaction to sixteenth century Roman Catholicism, or "Romanism," as Van Til calls it. While Reformed Theology, Lutheranism, Arminianism and Romanism have fairly well-defined theologies, "Evangelicalism," says Van Til, is a loose mixture of all of these,³⁶ and in some places, he speaks of it as "less consistent Calvinism."³⁷ He sees his own task as that of

³⁶ Van Til, Defense of the Faith, p. 78-79

³⁷ Ibid., p. 79. Cf. p. 80.



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creating the most consistent expression of Christianity possible. In so doing, he gives much credit to his predecessors, including among others, Hodge and Warfield of the "Princeton school" of theology and Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoeven of the "Dutch school" of theology.³⁸ His other basic sources are Calvin and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Dr. Van Til was born in the Netherlands in 1895. He is a graduate of Calvin College (A.B.), of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and Princeton University (Ph.D.). He spent a year in the pastorate and one year as instructor of Apologetics at Princeton Seminary. Since 1929, he has been Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Van Til is joint-editor of Philosophia Reformata, and frequent contributor to The Westminster Theological Journal, both of which are devoted to Calvinistic theology and philosophy. He has authored many books, syllabi, articles and pamphlets, many of which are included in the bibliography. His primary interest has been the refutation of the "neo-orthodox" school led by the German theologian, Karl Barth.

Dr. Erich Fromm is the better-known scholar, having gained a wide reputation as a "neo-Freudian revisionist"³⁹ along with his colleagues, Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. All three have attempted to show

³⁸Systematic Theology, p. 2.

³⁹Hammond, Man in Estrangement, p. 24.



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the relationship of social structures and personal relationships to psycho-analytic concepts, although it has been surmised that these revisions have been more in the nature of opposition to Freud than reform.⁴⁰ Fromm has been selected because he has drawn out the philosophical implications of psycho-analysis and applied them to many fields of interest, especially politics and religion.

Van Til builds his system upon Calvin while Fromm uses Calvin as one of his major antagonists, frequently quoting from Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion as the epitome of authoritarian religion.

Fromm depends heavily upon Aristotle, Spinoza, Dewey, Nietzsche, Spencer, Kent and Freud, and finds a close correlation between psycho-analysis, Zen Buddhism,⁴¹ and Marxian sociology.⁴² Out of this background, Fromm has been motivated to extend Freudian psychology to the study of the social group, presuming that the psychic attitudes common to most individuals are rooted in the cultural patterns of one's society.

Dr. Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1900. He studied at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich and at the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt. When Hitler's regime came into Power in 1932, he came to the United States, where he lectured at several

⁴⁰Loc. cit.

⁴¹Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, cf. especially pp. 77-141.

⁴²Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. ix.



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colleges, including Michigan State University. Currently, he is Professor of Psychoanalysis at the National University of Mexico, Mexico City, and Professor of Psychology at New York University. He is the author of fifteen major works.

These two scholars are at variance at almost every point in their thinking on the nature of reality, man, and the causes and solutions of guilt. After their positions have been thoroughly summarized, an attempt will be made to compare them and show the implications for counseling practice and research.



CHAPTER II

VAN TIL'S THEOLOGICAL BASIS

INTRODUCTION

Apologetics as the philosophical defense of the Christian faith is concerned with the problem of method. In Van Til, the method of defense and the faith defended merge into an integrated system built upon his concept of basic presuppositions. Defending Christianity from within the theological framework, he uses the language of Scripture and Christian doctrine, borrowing philosophical terms as a bridge to secular thought. This form of reasoning illustrates his contention that all men are forced to argue circuitously once they choose their philosophical points of departure.⁴³

Van Til holds that the place to begin defending the faith is systematic theology and follows this view in his definitive work, The Defense of the Faith, where he first discusses his basic doctrines, and then defends this Calvinistic system as the only possible intelligible position for men to accept. But his approach entirely depends upon his concept of argument by presupposition. He is thus consistent with his own premise that the method of apologetics of Protestant Christians "should be in line with their theology."⁴⁴

⁴³ Apologetics, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Defense, p. 4.



I. PRESUPPOSITIONS

Characterizing his apologetic is the concept that there are only two alternatives available, that they are radically antithetical to each other and logically impossible to maintain simultaneously. He writes:

Every form of intellectual argument rests, in the last analysis, upon one or the other of two basic presuppositions. The non-Christian's process of reasoning rests upon the presupposition that man is the final or ultimate reference point in human predication. The Christian's process of reasoning rests upon the presupposition that God, speaking through Christ by His Spirit in the infallible Word, is the final or ultimate reference point in human predication.⁴⁵

In his lectures, Van Til frequently uses a diagram similar to figure 1 (p. 29). In summary, he says that these basic epistemological and metaphysical principles are, by the nature of the case, unprovable, but that they control scientific methods and conclusions.⁴⁶ He feels that in most cases fruitful discussion between Christians and non-Christians is hampered because men are not consciously aware of their presuppositions. By constantly placing the alternatives in radical opposition, he hopes to create genuine discussion of the primary issues.⁴⁷

A. CHRISTIAN PRESUPPOSITIONS

1. GOD

Basic to all the doctrines of Christian theism is that of the self-contained God, or, if we wish, that of the ontological

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁶Apologetics, p. 62.

⁴⁷Defense, p. 298, 299.



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trinity. It is this notion... that ultimately controls a truly Christian methodology.⁴⁸

God is the ultimate reality or fact who determines and interprets all other fact;⁴⁹ the final reference point required to make "facts" and "laws" intelligible.⁵⁰ In Him, the ancient unity-plurality problem is both solved and meaningful.⁵¹

2. CREATION

The creation of the universe is consequent to the concept of God's counsel;⁵² as He willed, so the universe came into existence.⁵³ Since God is self-contained, He does not require the physical universe, nor is it an extension of Himself. Matter is not ultimate, only temporal, and time is seen in both temporal and eternal levels according as the referent is God or His universe.⁵⁴ However, the universe clearly displays something of the character of God, namely, His eternal power and existence.⁵⁵

Man is temporal and the quality of his being is on the creature level. His task is to become properly related to God, his Creator, but this relationship is always personal and ethical because God and man are

⁴⁸Apologetics, p. 62.

⁴⁹Defense, p. 150.

⁵⁰Apologetics, p. 62.

⁵¹Defense, p. 10.

⁵²Apologetics, p. 61.

⁵³Case for Calvinism, p. 19.

⁵⁴Christianity and Barthianism, p. 90f., Defense, p. 10.

⁵⁵Theology, p. 76



not correlative, i.e., of the same essence of being, subject to identical limitations of time and space.⁵⁶ Although man thinks rationally, as a creature he cannot understand comprehensively nor exhaustively, only analogically,⁵⁷ and sin further confuses and blinds man both rationally and ethically. He therefore needs to depend upon God for knowledge of God, for personal insight, for understanding of the world around him,⁵⁸ and for God's provision of redemption. Reality and fact become what they are because God mediates this knowledge to man,⁵⁹ not because man possesses the Kantian categories of causality by which he imposes meaning and order upon raw facts. Thus revelation is essential if man is to gain true understanding at all.⁶⁰ Van Til defines revelation as both that general knowledge of God manifested in nature, His eternal existence and power, and the special revelation appearing in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.⁶¹

B. NON-CHRISTIAN PRESUPPOSITIONS

By "non-Christian," Van Til means all those positions whose authority rests upon man's autonomy,⁶² consequently, there is only one

⁵⁶Defense, p. 29.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 119f.

⁵⁸Knowledge, p. 22.

⁵⁹Theology, p. 22.

⁶⁰Knowledge, p. 20, 21.

⁶¹Theology, p. 65

⁶²Knowledge, p. 2.



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basic presupposition for the non-Christian, the ultimacy of the human mind.⁶³ From this premise flows all of his concepts of reality, including any definitions of God, man or fact. Authority resides either in himself, personal experience, other experts, or a God who is equally limited and ultimate with himself.⁶⁴ His reasoning, like the Christian's, is also circular; "the starting point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another."⁶⁵

Van Til asserts that it is of the essence of non-Christian methodology to claim that it is neutral on all subjects until the evidence is in, and admits that from the non-Christian viewpoint, Van Til's own statement that conclusions are controlled by presuppositions is evidence of the purest form of authoritarianism.

In spite of this claim to neutrality on the part of the non-Christian, the Reformed apologist must point out that every method, the supposedly neutral one no less than any other, presupposes either the truth or the falsity of Christian theism.⁶⁶

The focus on these antithetical presuppositions appears consistently through Van Til's works, and he uses them as a tool to measure deviation from Scriptural norms. He sees modern theologies, such as the Death of God movement, Neo-orthodoxy and Liberalism operating almost

⁶³Defense, p. 63, 180.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 124f.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 100.



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entirely on the autonomous-man assumption, Roman Catholicism and Arminianism inconsistently using both assumptions simultaneously, Evangelicalism trying to use Christian assumptions with frequent lapses into autonomy, and Reformed theologies as the most consistently Biblical.

Equally important is Van Til's mutually interpretive and interacting concepts of God and fact, which he claims are derived from Scripture and Reformed theology, and from which emerge all his other doctrines. For purposes of clarification, Van Til first specifies his system of doctrine and then defends it by using his concept of fact.

II. VAN TIL'S THEOLOGY

By "Christian theology," Van Til means "Reformed Theology," i.e., "a strong Calvinistic Christian theism."⁶⁷ All other "Christian" theologies have one foot upon the Christian presuppositions of God and His counsel, and one foot upon man's autonomy.⁶⁸ He holds that Romanism starts with the natural theology of man without God and attaches supernaturalism to it, Arminianism makes God and man interdependent for salvation, following the lead of Romanism, while the modern theologies are afflicted with the naturalistic assumptions and therefore fail to present a "Christ who can help sinners in need."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Types of Apologetic Systems, Ramm, p. 187.

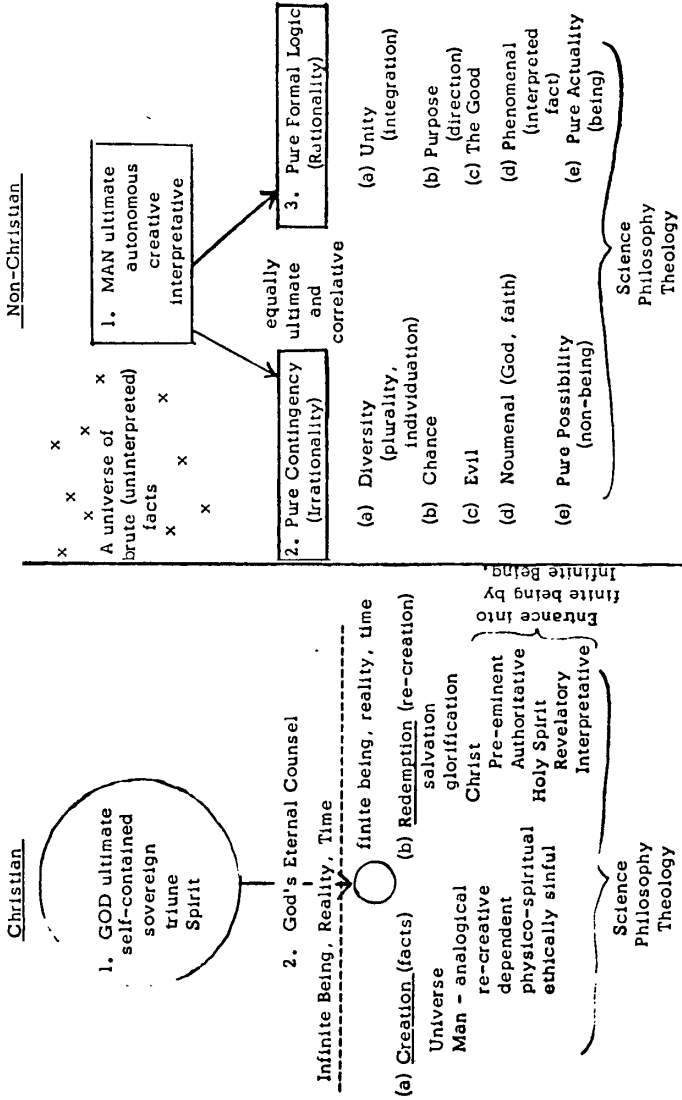
⁶⁸Defense, p. 3-6.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 5



Fig. 1

**BASIC PRESUPPOSITIONS
And Their Corollaries**





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Of his own Reformed doctrine, he says:

The basic structure of Christian theology is simple. Its every teaching should be taken from the Scriptures of the Old and New testaments as being the words of prophets and apostles spoken on the authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, the Saviour of sinners,⁷⁰

noting that it is proper to speak of it as a "system of truth" only if we acknowledge that the various doctrines were not deduced from some master concept extraneous to Scripture.

A. GOD

1. THE ONTOLOGICAL TRINITY

Epistemologically, says Van Til, the Christian theist begins with the Scripturally based assumption that there exists a God who is a self-contained ontological trinity⁷¹--self-existent, self-sufficient, self-determinative, self-conscious, necessary, sovereign and absolutely free.⁷²

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each an active personality and

...together constitute the exhaustively personal God. There is an eternal, internal self-conscious interaction between the three persons of the Godhead. They are co-substantial. Each is as much God as are the other two. The Son and Spirit do not derive their being from the Father. The diversity and unity in the Godhead are therefore equally ultimate; they are exhaustively correlative to one another and not correlative to anything else.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷¹ The unusual term "ontological trinity" is uniquely characteristic of Van Til's writings. He uses it to mean absolute, self-sufficient, the ultimate source of all being. cf. Apologetics, p. 62.

⁷² Apologetics, p. 5; By What Standard, Rushdooney, p. 12; Types of Apologetic Systems, Ramm, p. 186.

⁷³ Apologetics, p. 8.



The trinity is viewed both ontologically, referring to the essence of God's being and, economically, referring to the functional relationships of the three persons to the created universe.

The Father is centrally active in the creation and sustaining of the universe. The Son is centrally active in the objective work of salvation. The Spirit is centrally active in the subjective work of salvation. In all this the triune God is active with respect to the universe.⁷⁴

2. GOD'S INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

Van Til discusses the nature of God in terms of the communicable and incommunicable attributes, that is, those characteristics which man can share or which are unique to God. Under the incommunicable attributes, he lists:

a) The Aseity or Independence of God

God is not correlative to or dependent upon anything extraneous to Himself. Therefore, we cannot speak of the source of His being, for source cannot be applied to God,⁷⁵ who is Himself the category of interpretation for all things⁷⁶ and the "final reference point in human predication."⁷⁷

b) The Immutability of God

Although the Scriptures speak anthropomorphically about God as a condescension to man, God Himself is unchangeable in His existence,

⁷⁴Loc. cit.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 5; Defense, p. 9.

⁷⁶Apologetics, p. 7.

⁷⁷Warfield, p. 25.



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essence, will and decrees. The concept deals with the internal relationships of the trinity as distinguished from the continued changes in the universe, or from the incarnation of the Son as the man Christ Jesus.⁷⁸

c) The Infinity of God

God is "concrete self-existence,"⁷⁹ or limitless in existence. In reference to time this is conceived of as His eternity, meaning that there is continuity, not succession of moments, or beginning or end with God. In reference to space, infinity is seen as omnipresence, meaning that God is neither "included in space nor absent from it; rather, He is above all space yet present in every part of it (1 Kings 8:27, Acts 17:27)."⁸⁰

This conception of eternity is of particular importance in Apologetics because it involves the whole question of the meaning of the temporal universe; it involves a definite philosophy of history.⁸¹

d) The Unity of God

Van Til means that God is one God and not composed of discrete parts.⁸² He argues that this doctrine does not contradict the Biblical presupposition that God is both ontologically and economically triune, though superficially, it would appear that to speak of God as one God negates the statement that there are three persons in the Godhead. He protects himself from this paradox by appealing to his concept of exhaustive

⁷⁸Theology, p. 211.

⁷⁹Loc. cit.

⁸⁰Defense, p. 10.

⁸¹Loc. cit.

⁸²Loc. cit.



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Interaction among the triune persons: each is equally ultimate and equally exhaustive of divinity,⁸³ although distinctions among them occur in Scriptural revelation according to their relationships to man.

Van Til holds that the incommunicable attributes of God are unique to His self-conscious being. Man cannot partake of these in any sense. He cannot be self-contained, infinite, eternal or simple. These attributes emphasize God's transcendence⁸⁴ and at the same time provide Christians with a distinct philosophy of history.

All that has happened in the past, all that happens in the present, and all that will happen in the future rests for its presupposition upon the self-sufficient internal activity of the self-predicating and therefore non-delimited being.⁸⁵

3. GOD'S COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

God, says Van Til, is unlike man in His incommunicable attributes, but like man in his communicable attributes.⁸⁶ He is transcendent but also immanent. But, says Van Til,

It is not a sufficient description of Christian theism when we say that as Christians we believe in both the transcendence and the immanence of God while pantheistic systems believe only in the transcendence of God. The transcendence we believe in is not the transcendence of deism and the immanence we believe in is not the immanence of pantheism.

⁸³ Theology, p. 220.

⁸⁴ Defense, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Theology, p. 212.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 233.



In the case of deism transcendence virtually means separation, while in the case of pantheism immanence virtually means identification. And if we add separation to identification we do not have theism as a result... The Christian doctrine of God implies a definite conception of everything in the created universe.⁸⁷

a) The Intellectual Attributes

(1) Spirituality. When Van Til defines God as a Spirit, he avoids telling of some "vague generic concept of spirituality"⁸⁸ encompassing both God and man. God is the absolute, self-contained, self-individuated Spirit, who "does not need materiality over against Himself in order to individuate Himself."⁸⁹

Man, created in the image of God, has a dim replica of this spirituality although he is not a true spirit but a "physico-spiritual being."⁹⁰ God alone, as Spirit, is immortal and "invisible,"⁹¹ and the Scripture speaks of Him as "light."⁹² Spirituality then becomes for Van Til the foundation for God's self-knowledge.⁹³

(2) Self-Consciousness. In order to avoid pantheism, Van Til asserts that this self-consciousness is coterminous with God's being,

⁸⁷ Defense, p. 11, 12.

⁸⁸ Theology, p. 233.

⁸⁹ Loc. cit.

⁹⁰ Loc. cit.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 234.

⁹² Defense, p. 10.

⁹³ Theology, p. 234.



otherwise God's knowledge would have to be obtained by investigating being that is independent of God.

If being and knowledge are not coterminous in God then being stands over against the knowledge of God as a complement. There is then no possibility of distinguishing between non-created and created being. There can then be no creation except in the attenuated Platonic sense of formation of a pre-existing material. God's consciousness of self is then interwoven with his consciousness of the world.⁹⁴

And because God possesses this exhaustive knowledge of Himself, he also possesses a comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge of all possibility.⁹⁵ Possibility depends upon the counsel of God, and He is free to create according to His will. Moreover, all facts and laws are what they are because God has freely created and freely known all reality,⁹⁶ and this knowledge of God preceded the creation of the world. So Van Til uses the term "analytical" in reference to the necessary, free, and exhaustive self-knowledge of God. In contrast, Man's mirror-image knowledge is dependent, partial, and true, but "analogical."⁹⁷ Man, therefore, finds difficulty in comprehending such paradoxes as free agency and sovereignty, or actuality and possibility. Man has to wait for events to occur before he can know them, and makes inferences upon which he depends for knowledge of facts and laws.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 235.

⁹⁵ Loc. cit.

⁹⁶ Loc. cit., Theology, p. 236.

⁹⁷ Theology, p. 236.



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If we keep this biblical notion of the knowledge of God before us, we shall think of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge. And only if we do this can we have a truly Christian apologetic.⁹⁸

b) The Moral Attributes

The moral attributes are God's holiness "whereby He is internally and eternally perfect,"⁹⁹ God's goodness, and God's righteousness.

These form the basis for Van Til's Christian ethics and for his later discussion on guilt.

- (1) Holiness. By the holiness of God we therefore signify God's absolute internal moral purity. It is naturally to be expected that when this attribute of God expresses itself in the revelation of God to man, it requires his complete purity. This complete purity in man consists in the complete dedication of man's moral activity to the moral glory of God. Negatively, this will need to express itself as separation from sin.¹⁰⁰

The negative aspects of God's holiness particularly come to expression in the Old Testament period, where, he says, secular persons and things are dedicated to the service and glory of God, not because the secular is considered evil per se, but the secular became evil because of the sin of man.¹⁰¹

In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the positive expression of God's holiness. Van Til says, the Holy Spirit enables men to dedicate

⁹⁸ Loc. cit.

⁹⁹ Defense, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Theology, p. 244.

¹⁰¹ Loc. cit.



themselves to God after freeing them from slavery to sin. The negative aspect of God's holiness is still revealed in the punishment of those who rebel against God.¹⁰²

(2) The Righteousness of God signifies the "internal self-consistency of the divine being."¹⁰³ God does not respond to a law higher than Himself, for as absolute being He is "absolute law,"¹⁰⁴ and expresses this absolute self-contained consistency in the created world "by maintaining created consistency among men."¹⁰⁵ God distributes justice to men, punishes injustice and rewards justice. Unfortunately, there is no justice in sinners. "There is, to be sure, a measure of civil righteousness among men, but this proceeds from the 'old man' within them which they have not been able to subjugate fully."¹⁰⁶ If men do any justice, it must be given to them, for if they followed their own "self-consciously adopted principles"¹⁰⁷ they would perform only unrighteous acts. The believer, saved by grace, seeks to think God's thoughts after Him in an effort to do His will, and seeks to establish and maintain God's law for all other men "in ways that are themselves in accordance with those laws."¹⁰⁸ In this

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 245.

¹⁰³ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Loc. cit.



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fashion the believer seeks to protect the unbeliever from himself. The unbeliever seeks eternal laws as well as eternal truths apart from the person of God, but the fact remains that "true law cannot exist except upon a Christian foundation."¹⁰⁹

(3) The Goodness of God. Van Til distinguishes between what God is in Himself and what He is in relation to His created works. God is in Himself good and, therefore, God's moral deeds must be centered in Himself, for He cannot look to extraneous principles of truth and goodness as standards for His own conduct. "It is this notion of the goodness of God that forms the foundation of true Christian ethics."¹¹⁰

a. Common Grace. The concept of God's conscious goodness to His creatures provides Van Til the basis for his doctrine of grace. God is merciful and piteous¹¹¹ toward a world in suffering, and when He is good to undeserving men "it is called grace."¹¹² But when His goodness, as seen in the rain and the sunshine, talents and opportunities, is freely distributed to both believers and unbelievers alike, it is called "common grace."¹¹³

However, God's attitude and purposes differ. To the believers, He extends grace in respect to their forgiven status in order to enable

¹⁰⁹ Loc. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 238.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 239.

¹¹² Loc. cit.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 240.



them to mature in Christlikeness. To the unbelievers, He gives grace in order they might fulfill His purposes, and to restrain "their natural tendency to do only evil continually,"¹¹⁴ although their misuse of His gifts brings them "greater condemnation."¹¹⁵ This principle of common grace enables men to perform civil righteousness, and is the basis of law and order.¹¹⁶

b. Saving Grace. The doctrine of common grace underlies the concept of special or saving grace. "Together they form the covenant framework in which the sovereign God deals with man."¹¹⁷ Through God's special grace He elects unregenerate men to eternal life who, as spiritually dead, are incapable of yielding themselves to God.¹¹⁸

c) The Attributes of Sovereignty

These refer to God's ultimate power over the universe and the destiny He has eternally determined for it.

(1) God's Will. "As the self-existent being God wills Himself as His own end";¹¹⁹ He is altogether self-ruled. In order to avoid such ancient arguments as to whether God can make something greater than Himself, or will something contrary to His being, Van Til replies that "God

¹¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

¹¹⁷ Particularism and Common Grace, p. 20. For definition of "Covenant," cf. to this text, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Common Grace and Witness-Bearing, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Theology, p. 246.



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cannot exist otherwise than He exists. His will does not act independently of His nature. His will wills His nature as His nature comes to expression in His will."¹²⁰

a. His Secret Will. God's will with respect to the universe is considered in terms of "His secret and His revealed will."¹²¹ God's will of decree is "secret" because man cannot know that will precisely or in detail. Moreover, it is the "source of all substance and power in the created universe, and is comprehensive; everything is derived from it"¹²² including creation, revelation, government, the work of Christ, election of sinners and reprobation of men, regeneration, sanctification, and the entire destiny of believers. While God as holy is incapable of sin, His secret decrees allow the creation of finite moral beings who could sin, and for the existence of evil,¹²³ although, says Van Til, the answers to these questions remain a mystery to finite man.¹²⁴

b. His Revealed Will. This concept establishes the regulations for human living, says Van Til, and though there seem to be conflicts between God's secret and revealed will, these are only apparent contradictions because of man's limitations.¹²⁵ Van Til acknowledges the

¹²⁰ Loc. cit.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 247.

¹²² Loc. cit.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 248

¹²⁴ Loc. cit.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 251.



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difficulties in trying to understand how God can be absolutely determinative and man still exercise a measure of freedom, but he says that the Scripture reveals both of these doctrines which are necessary in order to avoid thinking of man as a helpless irresponsible victim of a blind fate,¹²⁶

B. THE ETERNAL COUNSELS OF GOD

While Reformed theologians¹²⁷ logically discuss the doctrine of Christ as an adjunct to the doctrine of the Trinity, Van Til apparently uses it to emphasize the need for God and man to be reconciled. Therefore it is possible to categorize it under his concepts of the eternal counsels of God, together with man, revelation, salvation, the church and eschatology.

1. THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

Van Til's concept of man is related to his doctrine of creation and to his philosophy of reality or fact. The relation of God to man is the substance of his Apologetics, and he discovers the common ground for dialogue between the antithetical Christian - non-Christian presupposition in the image of God in man.

a) The Image of God in Man,

To speak of the image of God in man is, for Van Til, to speak of the first man, Adam in paradise before the Fall. He makes no apology for this concept in spite of almost complete rejection of a literal Adam and

¹²⁶ loc. cit.,

¹²⁷ Cf. A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology.



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Eve by the bulk of modern thinkers, depending for his conceptions upon the Scriptural testimony of the Mosaic writings and the theology of Paul, whose doctrine of justification builds upon the analogy between the first Adam and Christ, the "second" Adam.¹²⁸

(1) Personality. Although finite, man has God's image in both a general and a narrow sense.¹²⁹ In the general sense, man has personality. Every act of man is a personal relationship to other men and God, but need not be at the "expense of the personal character of that which surrounds him."¹³⁰ In dealing with himself or others, man deals with God's creation and therefore with the Creator. Personality is manifested in relationship to God's personality, will and interpretation of reality.

(2) Finiteness. In the narrow sense of God's image, man reflects God's moral attributes; he had in Adam true knowledge, true righteousness and true holiness, which were mutilated through rebellion but restored in personal relationship to Christ. The image of God always appears in both the general and narrow sense so that every act of man is a moral act, "an act of choice for or against God."¹³¹ Man reveals righteousness and holiness or unrighteousness and unholiness in every act of knowledge. "The idea of disinterested or neutral knowledge is out of accord with the basic ideas of Christianity."¹³²

¹²⁸Genesis 2:1-4:1, Luke 3:38, Romans 5, I Corinthians 15.

¹²⁹Defense, p. 13.

¹³⁰Rushdooney, By What Standard?, p. 142, quote from Van Til, Metaphysics of Apologetics, p. 64. Out of print.

¹³¹Defense, p. 13.

¹³²Apologetics, p. 14.



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Man is also unlike God; he cannot participate in God's incommensurable attributes of aseity, immutability, infinity, and unity.¹³³ He never outgrows his creaturehood.

Although originally it was "no burden to him,"¹³⁴ man now chafes under the awareness of his finite being and knowledge. He desires to know God and himself through and through. He struggles with the idea of mystery, asserting "That there is either no mystery for God or man, or there is mystery for both God and man."¹³⁵ In contrast, the Christian says that "There is mystery for man but not for God."¹³⁶

(3) Autonomous Man. Van Til avers that autonomous man rejects this "doctrine of his creation in the image of God,"¹³⁷ replacing it with a "metaphysics of correlativity between God and man"¹³⁸ so that man can think analytically as God.

Van Til rejects this implication of God and man being correlative, since then man would be self-sufficient. In order for man to make any true interpretation of any single fact, he would have to possess comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge of the universe causing him to face the dilemma of either being absolutely ignorant or absolutely omniscient.¹³⁹

¹³³ Defense, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Loc. cit.

¹³⁵ Loc. cit.

¹³⁶ Loc. cit.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 81.

¹³⁸ Christianity in Modern Theology, p. 19.

¹³⁹ Apologetics, p. 54.



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(4) Point of Contact. If then the Christian and non-Christian cannot agree on any common ground upon which to discuss the nature of man and reality, where is the point of contact between them? There must be basis for dialogue, otherwise they could not labor together in any area and the non-Christian would never be convinced of the Christian position. Is there some area upon which all may agree and is there a common method of perceiving this area?

It will not do to assume at the outset that these questions must be answered in the affirmative. For the knower himself needs interpretation as well as the thing he knows. The human mind as the knowing subject, makes its contribution to the knowledge it obtains. It will be quite impossible then to find a common area of knowledge between believers and unbelievers unless there is agreement between them as to the nature of man himself.¹⁴⁰

Rejecting the theories that assert a common area of intellectual agreement between believers and unbelievers,¹⁴¹ or a common religious consciousness acting independently of God,¹⁴² Van Til contends that the only point of contact is the image of God in man.¹⁴³ All men are themselves revelatory of God and surrounded by God's revelation in nature.¹⁴⁴ As rational and moral, man is the "ethically responsible reactor to revelation";¹⁴⁵ his self-consciousness "presupposes God-consciousness."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Defense, p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁴² Psychology of Religion, p. 9, 10.

¹⁴³ Defense, p. 94.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 88, 89.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁴⁶ Loc. cit.



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Man is aware of his "inescapable sense of duty"¹⁴⁷ to reinterpret "the counsel of God as expressed in creation to himself individually and collectively."¹⁴⁸ The image of God is man's "borrowed capital" which enables him to operate as a human being even though he may deny responsibility and relationship to God.¹⁴⁹

Man is therefore always "accessible to God."¹⁵⁰ He is always in contact with these inescapable truths. "His efforts to hide this fact from himself are bound to be self-frustrative."¹⁵¹ The Christian can only be true to Scripture and "effective in reasoning with the natural man" by thus "finding the point of contact in man's sense of deity that lies underneath his own conception of self-consciousness as ultimate."¹⁵²

b) Man's Relation to Nature,

Next to noting that man was created in God's image it must be observed that man was organically related to the universe about him. Man was to be prophet, priest and king under God in this created world. The vicissitudes of the world would to a large extent depend upon the deeds of man. As a prophet man was to interpret this world after God, as a priest he was to dedicate this world to God, and as a king he was to rule over it for God. In opposition to this, all non-Christian theories hold that the vicissitudes of man and the universe about him are only accidentally and incidentally related.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Apologetics, p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Defense, p. 94.

¹⁵⁰ Loc. cit.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁵² Loc. cit.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 14.



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In order to understand and fulfill his three-fold task, man was, even in Paradise, given revelation in nature and a "supernaturally communicated positive revelation."¹⁵⁴ Before the Fall, man learned God's purposes with respect to nature and himself through "direct positive revelation."¹⁵⁵ "It was in this atmosphere of revelation"¹⁵⁶ that man lives and moves and has his being. Revelation describes his intimate relationship to the universe for which he is responsible, describes his origin and his goal, though none of this is given in detail, and man must continually refer to it.

His speculation was always to be subject to revelation. His hypotheses with respect to the relation of any one fact of the universe to any other fact were always to be made within the limits of the presupposition that God rules and directs all things. Thus speculation, that is, intellectual articulation, was consciously subject to the sovereign directing activity of God.¹⁵⁷

c) The Fall of Man.

(i) Sin. Among Christian theologians, writes Van Til, only the Calvinist takes sin seriously.¹⁵⁸ Sin has blinded men to the truth¹⁵⁹ and warped all aspects of their being so that they are totally depraved, i.e., no area of their being is unblighted. The heart of man's existential guilt is this breakdown of his personal relationship to God, a breakdown brought

¹⁵⁴ Apologetics, p. 29.

¹⁵⁵ Systematic Theology, p. 81.

¹⁵⁶ The Search for Meaning, p. 66.

¹⁵⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁵⁸ Apologetics, p. 98.

¹⁵⁹ Loc. cit.



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about by man's own willful, rebellious transgression against God. Therefore, the "fall of man needs emphasis as much as his creation."¹⁶⁰ If we accept the fact that man was created by God in temporal time, then we must also accept the fact "that soon thereafter man through disobedience sin."¹⁶¹

According to Van Til, the fall of man is more complicated than believing that Adam merely ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a creature, man had to live in constant awareness of "the ordinances that God had placed in His creation"¹⁶² which were endemic to man's being. Man's conformity to God's law was in accord with his own nature. The commandment forbidding contact with the knowledge of good and evil was "only to force an immediate and final test as to whether man would really live in accordance with the law of God as everywhere revealed within and about him."¹⁶³ In the fall, man sought his identity apart from God. He preferred his own resources. He "sought his ideals of truth, goodness and beauty somewhere beyond God, either directly within himself or in the universe about him."¹⁶⁴

Barth scoffs at the saga of "the speaking serpent" which he says belongs to natural history along with the physical resurrection of Christ,¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰Defense, p. 14.

¹⁶¹Loc. cit.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶³Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁵Christianity and Barthianism, p. 14. cf. to Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, p. 35.



but Van Til's philosophy of history encompasses it as part of Satan's plan to destroy the work of God. Satan is a person, not an abstract principle of evil. The warfare is between God and Satan, the embodiments of good and evil. The natural or fallen man has become the bondservant of Satan.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in paradise he sought to make them believe that man's self-consciousness was ultimate rather than derivative and God-dependent. He argued, as it were, that it was of the nature of self-consciousness to make itself the final reference point of all predication... that God had no control over all that might come forth in the process of time.¹⁶⁶

To the extent that man accepts the monistic assumption of his own ultimacy he "misinterprets all things, flows no less than God."¹⁶⁷ The only thing that saves him from complete capitulation to his "satanic principle"¹⁶⁸ is the "incubus of the sense of deity"¹⁶⁹ engraved within his nature.

(2) The Covenant Concept. God established a covenant relationship with Adam in which he was always to live in accordance with God's laws and in return God would grant life and peace and would be eternally his God.

Through Adam, God assigned mankind its covenant task¹⁷⁰ whereby all men would interpret and rule the world aright as prophets, priests and kings.

¹⁶⁶ Defense, p. 92.

¹⁶⁷ Theology, p. 27.

¹⁶⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁷⁰ Particularism and Common Grace, p. 1.



In this intricate manner the particular and the universal are from the outset of history intertwined with one another. God approaches the mass of mankind through one man as their representative and He approaches each individual human being throughout history through the mass of mankind that has been thus approached through one man. When John Brown is born he may find himself in Africa or in Europe; he may look into the mirror and find himself to be black or white. He may be unable to play ball with other children because of infantile paralysis or he may be a better ball player than his fellows. All the factors of his inheritance and environment are mediated through and are expressive of, the covenant relationship that God from the beginning established with mankind. All the facts of life about him speak of the mandate of God upon mankind, and therefore upon him. And all these facts also speak of the fact that mankind has, through Adam, broken the covenant with God. Thus, self-consciousness for John Brown is identical with covenant-consciousness. John Brown knows he is a covenant breaker to the extent that he knows anything truly at all.¹⁷¹

The effects of sin upon man are manifold and devastating, requiring the restorative powers of the Trinity for salvation and enlightenment. In the fall, man surrounded God as well as himself with "pure contingency or pure irrationalism"¹⁷² in believing that God knew no more than he did about reality. At the same time his apostasy "expressed itself from the outset in the idea of the correlativity of pure rationalism and irrationalism."¹⁷³ Man's sin has become so pervasive and deceitful that he is unaware of the true nature of his apostasy.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷²The Later Heidegger and Theology, p. 34.

¹⁷³Loc. cit.



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He assumes that the abnormal state, introduced by his own disobedience, is normal. Since the fall apostate man is at enmity against God. He seeks, with all his God-given powers, to repress the voice of God speaking to him through Christ and His word. When the Christ of the Scriptures is presented to him with the promise of forgiveness of sins on condition of repentance, then this Christ is asked to show his credentials.¹⁷⁴

Rebelliousness, argues Van Til, has brought man into intellectual and moral darkness¹⁷⁵ so that he cannot receive the "things of the Spirit of God"¹⁷⁶ which he sees only as foolishness. He represses God's revelational truths about himself "lest he should have to confess his own guilt,"¹⁷⁷ affirming that because "no one has transgressed the law of love of his Creator"¹⁷⁸ no one can possibly be condemned. In order to escape the ethical consequences of sin, man either affirms that evil will "eventually fade away into non-being"¹⁷⁹ or reduces "good and evil to correlatives of one another."¹⁸⁰ His suppression of truth has not only led him to cover up his guilt by denial, but eventually to a hatred of God. "When he speaks of the primacy of the ethical he does this only in the interest of making his own moral consciousness the ultimate source of right and wrong."¹⁸¹ But man faces "self-frustration"¹⁸² because "the laws of logic as God had

¹⁷⁴ ibid., p. 34, 35.

¹⁷⁵ The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁷⁷ Biblical Ecumenism, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁷⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁸⁰ Christianity and Modern Theology, p. 52.

¹⁸¹ The Search for Meaning in Modern Thought, p. 78.

¹⁸² Theology, p. 92.



created them in the universe were not broken by sin, but man's ability to use them rightly was weakened, and still it is true that in his logical interpretation man has, in the form of the matter, come very close to the truth."¹⁸³

d) Regenerate Man.

As Ezekiel stood over the valley of dry bones in his vision and watched the Spirit of God breath into them and raise up a host of living men,¹⁸⁴ says Van Til, so the Christian watches Christ restore men to true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, albeit in principle only.

Van Til here refers to the "three types of consciousness."¹⁸⁵ First, the "Adamic consciousness" was perfect and therefore unified, receptive to revelation, and acknowledged creaturehood. Secondly, "fallen or non-regenerate consciousness" claims normality, but "builds upon the non-Theistic assumption,"¹⁸⁶ denies creaturehood, is not "receptive of God's revelation,"¹⁸⁷ wants to construct its own interpretations, lacks unity because "it has cut itself loose from the only existing source of unity,"¹⁸⁸ yet knows God and self "after a fashion," and

¹⁸³Loc. cit.

¹⁸⁴cf. Defense, p. 80, The quote from Warfield. cf. Ezekiel 37.

¹⁸⁵ibid., p. 48.

¹⁸⁶ibid., p. 49.

¹⁸⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁸⁸Loc. cit.



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possesses "relative good." Thirdly, the "regenerate consciousness" has been restored to the Adamic consciousness in principle, recognizes its guilt and rebellion, acknowledges dependency and realizes that "it has been saved by grace";¹⁸⁹ desires to receptively reconstruct and possesses unity, "though not comprehensive unity."¹⁹⁰

e) Man's Freedom.

To preserve God's ultimacy, Van Til holds that man is relatively free; free within the atmosphere of law; free within the sphere of God's personality. The idea that man is a "rational and moral being"¹⁹¹ is "not inconsistent with the idea that man lives under certain limitations."¹⁹² Man's character, rationality and environment limit freedom but do not absolutely determine his destiny. Man as a free agent is relatively free to be self-directive and self-determinative. His is not a Platonic kind of freedom that would make God a "finite god...an unknown and powerless God."¹⁹³

2. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

a) His Deity,

The concept of the fall of man lays the base for Van Til's presentation of Jesus Christ. God and man are reconciled, communication is

¹⁸⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹⁹¹ Boston Personalism, p. 4.

¹⁹² Loc. cit.

¹⁹³ Christianity in Conflict, Vol. I, part II, p. 95.



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reestablished, and life is breathed into the spiritually dead by Christ as an operation of the "economical trinity."¹⁹⁴

It was the second person of the ontological trinity, who was, in respect of his essence, fully equal with the Father, who therefore existed from all eternity with the Father, who in the incarnation assumed a human nature.

This does not mean that he laid aside his divine nature or that he became a divine-human person. Nor does it mean that the divine and human natures were intermingled The Creed of Chalcedon has expressed all this by saying that in Christ the divine and the human natures are so related as to be "two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."¹⁹⁵

As such, while Jesus Christ in His incarnation "shares in the incommunicable attributes of the Godhead,"¹⁹⁶ at the same time He was a truly human creature. "Accordingly even in the incarnation Christ could not commingle the eternal and the temporal. The eternal must always remain independent of and prior to the temporal."¹⁹⁷

b) His Functions.

In addition, Christ acted as the "true prophet, priest and king,"¹⁹⁸ in relation to all regenerated Christians. As Prophet, He reveals the will of God to man, becoming man's true wisdom and source of knowledge. In Christ the fallen consciousness is restored to the Adamic in principle and

¹⁹⁴Defense, p. 16.

¹⁹⁵Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁷Apologetics, p. 18.

¹⁹⁸Defense, p. 17f. (also cf. Apologetics, p. 18f.)



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man is "reinstated to true knowledge,"¹⁹⁹ although this knowledge is only partial. As Priest, He sacrifices Himself to "satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God,"²⁰⁰ making "continual intercession for us."²⁰¹ His death is the foundation for the gift of true knowledge, which at its root "is an ethical question,"²⁰² involving both knowing and loving God. As King, Christ subdues, rules and defends His people and conquers their enemies. "It is only by emphasizing this organic connection of the aspects of the work of Christ that we can avoid all mechanical separation of the intellectual and moral aspects of the question of knowledge."²⁰³

Rejecting Christ is, for Van Til, rejection of God as the Father, and "tantamount to hatred of God as the Father."²⁰⁴ Conversely, true belief in one necessarily implies belief in the other. "He who is not a Christian is not, properly speaking, a Theist."²⁰⁵ Moreover, if a man does not know Christ as the Son of God, he neither understands Christ for what He truly is, nor does he truly understand himself as a man, nor truly "know reality for what it is."²⁰⁶ As a result, he cannot "know the nature of the dialogue between God and man, nor the nature of dialogue between man and man."²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰⁰ Loc. cit., quote from the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

²⁰¹ Loc. cit.

²⁰² Loc. cit.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 17, 18.

²⁰⁴ Christ and the Jews, p. 10.

²⁰⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁰⁶ Loc. cit.

²⁰⁷ Loc. cit.



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c) Christ and Revelation.

The questions here are: "What Christ to accept? How can we know Him if He speaks? Where does He speak? Can we separate the so-called historical 'facts' surrounding His life from their 'meaning'? These problems bear on the natures of history, Scripture and fact. Further, if possibility lies outside the being and will of God, then 'the very idea of God becoming man is logically impossible.'"²⁰⁸

Van Til disavows the viewpoints of theologians and philosophers who "assume that Immanuel Kant's view of man's absolute self-dependent freedom is the proper starting point for all human predication"²⁰⁹ because he claims that this viewpoint leads ultimately to complete subjectivity.²¹⁰

...one who starts with human autonomy unavoidably uses a principle of unification by which he will, in purely a priori fashion, exclude the possibility of the direct identification of God with the Christ of history. In fact one who starts with human autonomy must, in rejecting the self-attesting Christ, reject everything connected with Him. And this rejecting may be accomplished by direct denial or by reinterpretation.²¹¹

When Albert Schweitzer sought for the real Jesus behind the accretions of Gospel history, he despaired, for the supernatural elements were inextricably woven into its fabric of the Christ image. Barth also

²⁰⁸ Christianity in Conflict, Vol. I, part I, p. 18.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Vol. I, part III, p. 113.

²¹⁰ Loc. cit.

²¹¹ Christianity in Conflict, Vol. I, part II, p. 49.



seeks the Christ of faith apart from the so-called historical facts. Van Til feels that this effort is doomed to failure, and men face the alternative of either choosing to join with the historic church and

bow before the self-attesting and self-explaining Christ of the Scriptures or to construct a Christ-ideal from the materials of a self-existing and self-explanatory man. For the Christ that results from the effort at interpreting Him from historical documents not regarded from the start as the self-attesting Word of Christ, even if that Christ is a skillful combination of the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith,' is yet no more than a projection of a man that does not need this Christ in any case. Why teach men to herald, witness to and set forth the meaning of a Christ that cannot be found or, if He can be found, has no help to offer man?²¹²

3. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

There is, says Ramm, "a sharp problem in any man's apologetic, namely, as to how a man becomes a Christian."²¹³ In view of the fact that Van Til "denies any common ground between Christians and non-Christians"²¹⁴ except in the image of God, unbelievers cannot be led from some neutral ground to Christian faith. How then does man come to God and to God-oriented philosophical position?

a) Dynamic God-Man Relationship.

Van Til's solution involves a dynamic relationship between the Trinity and sinful man. It is not enough that God the Father and the Son should provide a potential salvation for man, but God the Spirit must also

²¹² Ibid., Vol. I, part I, p. 4.

²¹³ Ramm, op. cit., p. 203.

²¹⁴ Loc. cit.



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apply to man the redemptive work of Christ. "Inasmuch as we are dead in trespasses and sins, it would do us no good to have a wonderful life-saving potion laid next to us in our coffin. It would do us good only if someone actually administered the potion to us."²¹⁵ The Spirit, then, takes the initiative in the matter of salvation, otherwise if man were able to reject God's particularistic offer of salvation, the redemptive attempts of Christ would be in vain.²¹⁶

Even if we say that in the case of any one individual sinner the question of salvation is in the last analysis dependent upon man rather than upon God, that is if we say that man can of himself accept or reject the Gospel as he pleases, we have made the eternal God dependent upon man. We have then, in effect, denied the incommunicable attributes of God. If we refuse to mix the eternal and the temporal at the point of creation and at the point of the incarnation we must also refuse to mix them at the point of salvation.²¹⁷

b) Unorthodox Views.

Van Til directs attention to views of the Christian Gospel "as visualized by the modern mind"²¹⁸ which include combinations of the following points: First, that mankind commonly originates from some form of animal ancestry, in which creation ex nihilo²¹⁹ is displaced in favor of "some form of saga, as a pictorial presentation,"²²⁰ allowing a

²¹⁵ Defense, p. 18.

²¹⁶ Loc. cit.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

²¹⁸ The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, p. 35.

²¹⁹ Ex Nihilo = "out of nothing"

²²⁰ The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, p. 35.



purely impersonal, non-Christian interpretation of man's physical, biological and physiological factors. "This is the general view of Barth, Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr and many others."²²¹

Secondly, that evil is endemic in man as an integral part of his finitude. On this view, man was never created perfect; each is his own Adam. "As such each man originates sin in the absolute sense."²²²

Thirdly, all mankind is actually saved through Christ. But in this view the term saved is not related to God's wrath and man's objective guilt. Rather, "to be 'saved' in the modern theological circle means being lifted up in the scale of being."²²³ It has no reference to the nature of God, a standard for man's behavior, or a set of revealed propositions.

For, on the modern view, God is no more than a hypostatization of man's own ideals... a God of whom nothing can be known, who cannot express His will, who cannot be sinned against, and who therefore cannot forgive sins or do anything to help man in his needs. He has no power over the world. He could not punish man if he would; in any case he would not because He does not exist in any sense that means anything to man.²²⁴

Finally, the popular conceptualization of the Gospel is the Christological interpretation²²⁵ where the Christ "stands for the ideal perfection of mankind."²²⁶

²²¹ Loc. cit.

²²² Ibid., p. 36.

²²³ Loc. cit.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 39.



Van Til charges the psychology of religion school with promoting the popular view of the Gospel by "ignoring the objective factor of redemption"²²⁷ on the ground that "they were dealing only with the psychology of religious experience,"²²⁸ a purely subjective phenomena. In reply, he says that if the Christian God does not exist, "and if there has been no objective process of redemption"²²⁹ by virtue of the suffering of Christ and the soteriological activity of the Holy Spirit, then "there can be no such thing as regeneration in the sense that Christians conceive of regeneration,"²³⁰ by definition and "implanting of the new spiritual life by the Holy Spirit into the souls of those who are in themselves dead in trespasses and sins."²³¹ The assumption of the psychology of religion school is that man acts univocally in an "ultimately impersonal environment,"²³² i. e., that "when man is active, he only is active"²³³ independently of God. Similarly, He avers, though all Christian theories of salvation are supernaturalistic, they are defective if they fail to emphasize the ethical character of man's sin and the particularistic concept of salvation.

4. THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

In the apologetic of Van Til, God's person and eternal counsels are inseparable from His revelation of Himself to man, and He is motivated

²²⁷ Psychology of Religion, p. 126.

²²⁸ Loc. cit.

²²⁹ Loc. cit.

²³⁰ Loc. cit.

²³¹ Loc. cit.

²³² Ibid., p. 133.

²³³ Loc. cit.



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by His sovereign good pleasure and love; He does not need to reveal Himself but He has chosen to do so. Van Til consistently stresses three elements in the concept of revelation: First, God has plainly revealed Himself both in nature and in special communications; Secondly, Adam needed and sinful man still needs objective, authoritative revelation; Thirdly, the Bible is the objective revelation. Van Til adds that the doctrine of the infallibility of the Scripture only claims integrity for the original manuscripts, not necessarily for the resultant versions or translations, nor is it a dictation theory of inspiration. "The personality of each writer of Scripture was allowed full play,"²³⁴ but the prophets and apostles "were guided by the Spirit of God and...what they wrote was therefore infallible."²³⁵ Accordingly, while Christians cannot solve all the problems raised by the phenomena of revelations, they accept Scripture's integrity "till the foundations of the rival position are investigated."²³⁶ Moreover, the rival position is meaningless "unless men can show that they themselves have a final interpretation of the facts of the phenomenal world to offer."²³⁷

It is not stubbornness or ignorance when we claim that in the original manuscripts of the Bible, the Word of Christ has come into the world. All the 'phenomena of Scripture' as well as all the 'phenomena of science' need this revelation of God if they are to present anything but chaos...It

²³⁴ Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, p. 26.

²³⁵ Loc. cit.

²³⁶ Loc. cit.

²³⁷ Loc. cit.



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is impossible for you to bring any coherence into your experience, unless you make God's revelation through Christ in Scripture your starting point. Without the light of the sun you search in vain for anything. All the lights of human life, science, philosophy or theology derive their light from Scripture, or they convey no light at all.²³⁸

5. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The Westminster Confession's definition of the church is Van Til's definition:

The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.²³⁹

God plans salvation for his people and builds his true church, that is, the "invisible" church from the "whole number of the elect." "This does not preclude human responsibility... It only brings out clearly that God is absolute, here as elsewhere."²⁴⁰

6. THE DOCTRINE OF ESCHATOLOGY

When we come to the Christian conception of the 'last things,' we see once more how diametrically the Christian position is set over against that of its opponents. It becomes especially plain here that in the Christian conception of things interpretation precedes facts. Every Christian who trusts his future to God believes that God controls the future... that God has interpreted the future; he believes that the future will come to pass as God has planned it. Prophecy illustrates this point.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Pro Rege, p. 13.

²³⁹ Westminster Confession of Faith, cf. "The Church," Vol. XXVII, part I, quoted in Defense, p. 20.

²⁴⁰ The Confession of 1967, p. 9.

²⁴¹ Defense, p. 20, 21.



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For, if God cannot control the future, then he is not God, and his promises of salvation are invalid. Thus Van Til emphasizes the integral relationship of man and the universe. When Christ prophesied the end of the world he did it in terms of "the regeneration of all things"²⁴² whereby man's salvation ushered in a "new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell."²⁴³ The church lives "in the glory of that expectation."²⁴⁴

In broad outline then, it is seen how Van Til's presuppositional apologetic permeates his theology, and vice versa. It is now possible to view his concept of reality and ethics which underlay the concepts of the nature of man and consciousness.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴³ Loc. cit.

²⁴⁴ Triumph of Grace, p. 120.

Erich Fromm Archiv



CHAPTER III

VAN TIL'S THEORY OF REALITY

INTRODUCTION

Raymond Aron once said:

In a strict sense, all the sciences spring from a certain manner of interrogating the real, and this manner of interrogation is inspired or justified by a certain conception of the structure of reality.²⁴⁵

One of the most perplexing elements of this structure has been the relationship between the one-and-the-many, or the unity that integrates the plurality of particulars. In an attempt to deal with the problem, Van Til develops a Christian "Paideia"²⁴⁶ or theory of reality correlating the various concepts of being, knowledge and ethics; and places it in opposition to the "totality picture of non-Christian thought."²⁴⁷ Yet, consistent to his own thesis, he only claims analogical knowledge of these areas, not total comprehension.

In the debate, he borrows philosophical language but fills it with Christian concepts in order to be able "to contrast the Biblical idea of the Trinity with philosophical theories that are based upon human experience as ultimate."²⁴⁸ There is no pleading of "scientific neutrality," for he

²⁴⁵Farber, ed., Philosophical Thought in France and the United States, p. 302.

²⁴⁶Christianity in Conflict, Vol. II, part I, preface.

²⁴⁷Defense, p. 24.

²⁴⁸ibid., p. 181.



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argues that such a notion is meaningless; "neutrality" is the assumption of autonomous man that he is able to approach reality with an objectively open mind as he compares his interpretations of facts with those of other men for theoretical validation. As Rushdoony says:

Historically, this process has been worked out in Descartes, Berkeley and Hume to the conclusion that man never knows reality except by his ideas of reality. The question then arises, 'is there any valid reason for believing that as I think so reality is?' The Kantian answer is determinative of modern philosophy: Things-in-themselves can never be known. Our knowledge is confined to phenomena, things as they appear to us, never reaching the thing in itself.²⁴⁹

He holds that on this kind of basis there is no such thing as a given world with a given interpretation. It leads to the conclusions that no one can ever reach a valid knowledge of reality in itself and eliminates causality.²⁵⁰

According to Van Til's Paideia, the theory of being centers around the personal creator-creature relationship, the theory of knowledge deals with the "relation between authority and reason,"²⁵¹ and ethics focuses upon "the duties of man as he develops himself and the world in accordance with the principles of knowledge and being that undergirds the Paideia as a whole."²⁵²

²⁴⁹Rushdoony, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁵⁰Loc. cit.

²⁵¹Christianity in Conflict, op. cit., preface.

²⁵²Loc. cit.



I. THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEING

At the outset, Van Til differentiates between a Christian and non-Christian philosophy of being on the basis of his first presupposition of "God as the absolute, self-conscious Being, who is the source of all finite being and knowledge."²⁵³ Therefore, he posits a two-level view of being rather than speaking of "being-in-itself."

A. ETERNAL UNITY AND PLURALITY

From Van Til's point of view, the first step in answering the one-and-many questions is "to distinguish between the Eternal one-and-many and the temporal one-and-many...because our conception of God as the triune God stands at the center of our thinking."²⁵⁴ There is no "non-being" over against God which defines Him, nor is there an abstract principle of being in which both God and man participate. God is the "absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality"²⁵⁵ who necessarily exists and who gives meaning to both the eternal and the temporal one-and-many.

Idealist philosophy has set forth the notion of the concrete universal "to escape the reductio and absurdum of the abstract particular and the abstract universal."²⁵⁶ Van Til puts the problem this way:

²⁵³ Theology, p. 8.

²⁵⁴ Defense, p. 25.

²⁵⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 26.



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The many must be brought into contact with one another. But how do we know that they can be brought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? The answer given is that in such a case we should know nothing of them; they would be abstracted from the body of knowledge that we have; they would be abstract particulars. On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars? We seem to get our unity by generalizing, by abstracting from the particulars in order to include them into larger unities. If we keep up this process of generalization till we exclude all particulars, granted they can all be excluded, have we then not stripped these particulars of their particularity? Have we then obtained anything but an abstract universal? ²⁵⁷

He maintains that the non-Christian cannot answer these problems adequately, the modern philosopher no more than the ancient Greeks. Aristotle, he says, tried to solve it by employing a form-matter scheme in his theory of reality in conjunction with the law of contradiction. The latter is defined by Clark:

The principle is this: the same attribute cannot attach and not attach to the same thing in the same respect. Or, otherwise, contrary attributes cannot belong to the same subject at the same time. This principle... is stated not merely as a law of thought, but primarily as a law of being. The ontological form is basic, the purely logical is derivative: it becomes a law of thought. ²⁵⁸

Aristotle's form-matter scheme was an eternal dualism, the form standing for "abstract-non-personal thought thinking itself," ²⁵⁹ and matter standing for the concept of pure chance or irrationalism. Another way to

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 25, 26.

²⁵⁸ Clark, Thales to Dewey, p. 98.

²⁵⁹ Christianity in Conflict, Vol. II, part I, p. 22.

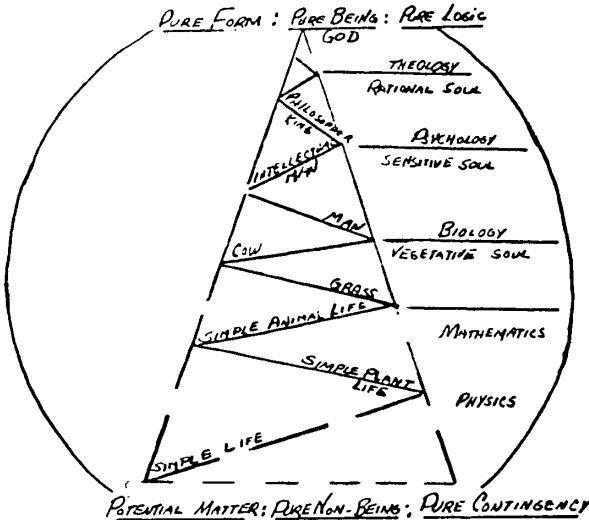


look at it is to see matter as pure non-being and form as pure being or act.

Matter is always in the process of becoming form; it has "potential being."²⁶⁰

Form is pure rationality, pure thought, pure principle, God.

A diagram of Aristotle's theory might look like this:²⁶¹



NOTE: This is a logical, not a chronological evolution.

In this scheme, each lower level of being has potential for achieving a higher level of being; all is in process of becoming. At the bottom is pure individuation, the "many" of Greek philosophy. At the top is pure

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁶¹ Diagram taken from class notes.



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unity. Aristotle hoped to create an all-inclusive theory of reality and knowledge and thus solve the problem of the one-and-the-many. It is, comments Van Til, "an attempt to combine an abstract principle of unity with an equally abstract principle of diversity."²⁶² Aristotle is assuming that "all reality is amenable to the exhaustive logical manipulation by man,"²⁶³ but to do this "he has to appeal to intuition or faith; not only so, he must appeal to faith in pure contingency as somehow furnishing the basis for the validity of logical demonstration."²⁶⁴ Aristotle's position is the same as that of Kant, "namely an island of regularity floating on a boiling cauldron of chance."²⁶⁵

Van Til reasons that Hegel, Tillich, Maritain and the existentialists also build upon Aristotle's form-matter scheme when they say that man is in the act of "becoming," that there are, as Maritain says, "degrees of being and goodness,"²⁶⁶ or that man is growing closer to participation in the being of God. If so, contends Van Til, then "why should God be said to be higher than man if God is himself enveloped by pure contingency except so far as he is pure contingency?"²⁶⁷ On such theory, all men are "in principle sons of God already through the idea of the analogy of being",²⁶⁸ there is no individuation left.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 10.

²⁶³ Loc. cit.

²⁶⁴ Loc. cit.

²⁶⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁶⁶ Orthodox Protestantism, p. 18, quote from Maritain, St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil, p. 5.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 26.



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Such a position, he says, which underlies the whole of modern philosophy, theology and science, cannot solve the one-and-the-many. Only the Christian doctrine of the Trinity gives an answer and demonstrates the true concrete universal. "In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars."²⁶⁹ Nothing is hidden in God's being, in whom "possibility is identical with reality and potentiality is identical with actuality."²⁷⁰

B. TEMPORAL UNITY AND PLURALITY

Van Til asserts that since there is no such thing as an Aristotelian-potentially-active-non-being, nor an abstract Platonic principle of being over against God, it is natural to hold that there is a realm of temporal one-and-many created by God. The doctrine of creation then becomes, for Van Til, the core of his doctrine of fact.

He says that the temporal one-and-many are equal in terms of their derivation and dependency upon the "God who sustains them both."²⁷¹ Their relations to each other are ordained so that "the particulars or facts of the universe do and must act in accord with universals or laws. There is order in the created universe."²⁷² The ultimate universal is God from whom all other facts and universals derive their meaning. If, on the other

²⁶⁹ Defense, p. 26.

²⁷⁰ Apologetics, p. 6.

²⁷¹ Defense, p. 27.

²⁷² Loc. cit.



hand, it would be true that the universe were composed of self-contained facts, or if man's mind alone could interpret facts, then it would logically follow that God would be extraneous.

1. SUBORDINATION

Van Til makes three points relating to the above. First, although all temporal facts or laws are basically equal, "there is a relation of subordination between them as ordained by God."²⁷³ The teleological laws are higher than the mechanical laws, and the will and intellect of man supersede the physical aspects of the universe. So man is spoken of as having dominion over God's creation in order to subdue it as prophet, priest and king. In turn, he is to learn subordination to the will of God. Man and the physical universe are thus intimately related; the destiny of the latter depends upon that of the former.

2. GENERALIZATION

Secondly, God's laws are but His generalized operations with the particulars. At any time, God may "take one fact and set it into a new relation to created law."²⁷⁴ All particular facts are subject to His will. This is Van Til's rationale for miracles which "are at the heart of the Christian position."²⁷⁵ Nowhere does the Christian position allow that "the being of God and the being of man are united with one another,"²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Loc. cit.

²⁷⁴ Loc. cit.

²⁷⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁷⁶ The Case for Calvinism, p. 20.



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which is the presupposition supporting the popular rejection of miracle. Miracle forms part of the "larger circle of redemptive works"²⁷⁷ generating the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Nor may the fact of miracle be fit into a pragmatic scheme of "abstract impersonal logic, logic which virtually asserts that the facts cannot possibly display the plan of God."²⁷⁸ It only fits into the notion of the self-contained ontological Trinity. Again the physical and historical elements in miracles cannot be removed in order to allow them to be merely interpreted "theologically and redemptively,"²⁷⁹ for then they must either be denied as historical fact, or else accepted as historical fact without religious significance. Rather, miracle is "a mode of revelation"²⁸⁰ whereby God fulfills his redeeming work and "destroys the power of sin"²⁸¹ in man.

3. THE BASIS OF SCIENCE

Thirdly, Van Til asserts that God-created and interpreted fact lays the only proper foundation for science. "God makes the facts to be what they are,"²⁸² and the facts are all related to a larger whole sustained by God's counsel. A blade of grass is not a "brute fact" dissociated from

²⁷⁷ Evidences, p. 56.

²⁷⁸ Theology, p. 18.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁸¹ Loc. cit.

²⁸² Defense, p. 147.



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all other "brute facts." Chance has no place in God's universe. The facts of mathematics, the facts of history, of life, only are "subordinately and derivatively important"²⁸³ and cannot be disentangled from coherent principles of interpretation. Without the undergirding of the Christian (Calvinistic) philosophy of reality, man sinks into a "sea of contingency" and irrationalism. On autonomous principles he can know nothing truly.

This involves Van Til in the scientific ideal set before science. This goal is "complete comprehension."²⁸⁴

Evaluated from Van Til's point of view, such a goal "wipes out the basic distinction between the Creator and the creature"²⁸⁵ and therefore makes two errors: first, it fails to realize that God has already reached the scientific ideal, and, secondly, it puts man in the impossible situation of trying to gain exhaustive comprehension of all things. This ideal manifests itself in all branches of science in the current determinancy-indeterminancy debate.²⁸⁶ Van Til contends that, in practice, scientists assume the equal relevancy of both. On the one hand, determinancy underlies the concepts of prediction, statistical averages and physical laws, and on the other hand, such problems as exceptional cases,²⁸⁷ discreteness

²⁸³Ibid., p. 148.

²⁸⁴Evidences, p. 57, cf. also Christianity in Conflict, Vol. I, part II, p. 43f.

²⁸⁵Loc. cit.

²⁸⁶Ibid., p. 95-98.

²⁸⁷Loc. cit.



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of sensations,²⁸⁸ probability,²⁸⁹ and man's apparent freedom²⁹⁰ argue for indeterminacy.

Again, Van Til finds that the doctrines of creation and providence as elements of God's revelation point toward the solution of this apparent paradox. All existence, and meaning, the laws of mathematics and physics, even time itself are not eternal principles, but God-created modes of finite existence²⁹¹ revelatory of the nature of God who determines all things.

C. SIN AND ITS CURSE

The clearness of this revelation is obscured by the all-pervasive effects of the sin of man, the opposition of Satan to God, and the subsequent curse of God upon the world. These aspects, he writes, must be accounted for in any concept of temporal being.²⁹² God has entered temporal time in the person of His Son to reconstruct the whole and set it right.²⁹³

SUMMARY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEING

In Van Til's metaphysics there is a two-layer theory of reality: eternal ultimate being and temporal analogical being. The relationship

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p 21.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁹⁰ Christianity in Conflict, Vol. I, 2, p. 45 and 108.

²⁹¹ Theology, p. 66.

²⁹² Defense, p. 28.

²⁹³ Loc. cit.



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between the two is not conceived of primarily in terms of principle, but as personal.²⁹⁴ God's being is not subject to becoming and change, nor is it a function of time.²⁹⁵ All of these properly belong to temporal reality. In the Ontological Trinity are ultimately resolved the paradoxes of unity and diversity, determinancy and indeterminancy, time and eternity. Sin and its resultant condemnation have obscured and complicated man's grasp of these ideas, but God's remedial work in Christ provides the ground for and adequate epistemology.

II. THE PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE

Van Til makes it plain that "our theory of knowledge is what it is because our theory of being is what it is."²⁹⁶ As his concept of being was taken from the Bible, so he feels compelled to look there for his epistemology.²⁹⁷

The business of philosophy is to ask "How do we know?"²⁹⁸ and the Christian answer is that true knowledge must correspond to God's knowledge.²⁹⁹ If man argues that true knowledge is to be found by appeal to some neutral area of uninterpreted fact, or to some level of knowledge

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁹⁷ Loc. cit.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁹⁹ Loc. cit.



or being apart from God, then in effect, he denies the ultimacy of God's being and authority,³⁰⁰ which denial was the core of Adam's sin.³⁰¹

Once again Van Til introduces the doctrine of sin. Sin has ruined man's perceptual and emotional fields³⁰² so that he cannot understand or yield to God's interpretation without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.³⁰³ Sin manifests itself in the field of knowledge whenever man asserts himself as ultimate, refuses God's authority, and fails to correctly interpret the natural phenomena of God's general revelation of Himself.³⁰⁴

A. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF HIMSELF

Van Til posits a "two-layer theory of knowledge,"³⁰⁵ that of the self-determinative God³⁰⁶ who knows Himself exhaustively and analytically as the object of knowledge,³⁰⁷ and that of man who knows analogically.³⁰⁸

God does not have to look beyond Himself³⁰⁹ nor even within Himself for self-knowledge.³¹⁰ As God, He knows analytically or in self-dependence, i. e., He does not obtain knowledge by comparing or contrasting

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁰¹ Loc. cit.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 35.

³⁰³ Loc. cit.

³⁰⁴ Loc. cit.

³⁰⁵ Loc. cit.

³⁰⁶ Loc. cit.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

³¹⁰ Loc. cit.



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Himself with being or non-being;³¹¹ He knows "by one simple eternal act of vision."³¹² Therefore, it can be said that in God "the real is the rational and the rational is the real."³¹³

Van Til observes that this point is vital because modern theories of knowledge depend essentially upon the Platonic and Aristotelian logic that God neither knows Himself nor man nor the universe, and is Himself unknowable;³¹⁴ whereas upon Christian terms, human knowledge of both God and man is possible because of the internal coherence of the Trinity.³¹⁵ Though God is eternally incomprehensible,³¹⁶ He has revealed Himself to man, and it is therefore unnecessary to rest upon any such doctrine as the primacy of the intellect in order to establish a basis for human knowledge.³¹⁷

B. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

In dealing with the nature of God's knowledge of things beyond Himself, Van Til turns to the creation doctrine.³¹⁸ God had a plan for the universe from all eternity, though the universe per se is not eternal.³¹⁹ But this creates a problem. If God's self-consciousness is coterminous

³¹¹ Loc. cit.

³¹² Loc. cit.

³¹³ Loc. cit.

³¹⁴ Christianity in Conflict, I, part 2, p. 31.

³¹⁵ Theology, p. 22.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

³¹⁸ Defense, p. 37.

³¹⁹ Loc. cit.



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with His being, "would it not seem to follow that God's knowledge of the universe is to be identified with the being of the universe?"³²⁰ i.e., if God eternally knew of the universe, must not the universe eternally exist? After all, if man's self-awareness presupposes his existence, does not God's awareness of the world also presuppose existence of it? In reply, Van Til says that the very analogical quality of human logic is also its weakness; man always thinks in terms of his own limitations. This is "the most basic contrast conceivable between a Christian and non-Christian theory of knowledge,"³²¹ the former interpreting "reality in terms of the eternally self-conscious divine personality"³²² and the latter seeing it as independent of God. God knew the universe and His plan for it prior to its actual existence.

C. MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Man's knowledge is "analogical of divine knowledge."³²³ The question Van Til asks is, can man have true or objective knowledge of God, can "we get back to God by the road that He has used to create us?"³²⁴ He replies that, apart from the ethical complications of sin, it follows that if God is a self-conscious Being who "exists necessarily as a self-complete system of coherence"³²⁵ and men are created as self-conscious image-

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

³²¹ Loc. cit.

³²² Loc. cit.

³²³ Ibid., p. 39.

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

³²⁵ Loc. cit.



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bearers, then men "must have true knowledge of Him."³²⁶ This knowledge need not be comprehensive to be true.³²⁷ Furthermore, the relation between God and man is rational, and Christianity is "an absolute rationalism,"³²⁸ while "all other systems of epistemology believe in ultimate irrationalism."³²⁹

He affirms that non-Christian epistemology does allow for certain types of authority that are in keeping with its principle of autonomy. First, there is an authority that is based upon "the existence of the endless multiplicity of factual material."³³⁰ Time and pure factuality are seen as ultimate and contingent upon chance and irrationalism. This authority rests upon Kant's thesis that the moral and religious aspects of man as well as his intellect are able to come into contact with ultimate experience,³³¹ and thus gives room for both faith and reason. Yet, in Kant's noumenal realm of faith, man can never be really sure of his knowledge of God.³³² This is, responds Van Til, essentially a Greek idea in which God is an impersonal, unknowable, abstract principle.³³³ Such an idea of "pure factuality or chance is the best guarantee that no true authority... will ever confront man."³³⁴

³²⁶ Loc. cit.

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

³²⁸ Loc. cit.

³²⁹ Loc. cit.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 125.

³³² Christianity in Conflict, I, 2, p. 46.

³³³ Ibid., p. 82.

³³⁴ Defense, p. 126.



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The second kind of authority acceptable to natural man "springs from the fact that even that which the intellect does assert about the objects of knowledge is, of necessity, involved in contradiction,"³³⁵ i.e., that all logical assertion about phenomena must be "self-contradictory in character"³³⁶ because chance is irrational. On this basis, says Van Til, reality is always reduced to mere perceptualization,³³⁷ a way of seeing things. There can, again, be no true and objective authority, only a relative kind. If "reality" can be spoken of, it must only be in the terms of inward thought and self-experience.³³⁸

Finally, there is the authority of the expert.

D. MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE

By the term "universe," Van Til means "the whole of the created world including man himself and his environment."³³⁹ Man's ultimate environment is God, and therefore is personal.³⁴⁰ His immediate environment contains other finite persons and things intimately related to each other under God's control.³⁴¹ The world of objects was created for man

³³⁵ Loc. cit., Van Til here refers to F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality which details this position.

³³⁶ Loc. cit.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

³³⁸ Christianity in Conflict, I, 1, p. 12.

³³⁹ Defense, p. 42.

³⁴⁰ Loc. cit.

³⁴¹ Loc. cit.



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the subject to interpret under God.³⁴² On this basis alone, Van Til holds, can man think of objective knowledge.³⁴³

If man's knowledge is both partial and true, then the problem of "antinomies" or paradoxes is more clearly understood.³⁴⁴ It would seem that if God controls, knows, and interprets all things, then man cannot add anything to this system.³⁴⁵ The historical would be meaningless, scientific endeavor fruitless. One cannot add water to a full bucket.³⁴⁶ But if God is completely coherent and man is not, then man has to learn to live with apparent ambiguity and with the faith that all phenomena is ultimately coherent.³⁴⁷

Van Til depends upon Dooyewerd for the argument that science is totally dependent upon the Christian presupposition for its principle of coherence. Partial truths are insufficient in themselves; they are only truths in the context of theoretical truths which presuppose the totality of truth.³⁴⁸ For example, "the proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$ is not 'true in itself,' but only in the context of the laws of number and the logical laws of

³⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

³⁴³ Loc. cit.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁴⁶ Loc. cit.

³⁴⁷ Theology, p. 43.

³⁴⁸ Christianity in Conflict, II, 3, p. 52.



thought."³⁴⁹ The function of science is to find the revelational truths of God in the whole of created reality.³⁵⁰ Controlled by the Christian presupposition, the scientist rules out certain hypotheses that deny the systematic relationship of the universe to God.³⁵¹ The natural man suppresses this at every point in his knowledge of things,³⁵² being restrained only by the gift of God's common-grace.³⁵³ By the same common-grace principle, Christian and non-Christian can cooperate in scientific and humanitarian enterprises.³⁵⁴ Simultaneously, the Christian must challenge the entire freedom-nature scheme of autonomous man in the interest of showing that on ITS terms the methods of science, theology and philosophy "lead from nowhere into nothing."³⁵⁵

E. SIN AND ITS CURSE

As in his theory of being, so Van Til feels compelled to introduce the problem of sin and condemnation into his theory of knowledge, for "the question of knowledge is an ethical question at its root."²⁵⁶ True knowledge

³⁴⁹Loc. cit.

³⁵⁰Defense, p. 97.

³⁵¹Ibid., p. 99, cf. Theology, p. 15.

³⁵²Theology, p. 15.

³⁵³Defense, p. 174, 175.

³⁵⁴Loc. cit.

³⁵⁵Case for Calvinism, p. 109.

³⁵⁶Defense, p. 17.



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is not only intellectual assent to propositions, but "knowing and loving God."³⁵⁷ To know the world truly is to know God truly, and this is the work of Christ.³⁵⁸ He adds, "From what has been said, it has already become apparent that it is through Christ that the unity of science is to be attained."³⁵⁹

Seen in this light, the Christian can no longer imagine the sinful mind to be "normal."³⁶⁰ Christ transforms the fallen consciousness into regenerate consciousness³⁶¹ that now desires once more to be "receptively reconstructive"³⁶² concerning "the revelational material in which he lives, moves and has his being."³⁶³ Apart from Christ, man's mind is characterized by self-frustration.³⁶⁴

SUMMARY OF THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Van Til affirms that it is beyond human capacities to integrate the antinomies of determinism and indeterminism into a meaningful combination.³⁶⁵ On the intellectual basis of autonomy either man has to claim

³⁵⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁵⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁶² Loc. cit.

³⁶³ Intellectual Challenge, p. 14.

³⁶⁴ Theology, p. 92.

³⁶⁵ Intellectual Challenge, p. 40.



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that both are absurd, claim to have comprehensive knowledge, or claim to know nothing. On the Christian two-layer theory of knowledge man has the only coherent foundation for science. On this basis man does not need exhaustive knowledge to have objective and true knowledge. Sin has obscured man's knowledge, but common-grace enables Christian and non-Christian to cooperate. The foundation of knowledge is essentially Christological.

III. THE PHILOSOPHY OF ETHICS

Sooner or later, says Van Til, all ethical writers must deal with man's summum bonum, criterion and motivation.³⁶⁶ Van Til relies on the simplicity of the Reformed Confessions that the highest good of man is the glory of God.³⁶⁷ In the temporal realm, God is glorified when His kingdom becomes man's summum bonum, His revealed will man's criterion, and His life-giving Spirit motivates man to obey and love Him.³⁶⁸

Relating his philosophies of being and knowledge to ethics, Van Til claims that, surrounded by revelation and possessing God's image, "man's very constitution as a rational and moral being is itself revelational to man,³⁶⁹ and, that God's revealed moral attribute of goodness "forms

³⁶⁶Defense, p. 51.

³⁶⁷ cf. Westminster Confession, question 1.

³⁶⁸Defense, p. 51.

³⁶⁹Apologetics, p. 55.



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the foundation of true Christian ethics."³⁷⁰ In contrast, the ideal in every non-Christian ethic is said to be "no more than an abstract principle of goodness"³⁷¹ subject to the ultimacy of change³⁷² because nothing prevents "man from making himself his own summum bonum."³⁷³ Nor can any "non-Christian system of thought find a solution for the question of human responsibility"³⁷⁴ as long as its God is finite, powerless and unknowable.³⁷⁵ Van Til wonders if there can be any meaning in ethical words like obedience, disobedience, love and hate apart from "the background of the self-determinate triune God of Scripture."³⁷⁶

The basic differences between Christian and non-Christian ethics in Van Til's view are, first, "the acceptance, or denial, of the ultimately self-determinative will of God";³⁷⁷ secondly, the non-Christian assumption of the "ultimacy of chance that either makes the determinate good an achievement, or it sets the good out of relation to its environment, and therewith destroys its value,"³⁷⁸ and thirdly, the non-Christian idea that man's

³⁷⁰Theology, p. 238.

³⁷¹Loc. cit,

³⁷²Loc. cit,

³⁷³Loc. cit,

³⁷⁴Ibid., p. 251.

³⁷⁵Christianity in Conflict, I, 2, p. 94, 95.

³⁷⁶Theology of James Daane, p. 119.

³⁷⁷Defense, p. 62.

³⁷⁸Ibid., p. 61.



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moral activity is "creatively constructive"³⁷⁹ vs. the Christian idea of it being "receptively reconstructive."³⁸⁰

A. THE SUMMUM BONUM OF ETHICS: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Whenever Van Til discusses the Christian summum bonum, he does it in terms of original man in the state of righteousness. Only this is "the normal state of affairs"³⁸¹ by which all other theories of the summum bonum must be judged.

1. THE SUMMUM BONUM IDEALLY CONSIDERED: THE INDIVIDUAL

According to Van Til, God desired man to set before himself the ideal of the glory of God,³⁸² that man would seek His glory directly in religious activity and indirectly in ethical activity.³⁸³ These distinctions are seen merely as a matter of emphasis in the temporal sphere because "strictly speaking, God's glory cannot be increased."³⁸⁴ As emphases, however, religion tends to deal with the will of man in the act of adoration to God, while ethics is more concerned with the "driving and directing forces" of personality in the act of obedience³⁸⁵ to God as these are expressed in dealings with fellow men. Both religion and ethics deal with the whole personality³⁸⁶ in terms of the intimate relationship of the

³⁷⁹Ibid., p. 53.

³⁸⁰Loc. cit.

³⁸¹Ethics, p. 53.

³⁸²Ibid., p. 38.

³⁸³Loc. cit.

³⁸⁴Loc. cit.

³⁸⁵Ibid., p. 40.

³⁸⁶Ibid., p. 39.



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individual with society³⁸⁷ through historical process³⁸⁸ as "revealing of God and as genuinely significant for the development of God's purpose with the universe."³⁸⁹

The most vital aspect in realizing the kingdom of God as the Ideal is that man sees himself as "God's vicegerent in history."³⁹⁰ Man is given a central place in the universe³⁹¹ as the head of all creation. All things in the universe are in "covenant relation with one another"³⁹² so that even the flowers of the field glorify God "indirectly and consciously through man."³⁹³ As King over God's domain, man ought, above all, to seek self-realization as the most direct way of glorifying God.³⁹⁴ Man realizes himself in three ways. First, he learns to develop his own will to its highest capacities.³⁹⁵ To serve God spontaneously, "man's will needs to become increasingly spontaneous in its reactivity."³⁹⁶ He becomes increasingly sensitive to his "subordination" to God and his

³⁸⁷Loc. cit.

³⁸⁸Loc. cit.

³⁸⁹Ibid., p. 40.

³⁹⁰Ibid., p. 41, "Vicegerent: acting in the place of another," Winston Dictionary.

³⁹¹Loc. cit.

³⁹²Loc. cit.

³⁹³Loc. cit.

³⁹⁴Ibid., p. 41, 42.

³⁹⁵Loc. cit.

³⁹⁶Loc. cit.



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"coordination" to his fellow men and "therefore increasingly spontaneous in his desire to maintain these relationships."³⁹⁷ His will develops as he exercises obedience to God. "A neutral will cannot develop because it cannot function."³⁹⁸

Secondly, "man's will needs to become increasingly fixed in its self-determination"³⁹⁹ as he reflects the self-determination of God.⁴⁰⁰ "An unstable man would be useless in the Kingdom of God";⁴⁰¹ so he needs solidity of moral character. This self-determination refers to "man's subconscious processes as well as to man's self-conscious processes."⁴⁰²

Thirdly, "man's will must increase in momentum." His area of activity grows larger in proportion to his responsibility, spontaneity and determination.

In respect to this self-realization, says Van Til, all believers should oppose the commonly held notions of determinism and indeterminism which "place man in an impersonal environment"⁴⁰⁴ that excludes God.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁹⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁰⁰ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰¹ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 44.



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"This is of the utmost significance for the proper conception of his freedom."⁴⁰⁵ For man to be free, there must be nothing in his environment or in himself that would prevent him from doing God's will.⁴⁰⁶ Van Til qualifies this in reference to the types of psychology that find determinism in the drives and instincts of the "subliminal self" motivating man.⁴⁰⁷ He says that man was created to be a replica of God, though he could not, as a temporal being, be entirely self-conscious. "Man can never become pure act as God is pure act,"⁴⁰⁸ for man is subject to change. Nevertheless, as originally created his "will controlled his subconscious life, while after the fall man's sub-conscious life controlled his will."⁴⁰⁹ Man now has become the "slave of his instincts"⁴¹⁰ which are turned against God. Thus man has lost his freedom to become self-realized apart from grace in Christ and the empowering activity of the Spirit.⁴¹¹

2. THE SUMMUM BONUM IDEALLY CONSIDERED: SOCIETY

The immediate task of society is "the self-realization of every finite personality,"⁴¹² but presently this is hampered by the necessity to

⁴⁰⁵ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁰⁸ Loc. cit.

⁴⁰⁹ Loc. cit.

⁴¹⁰ Loc. cit.

⁴¹¹ Christianity in Conflict, I, 1, p. 6.

⁴¹² Ethics, p. 47.



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repair the damages of sin.⁴¹³ If the mind and will of man had not been effected by sin the successive generations could have accomplished unlimited achievements, and self-realization of each individual in developing spontaneity and power of the will would "bring about righteousness in society."⁴¹⁴ Competition would only serve to enhance other men not destroy them.⁴¹⁵

In contrast, Van Til says any ethic that depends upon the "principle of individuation is ultimately non-rational."⁴¹⁶ On such a principle one man's personality can only be developed "by way of contrast to other men's individual personalities."⁴¹⁷ Law will be seen only in formal, abstract terms "correlative to non-rational individuality,"⁴¹⁸ making it imperative for each man to make his own applications. Self-realization would then be at the expense of society as a whole,⁴¹⁹ whereas in the New Testament sense, every member of society has a function within the whole organism.⁴²⁰

Christian ethics, implies Van Til, favors prosperous use of the world because it does not view matter as evil per se, as does Thomas

⁴¹³Loc. cit.

⁴¹⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁴¹⁵cf. to Van Til's discussion of Kant's theory that the ethical self must be sufficient to itself in order to be truly free. In Modern Ethical Theories, Chapter III, "Speculation and Revelation," p. 22f.

⁴¹⁶Loc. cit.

⁴¹⁷Loc cit. cf. p. 62, 63.

⁴¹⁸Loc. cit.

⁴¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

⁴²⁰Loc. cit.



Aquinas, or Arminianism to a lesser degree;⁴²¹ neither does it posit prosperity,⁴²² happiness,⁴²³ utility,⁴²⁴ or good will⁴²⁵ as ends in themselves nor as non-rational principles, nor as means to an end, only as the by-products of seeking the Kingdom of God. There must be no ulterior motives in seeking God's glory.⁴²⁶

3. THE NON-CHRISTIAN SUMMUM BONUM

Van Til charges that all non-Christian ethics take for granted the normality of present existence⁴²⁷ which assumes that there will "never be a perfect world."⁴²⁸ Correlative with this is the assumption of inherent evil in matter,⁴²⁹ although this may sometimes be referred to as "irrationality."⁴³⁰ This, he says, effects a psychological dualism; either the rational and the sensual are seen in continuous internal strife,⁴³¹ as in Greek thinking, or as in modern times, "ethics tends to become an art of skillfully manipulating the drives and instincts of man in order to accomplish

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 49, 50.

⁴²² Loc. cit.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴²⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 55, cf. Defense, p. 62.

⁴²⁸ Loc. cit.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 56, 57, cf. also Psychoanalysis of Religion, p. 127.

⁴³⁰ Christianity in Conflict, I, 2, p. 73.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 60.



the greatest amount of good and prevent the greatest amount of evil.⁴³² on the belief that man lacks a "definitely and intellectually conceived goal."⁴³³ On the other hand, Christian ethics sees man as originally created as a whole personality in perfect harmony with himself, hence tries to avoid the intellectualistic-voluntaristic dualism.⁴³⁴

Society is also seen as an integrated whole. Although nations seem to have unique characteristics because God gave them different gifts, He intended those gifts to be used for all peoples.⁴³⁵ There is more than just a "concidental resemblance between the various ethical ideals of various peoples."⁴³⁶ It is imperative to think of the family of man,⁴³⁷ not just "an aggregate of individuals."⁴³⁸ This principle of an organic society provides the proper basis for parental authority, whereas the principle of individuation runs either to the perverted extremes of parental autocracy or of the autocracy of the child, or also replaces the autocracy of the king with a "false democracy which seeks the ultimate source of authority in the multitude of men, without recognition of God."⁴³⁹ The

⁴³² Loc. cit.

⁴³³ Loc. cit.

⁴³⁴ Loc. cit.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴³⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴³⁷ Loc. cit.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴³⁹ Loc. cit.



middle-of-the-roader ideal man of Aristotle is no solution either, for it subverts "the idea of the possibility of a perfect man."⁴⁴⁰

4. THE BIBLICAL SUMMUM BONUM

Van Til postulates four differences between Old and New Testament ethics in relation to the Biblical summum bonum.⁴⁴¹ First, all Scripture speaks of an absolute ethical ideal. Secondly, the Kingdom of God is a gift. Thirdly, a part of the task of realizing that kingdom is absorbed in eradicating the works of evil. Fourthly, the ideal will never be realized in the present world.

Christian ethics must concentrate on the "original existence of a perfect man,"⁴⁴² a concept only found in the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁴³ In the light of the absolute requirements of perfection in the moral law,⁴⁴⁴ the promises to Israel of a permanent country,⁴⁴⁵ and the progressive nature of revelation,⁴⁴⁶ it is easier to understand the reasons for the threats and penalties incurred by disobedience.⁴⁴⁷ In both Testaments "the reward for obedience is that of eternal life in the presence of God";⁴⁴⁸ with no

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁴² Loc. cit.

⁴⁴³ Loc. cit.

⁴⁴⁴ Loc. cit.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁴⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁴⁷ Loc. cit.

⁴⁴⁸ Loc. cit.



concept of an in-between state for immortal souls; it is an either-or. Apart from God the woe is eternal and complete.⁴⁴⁹

In Scripture, says Van Til, "the sin of man is definitely set forth as the cause of all physical evil."⁴⁵⁰ Consequently, every act has moral significance.⁴⁵¹ The Old Testament ordinances on hygiene and the burial of the dead taught that evil was introduced by man and has no place in God's world; disease is abnormal and man responsible.⁴⁵²

The joy of the Kingdom-ideal is that God effects a perfect redemption through Christ, delivering men from sin and re-establishing the principle of harmony in the inward man and between men.⁴⁵³

The task of Biblical ethics is "the destruction of evil within man and round about man, moral and physical."⁴⁵⁴ This is the negative but unavoidable task of every believer;⁴⁵⁵ for sin insults the holiness of God and prevents man's self-realization.⁴⁵⁶ At the same time, this negative aspect of Christian ethics has brought unfavorable criticism, especially when the Old Testament required destruction of God's enemies.⁴⁵⁷ Van Til

⁴⁴⁹ Loc. cit.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁵² Loc. cit.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p. 72-74.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁵⁵ Loc. cit.

⁴⁵⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 77.



argues that the Old Testament goal had to be reached in externalistic fashion while in New Testament times it is done in "more spiritual or internalistic ways."⁴⁵⁸

Lastly, the Biblical summum bonum is other-worldly; it is "an ethics of hope."⁴⁵⁹ The Christian looks for the complete renovation of the universe "in God's own good time."⁴⁶⁰ In that hope, he looks for perfect righteousness in his resurrection in Christ.⁴⁶¹

B. THE CRITERION FOR ETHICS: GOD'S REVEALED WILL

Van Til claims that the notion of a moral or "common consciousness" is insufficient as the standard for Christian ethics for it has too many contradictions.⁴⁶² The only way, he says, that we can properly imagine the propriety of a moral consciousness is if it "has never functioned apart from God,"⁴⁶³ a position rejected by non-Christian ethics.⁴⁶⁴ Van Til does not deny that a general moral consciousness exists, but that man's perception of right and wrong has been subverted by sin, and that in cases where there is conflict between intuition or conscience, and revealed principles, the latter must always prevail.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁵⁸ Loc. cit. cf. also p. 104f.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁶⁰ Loc. cit.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁶⁴ Loc. cit., cf. discussion of Windelband, Modern Ethical Theories, I, p. 1-6.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 119.



The only logical standard of ethics for the Christian is "in the revealed will of God,"⁴⁶⁶ and centers in the doctrines of God, creation, the fall of man and of redemption in Christ.⁴⁶⁷ Its foundation also rests in the covenantal relationship between God and man.⁴⁶⁸

C. THE MOTIVATION BEHIND ETHICS: REGENERATION

1. SIN AS ETHICAL

Van Til opposes any ethics that views man's sin as an aspect of his finiteness⁴⁶⁹ or as metaphysical tension⁴⁷⁰ because these both imply a "low view of sin"⁴⁷¹ and therefore a "low view of the atonement."⁴⁷² By such methods, he writes it is possible to obliterate the concepts of the substitution of Christ for man, the transference of sin to Him and the need for miraculous grace.⁴⁷³ The Christian needs to affirm the ethical basis of sin and the total depravity of man in order to proclaim the necessity of God's grace⁴⁷⁴ and the regeneration of the Spirit.

⁴⁶⁶Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁶⁷Defense, p. 66.

⁴⁶⁸Christianity in Conflict, I, 3, p. 138.

⁴⁶⁹Defense, p. 58; Ethics, p. 36; Intellectual Challenge, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁰Case for Calvinism, p. 91f.

⁴⁷¹Christianity in Conflict, I, 2, p. 59.

⁴⁷²Loc. cit.

⁴⁷³Ibid., I, 1, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., I, 3, p. 123, cf. Defense, p. 54.



2. THE REGENERATED CONSCIOUSNESS

Although the consciousness is reinstated, it is merely so in principle.⁴⁷⁵ Nevertheless it now serves as a "reference point."⁴⁷⁶ However it must constantly test itself and sharpen its sensitivity to the inward work of God by regular contact with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures,⁴⁷⁷ since it often errs. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to enable man to submit his consciousness to an objective standard outside of itself.⁴⁷⁸

However, moral consciousness implies responsibility, and if regenerate man must learn to obey the revealed will of God as his rule of faith and practice, how can he develop his self-determination? Van Til's answer to this is the Reformed doctrine of the "Adiaphora."⁴⁷⁹ The Scripture lays out the basic principles of ethics but often omits the details or the application. The believer must integrate various principles and apply them as he keeps before himself the controlling ideal of God's glory. Thus there is a wide area for disagreement and debate among Christians and a range of activities that are morally indifferent in themselves, their moral significance entirely depending upon the attitude and purpose of the Christian using them.

⁴⁷⁵ Defense, p. 55.

⁴⁷⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁷⁷ Loc. cit.

⁴⁷⁸ Ethics, p. 128.

⁴⁷⁹ Material taken from lecture notes. "Adiaphora" means things indifferent in themselves.



3. CONSCIENCE AND GUILT

The concepts of conscience and guilt, here summarized, have been previously discussed under various topics. It is obvious that, for Van Til, the idea of man's responsibility for his own sin implies belief in an absolute God who is a moral Being and who holds man responsible for his actions. Accountability, he asserts, can only rest on this basis,⁴⁸⁰ for, "only an analogical act is a responsible act."⁴⁸¹ The conscience is an aspect of the image of God which, in turn, cannot be entirely suppressed.⁴⁸² As a created being, man possesses character; he is not an "intellectual and moral blank."⁴⁸³ This sense of ethical power and responsibility to God is always present in his subconscious, if not clearly held in conscious awareness.⁴⁸⁴ Van Til feels that the more one tries to suppress this creator-creature awareness, the more clearly that relationship stands out.

Desiring to escape this relationship, man seeks freedom, authenticity, and identity in terms of his autonomous assumptions.⁴⁸⁵

Now it is precisely this sort of 'freedom' that is designated as slavery to sin in Scripture. For this sort of 'freedom' is based upon the repression of God as man's creator and law-giver. According to the Scriptures, man has become a sinner

⁴⁸⁰Ethics, p. 32.

⁴⁸¹Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁸²Intellectual Challenge, p. 1-7.

⁴⁸³Ethics, p. 34.

⁴⁸⁴Psychoanalysis of Religion, p. 132.

⁴⁸⁵Later Heidegger and Theology, p. 36.



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by his disobedience to God's requirements. Man's guilt is the result of this disobedience.⁴⁸⁶

Man lives with a gnawing sense of guilt manifested either when he is aware of his rejection of God, or when estranged from his fellow men, or when experiencing internal conflict. Even if barely glimmering in the recesses of his mind, it drives him to find meaning in life. Everywhere he finds substitutes for the eternal I-Thou relationship, but remains unsatisfied.⁴⁸⁷

By attempting to cut himself loose from God through univocal reasoning, man brings upon himself God's wrath. His sin further warps and corrupts his entire personality. Ideally, the intellect, will and emotions are equal,⁴⁸⁸ although the intellect has primacy in the economical operations,⁴⁸⁹ however sin not only creates conflict between the will, emotions and intellect, but also brings reason at variance with itself.⁴⁹⁰ In time, these elements adapt to this abnormal ethical estrangement so that man now believes that the disruptive conditions within himself and his environment are normal and permanent; on such terms, guilt and conversion seem meaningless.

Nevertheless, says Van Til, it is not necessary for man to live burdened with guilt. Forgiveness and reconciliation with God is provided

⁴⁸⁶ Loc. cit.

⁴⁸⁷ Defense, p. 173, 174.

⁴⁸⁸ Van Til is not concerned whether one accepts a three-fold conception of man or a two-fold conception in which the emotions are included under the will as long as the ethical considerations are made prominent. Theology, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁹ Theology p. 32.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 33.



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in Christ's atonement.⁴⁹¹ Through Christ's righteousness, man can be "accounted ethically perfect."⁴⁹² Once ethically reunited to the Trinity regenerated man begins the "existential" process of self-understanding the "covenantal response of the whole man to the total and many-sided revelation of God to man in Christ and His Word."⁴⁹³ Under the control of the Holy Spirit, man grows in freedom, power and spontaneity in his responses to the will of God.

Warfield⁴⁹⁴ directs attention to the perfect man, Jesus, who maintained a perfect symmetry between all elements of His personality, although He manifested the strongest emotions of both love and wrath, not because He held to the primacy of the intellect, but because as the sinless One, He showed that powerful emotions are naturally in accord with the will of God.

⁴⁹¹Later Heidegger and Theology, p. 36.

⁴⁹²Ethics, p. 35.

⁴⁹³Later Heidegger, op. cit., p. 41.

⁴⁹⁴Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies, p. 66.