

# CALLING VAN TIL TO THE STAND: A Reformed Biblical Counselor's Appraisal of the Label "Clinically-Informed" *Dr. Jared S. Poulton*<sup>1</sup>

For several years, the biblical counseling movement has been experiencing controversy over the appearance of a new qualifier to the discipline's name. Anecdotally, the label "clinically-informed" can be traced to biblical counselors such as Jonathan Holmes, Brad Hambrick, and Jason Kovacs.<sup>2</sup> These biblical counselors posture themselves as standing within the mainstream of the biblical counseling movement in doctrine and practice, affirming the doctrinal and confessional statements of the Biblical Counseling Coalition.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, whether because of prior education or the location and focus of their counseling ministries, these counselors advertise themselves as offering counsel informed by insights, observations, and counseling tools that have their origins within the secular settings of clinical counseling.<sup>4</sup> The flagship organization providing intellectual leadership for this model is Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, with "clinically-informed biblical counseling" growing into a dominant

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<sup>2</sup> Jason Kovacs, "Are clinically-informed Biblical Counseling ministries drifting from Scripture?" X, July 16, 2025, 3:06pm, <https://x.com/jasonkovacs/status/1945560659728765137>.

<sup>3</sup> The Biblical Counseling Coalition, "BCC Confessional Statement," accessed April 29, 2025, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>; The Biblical Counseling Coalition, "BCC Doctrinal Statement," accessed April 29, 2025, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/doctrinal-statement/>.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this essay, "secular psychology" or "secular counseling" could also include insights from non-Christian social sciences, neuroscience, psychotherapies, and philosophical reflections upon human psychology. This paper will use the label "secular psychology" as a stand in for these options for the sake of space and to avoid drowning this paper in endless qualifications.

model among many para-church biblical counseling ministries.<sup>5</sup>

This essay will seek to answer an important question. Is it theologically justifiable to attach the qualifier “clinically-informed” to the practice of biblical counseling? To help biblical counselors wrestle with this issue, this author calls Cornelius Van Til to the stand. In several places, I have outlined the influence of Cornelius Van Til upon the discipline of biblical counseling.<sup>6</sup> As biblical counseling’s honorary “Godfather” and the most direct theological influence upon Jay Adams, the Dutch apologist Van Til provides biblical counselors with a hereditary conversation partner for discerning the theological trajectories within biblical counseling.

The aim of this essay simple. Imagine the hypothetical scenario in which a Westminster student asked Van Til, “What do you think of the label ‘clinically-informed’? Should Christians offer ‘clinically-informed’ counseling?” This essay will attempt to reconstruct the concepts Van Til would have used to analyze the label “clinically-informed” at face value,<sup>7</sup> arguing that Van Til would have had

<sup>5</sup> See Nate Brooks, Tate Cockrell, Brad Hambrick, Kristin Kellen, and Sam Williams, “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, July 8, 2024, <https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf>. See also Christian Counseling Center Collaborative, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://ccccollab.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> See Jared S. Poulton, “Reforming Counseling: The Adaptation of Van Tilian Concepts by Jay Adams,” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024); Jared S. Poulton, “Cornelius Van Til: The Godfather of Biblical Counseling,” The Biblical Counseling Coalition, October 18, 2023, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/10/18/cornelius-van-til-the-godfather-of-biblical-counseling/>; Jared S. Poulton, “Presuppositional Counseling: An Introduction to Van Til’s Influence Upon Jay Adams,” The Biblical Counseling Coalition, August 2, 2024, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2024/08/02/presuppositional-counseling-an-introduction-to-van-tils-influence-upon-jay-adams/>.

<sup>7</sup> This comment is an important caveat that will protect my paper from misunderstanding. The aim of this paper is not to provide extensive engagement with the “clinically-informed” biblical counseling camp. It is essentially a Van Tilian thought experiment. This approach will most likely disappoint many, but the “clinically-informed” biblical counseling position is still growing into an established discipline. There are only a handful of blogs and articles that outline this approach. Also, there are signs that not all who use the label “clinically-informed” mean the same thing. Since I do not align myself with “clinically-informed” biblical counseling and I am not inside of this section of biblical counseling, I am not in a place to synthesize the major beliefs that inform this approach to counseling for critical analysis. My aim is different. Having given extensive attention to the writings of Cornelius Van Til, I am attempting to take the term at face value and analyze this label through Van Tilian concepts. By face value, I mean what the label itself communicates (being “informed” by clinical insights from secular psychology—but see also footnote 3). As the executive director of the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling, I am also attempting to provide clarity for those within our own organization concerning why I

two responses to the label “clinically-informed.” First, Van Til would conclude that, *in principle*, there are no issues with qualifying counsel from Scripture with clinical insights from psychology because of the unity between God’s revelation in nature and God’s revelation in Scripture. At the same time, Van Til—a man who reveled in nuance—would argue that, *in reality*, the label “clinically-informed” must wrestle with the complexities of man’s current epistemological state and three qualifications that offer warnings for a Christians engagement with secular psychology: (1) mystery, (2) hostility, and (3) priority. This essay will seek to reconstruct Van Til’s potential assessment of the label “clinically-informed” from these two vantage points (*in principle* and *in reality*).

## ASSESSING CLINICALLY-INFORMED BIBLICAL COUNSELING *IN PRINCIPLE*

The impulse to assess theological ideas both *in principle* and *in reality* reflects the fact that Van Til viewed the Christian system of truth as an “analogical” system. Central to Van Til’s epistemology is the Creator-creature distinction. As the eternal and omniscient source of all things, God alone has a comprehensive and exhaustive understanding of reality, including himself. “God is *completely self-comprehensive*. God is absolute rationality. God was and is the only self-contained whole, the system of absolute truth.”<sup>8</sup> Man’s understanding of reality, by necessity, is a finite and derivative reinterpretation of God’s system of knowledge. Therefore, Van Til viewed both reality and knowledge as operating upon two distinct planes: the “level of God’s existence” and the “level of man’s existence.”<sup>9</sup> Van Til writes, “Christians must also believe in two levels of knowledge, the level of God’s knowledge, which is absolutely comprehensive and self-contained, and the level of man’s knowledge, which is not comprehensive but is derivative and reinterpretative. Hence we say that as Christians we believe that man’s knowledge is analogical of God’s knowledge.”<sup>10</sup>

The analogical nature of human knowledge has a direct implication for the

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would not use this label to describe our approach to counseling.

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

epistemological endeavors of God's covenant creatures. God's knowledge of all things transcends human knowledge. Therefore, all of God's revelation to man, including God's revelation in Scripture, is necessarily *anthropomorphic*, or fitted for human understanding.<sup>11</sup> Human "activity" and "interpretation always runs alongside of and is subordinate to the main plan or purpose of God."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the truths within creation and biblical doctrines are not Lincoln Logs, nicely fitting together in ways that humans prefer. Everywhere man looks, he confronts mystery—or places where the intricate harmony of creation's truths surpasses human comprehension. Because of the analogical nature of knowledge, mystery exists only for man, not for God.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, man must leave room for mystery and tension, even in Scripture: "One must rather gather together all the facts and all the teachings of Scripture and organize them as best as he can, always mindful of the fact that such ordering is the ordering of the revelation of God, who is never fully comprehensible to man."<sup>14</sup>

Van Til's reliance upon analogical thinking appears within his liberal use of two qualifiers within his writings: "in principle" and "in reality." The phrase "in principle" allows Van Til to analyze a particular doctrine and its distinct qualities in isolation from other concerns. For example, Van Til often focuses his attention upon the doctrine of the antithesis, stressing its absolute and ethical nature as a principle of hostility within man. Standing on its own, the antithesis teaches that man is "*absolutely* or utterly, not partly opposed to God."<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Van Til argues that the antithesis only operates *in principle* and is restrained in human experience: "It is one of principle, not one of full expression. If the natural man fully expressed himself as he is in terms of the principle of ethical hostility to God that dwells within his soul, he would then be a veritable devil. Obviously he is often nothing of the sort. He is not at all as 'bad as he may be.'"<sup>16</sup>

As a single strand, Van Til can stress the absolute nature of his theological concepts. When seeking to compile human knowledge together into a coherent

<sup>11</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (1969; repr., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2023), 29.

<sup>12</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 192.

<sup>16</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 45.

system, Van Til acknowledges the presence of tensions and mysteries since the Christian's system of truth is an analogical system. Therefore, Van Til also addresses theological issues *in reality*. Continuing the example of man's fallen state, Van Til recognizes that "the man on the street is a complex individual."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the absolute ethical antithesis is qualified by man's natural moral nature as being made in God's image as well as the universal restraint of common grace.<sup>18</sup> This pattern of reasoning reveals Van Til's frustrating habit of stressing the absolute or essential nature of a theological truth only to introduce later other theological qualifications that inform man's experience of life in this world.<sup>19</sup>

This author believes that Van Til would apply a similar method of analysis to the question of "clinically-informed biblical counseling," considering the label "clinically-informed" from the twin perspectives of "*in principle*" and "*in reality*." In principle, the labels "clinically-informed" and "biblical counseling" place this discussion underneath the umbrella of God's revelation within creation and Scripture. At this point, biblical counselors may be curious as to why this discussion is not focusing solely on the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, which was originally included in my assignment for this essay. The sufficiency of Scripture does not receive extensive attention within Van Til's writings because Van Til believes that "God's revelation in nature, together with God's revelation in Scripture, form God's one grand scheme of covenant revelation of himself to man."<sup>20</sup> These two aspects of revelation form "one general philosophy of history," "supplementing" and "presupposing" one another.<sup>21</sup> Central to Van Til's system is the belief that every fact within creation is a "revelational fact." He explicitly states, "for any fact to be a fact at all, it must be a revelational fact."<sup>22</sup> In essence, Van Til is arguing that every aspect of creation (including every fact) testifies that it is what it is because it was created by God. "The flowers of the field and the cattle on a thousand hills are a revelation of God. If the whole universe was

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<sup>17</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 229.

<sup>18</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 229.

<sup>19</sup> The clearest example of this habit is seen in Van Til's discussions of 1 John 3:9 and the principle of *non posse peccare* ("not able to sin") as applying to Christians within this present life. See Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 66–67.

<sup>20</sup> Cornelius Van Til, "Nature and Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, ed. Ned Bernard Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 267.

<sup>21</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, In Defense of Biblical Christianity 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 9.

created to show forth the glory of God, as the Scriptures constantly say that it was, then it could not do this unless it was a revelation of God.”<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, Van Til comments that “the face of God appears in all the facts and principles with which philosophy and science deal.”<sup>24</sup>

The revelational nature of the facts of philosophy and science is central to Van Til’s apologetic. Van Til sees the Christian apologist walking into every science lab, philosopher’s study, and even therapist’s office, and confronting them with the theological truth that their facts and principles are only true because God exists. The scientist “in the laboratory and the philosopher in his study are both dealing with their materials as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Christian must readily acknowledge the philosophy of facts presented within the Scriptures. The Bible provides the essential principles for “the interpretation of every fact in our lives.”<sup>26</sup> Scripture sheds “its indispensable light on everything we as Christians study.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Christians should not “limit” themselves “entirely to the Bible when we study anything else.”<sup>28</sup> When Christians study theology, “we must allow God to teach us.”<sup>29</sup> When Christians engage in the sciences, “we need only to open our eyes and look around.”<sup>30</sup> From the beginnings of creation by virtue of the covenant of works, “natural revelation” was “incorporated into the idea of a covenant relationship of God with man.”<sup>31</sup> Nature speaks with as much authority to man as Scripture.<sup>32</sup> In this way, Van Til can conclude that the facts of the universe “are what they are because they express together the *system of truth* revealed in the Bible.”<sup>33</sup>

To bring this reflection closer to the task of counseling, biblical counselors cannot overlook Van Til’s inclusion of “[man’s] own psychological activity” under the umbrella of “revelational” facts.<sup>34</sup> Truly, Van Til’s works contain the

<sup>23</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 120–21.

<sup>24</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” 267.

<sup>32</sup> Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” 274.

<sup>33</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” 274. See also Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 73.

rough outline of a system of psychology, despite counseling and psychology not being his primary field of emphasis. His works recognize the distinction between the conscious and subconscious realms of human psychology.<sup>35</sup> He outlines a brief faculty psychology, discussing the relationship between the faculties of the intellect and the will, “natural powers” that allow man to study God’s creation.<sup>36</sup> He references “insanity” or “irrational” behavior among the human race.<sup>37</sup> He also acknowledges the tensions between the body and the soul, including the need for developments in “somatic aspects” of the “psychological sciences.”<sup>38</sup> In summary, Van Til believes that this “revelation that comes to man by way of his own rational and moral nature is no less objective to him than that which comes to him through the voice of trees and animals.”<sup>39</sup>

Psychology plays a critical role in two areas of Van Til’s corpus. First, Van Til is confident that Christians have an identifiable structure to their psychology (that can be studied) since human beings were made in God’s image. Van Til defines the *imago Dei* as the reality that man is “like God in everything in which a creature can be like God,” including the fact that “like God . . . he is a personality.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, man can apply their reason to the material and immaterial aspects of human nature and discern the basic structure of a biblical psychology:

God has created man with intellect, feeling, and will. God created man soul and body. God created the first man as a full-grown person but has caused later generations to spring up by growth from childhood to maturity. God has related man’s self-conscious to his subconscious life, his childhood to his maturity. Every activity of every aspect of the human personality, at any stage of its development, acts as a derivative personality before the background of the absolute personality of God. *Man is an analogical personality.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016), 196–98.

<sup>36</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, 192; Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 192–93. See also, Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 71–88.

<sup>37</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, 193. Cornelius Van Til, *Unpublished Manuscripts of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. Eric H. Sigward, elect. ed. (New York: Labels Army, 1997)

<sup>39</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, 198.



Second, Van Til would not give his approval to biblical counselors who downplay a discernible structure of human psychology within general revelation.<sup>42</sup> Van Til views man's internal nature as a primary arena for apologetic sparring with non-Christians. A central aspect of Van Til's psychology is the Reformed doctrine of the *sensus deitatis* (sense of deity).<sup>43</sup> In essence, human nature and man's universal psychology allow Van Til to call the non-Christian's bluff. The non-Christian *knows* that God exists because the knowledge of God's existence has been implanted within his very being (Rom 2:14–15). "In the *sensus deitatis* (sense of deity), then, we find welling up within the consciousness of man an immediate awareness of the fact that God is the Creator and sustainer of this world. . . . As soon as man is conscious, he is also self-conscious; and as soon as he is self-conscious he is a covenant breaker."<sup>44</sup> In other words, the non-Christian's own psychology is Van Til's greatest ally. A biblical psychology allows Van Til to press upon the non-Christian the truth that the non-Christian knows that God exists, even if he suppresses this truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18).

Returning to the question at hand, would Van Til disagree with the label "clinically-informed biblical counseling"? In principle, no. Van Til's own apologetic is "psychologically-informed," or "informed" by the testimony of Scripture to the nature of reality and human nature that allows Van Til to use the non-Christian's own psychology against them. Truly, Van Til's writings reflect no incongruence between the truths of Scripture and the facts of psychology. *In principle*, Van Til would see no reason to divorce counsel derived from Scripture with observations and insights from the scientific study of human psychology, since the facts of Scripture and psychology are part of God's comprehensive understanding of reality. Van Til's writings confirm this idea: "Ministers of the gospel should have a knowledge of a sound psychological approach to men. . . . [We] must know Christian psychology and must be able to distinguish it from non-Christian psychology."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Winston Smith's review of *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* and comments on general revelation and Van Til in Winston T. Smith, "Common Ground and Course Corrections: An Essay Review of Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 1 (2014): 38–52.

<sup>43</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 161.

<sup>44</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 161.

<sup>45</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, In *Defense of Biblical Christianity* 4 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 2.



## ASSESSING CLINICALLY-INFORMED BIBLICAL COUNSELING IN REALITY

Despite the seemingly conclusive ending of the previous section, this analysis of Van Tilian thought is not yet complete. This consideration of the label “clinically-informed” has yet to wrestle with the present theological tensions surrounding this label. Van Til’s writings reflect the position that, in the garden, man would have been free to walk and commune with God and would have faced few obstacles in the study of his own material and immaterial psychology. Yet, this reality does not reflect the Christian’s current experience. We live in a post-Genesis 3 world. Thus, Van Til’s writings reflect the position that any Christian engagement with secular (i.e., non-Christian) psychology must account for the three following theological qualifications: (1) mystery, (2) hostility, and (3) priority.<sup>46</sup>

### Mystery

Van Til views the concept of “mystery” as a central component to the Bible’s understanding of reality because of analogical thinking. God’s knowledge of all things is comprehensive, transcending all human understanding in its depths and understanding of the created world (see Job 38–41). On the other hand, the “interpretation that man would give to anything in this world can therefore never be comprehensive and exhaustive. . . . God as absolute Light is back of the facts of the universe.” For example, Van Til argues that the atom is “mysterious for us, but not for God.”<sup>47</sup> Mystery originally was not a problem for Christians.<sup>48</sup> The non-Christian, in his rejection of God, desires to be “as God” in becoming “himself the standard of truth” (see Gen 3:1–7).<sup>49</sup> In essence, an essential aspect of the fall is the non-Christian’s desire to set themselves up as “the ultimate interpreter of

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<sup>46</sup> As an important comment, this following section should not be read as this author accusing all “clinically-informed” biblical counselors of committing the errors outlined below. This essay is an analysis whereby the author is applying Van Til’s theological system to the qualifier “clinically-informed.” The “clinically-informed” biblical counseling camp is broad enough that some biblical counselors may be conscious of these concerns. Others may have different theological convictions concerning a theological epistemology for counseling. This section should be read as theological guardrails that Van Til would challenge all biblical counselors to heed in their engagements with secular psychology. Van Til would grow concerned with “clinically-informed” biblical counseling inasmuch as they were ignoring these theological qualifications.

<sup>47</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 60–61.

<sup>48</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 63.

this world” in the pursuit of “*comprehensive knowledge*” of reality.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the non-Christian inevitably “misinterprets all things” because his method and starting point begin in man instead of God.<sup>51</sup> In summary, the Christian view of mystery is that there is “mystery for man but not for God, while the non-Christian holds that there is either no mystery for God or man or there is mystery for both God and man.”<sup>52</sup>

If there is a discipline that exemplifies the hubris of ignoring the limitations of human knowledge and irresponsible interventions, psychiatry and psychology together top the list. Despite their current reverence within the contemporary cultural zeitgeist, the psychological disciplines have historically suffered from a “crisis of legitimacy.”<sup>53</sup> In previous centuries, psychology, psychiatry, and social work were once considered “odd and unusual professions,”<sup>54</sup> being dismissed as “mad-doctors, shrinks, bughouse doctors, and worse.”<sup>55</sup> This skeptical posture has been warranted. Writing in 1941, medical historian Gregory Zilboorg observes that “at no time, even today and particularly in the eighteenth century, has psychiatry enjoyed the advantage of having the causes of mental diseases actually known.”<sup>56</sup> This situation has yet to change. Bessel van der Kolk, in critiquing the DSM and advancing an approach grounded in analyzing “social systems,” observes that the discipline of psychiatry “aspires to define mental illness as precisely as, let’s say, cancer of the pancreas, or streptococcal infection of the lungs. However, given the complexity of the mind, brain, and human attachment systems, we have not come even close to achieving that sort of precision.”<sup>57</sup>

When biblical counselors speak of being “clinically-informed,” Van Til may respond, “clinically-informed by what?” To date, there are no “physical tests” that can confirm the existence of a mental disorder or trace a mental disorder

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<sup>50</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 63.

<sup>51</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Scull, *Psychiatry and Its Discontents* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 29.

<sup>54</sup> George A. Bonanno, *The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience is Changing how We Think about PTSD* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 55.

<sup>55</sup> Scull, *Psychiatry and Its Discontents*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory Zilboorg, *A History of Medical Psychology* (New York: Norton, 1941), 304.

<sup>57</sup> Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 139, see also 166-170.

to a clear pathogen or biological event.<sup>58</sup> The categories of the DSM-5 do not identify the etiologies of mental illnesses but record clusters of psychological symptoms (neo-Kraepelinian), with distinctions between different diagnoses often decided by committee.<sup>59</sup> Despite the concerning evidence that laypersons are more susceptible to believing scientific studies when supported with graphics of brain scans (The “seductive allure of neuroscience explanations” (SANE)),<sup>60</sup> scientists have only recently begun to map completely the brains of creatures such as fruit flies and mice, “let alone successfully tackling the infinitely more complex task of unraveling the billions on billions of connections that make up our own brains.”<sup>61</sup> Even if scientists successfully trace the billions of neurological connections in the human brain, they then must confront the perennial questions of the relationship between mind and matter as well as correlation and causation. Truly, secular psychiatrists and psychologists have a poor track record of “cutting nature at its joints,” a reality reflected in the following quote from psychologist Richard J. McNally:

The boundary between mental distress and mental illness will never be neat and clean. What counts as a mental disorder depends on shifting cultural, political, and economic values as well as on scientific facts about how our psychology and biology can go wrong, producing suffering and functional impairment in everyday life. We’ll never have a clear-cut list of criteria that will enable us to identify all instances of mental disorder and exclude everything else.<sup>62</sup>

These comments do not lead to the conclusion that the psychological sciences contain nothing of value for Christians. The story of Susannah Cahalan’s descent

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<sup>58</sup> Bonanno, *The End of Trauma*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Bonanno, *The End of Trauma*, 37. For the controversial history of the decision making behind the categories within the various editions of the DSM, see Andrew Scull, *Desperate Remedies: Psychiatry’s Turbulent Question to Cure Mental Illness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2022), 299–356.

<sup>60</sup> See also Soo-hyun Im, Keisha Varma, and Sashank Varma, “Extending the Seductive Allure of Neuroscience Explanations Effect to Popular Articles about Educational Topics,” *British Journal of Educational Philosophy* 87, no. 4 (May 2017): 1–35. doi: 10.1111/bjep.12162.

<sup>61</sup> Scull, *Psychiatry and Its Discontents*, 237. See also Emma Sprooten, et al., “Addressing Reverse Inference in Psychiatric Neuroimaging: Meta-analyses of Task-Related Brain Activation in Common Mental Disorders,” *Human Brain Mapping* vol. 38, 4 (2017): 1846-1864. doi:10.1002/hbm.23486.

<sup>62</sup> Richard J. McNally, *What is Mental Illness?* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011), 212.

into and return from madness demonstrates that psychiatrists can be heroes.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Van Til would have jumped upon the inabilities of non-Christians to provide a comprehensive understanding of every fact within the psychological sciences as an opportunity to apply the transcendental argument famous within his apologetic. According to Van Til, when man rejects God, he seeks to become God. Therefore, the psychological sciences have two options: “Man *before the God of the Scriptures*” or “man *in the void*.”<sup>64</sup> In rejecting God, non-Christian thought holds to the “ultimacy of the mind of man” and “interprets everything with which he came into contact without reference to God.”<sup>65</sup> Van Til would argue that non-Christians are not rationally justified to offer any prescriptions or therapies until they understand all the facts of human psychology.<sup>66</sup> He does not let secular psychologists off the hook when they claim to deal with facts in a “neutral” way apart from metaphysics—how the facts relate together and the philosophy that outlines the relationship between facts and reality.<sup>67</sup> If they want to restore rationality to the psychological science, then non-Christians must believe in God.<sup>68</sup>

This unstable footing within contemporary psychiatry and psychology raises significant issues for being “clinically-informed.” The social and political forces that support the modern mental health complex (Big pharma, lobbyists, and activists) make it incredibly challenging for the average Christian (and biblical counselors without previous scientific or clinical training) to discern good science from pop psychology. Furthermore, while non-Christians will stumble upon various facts and observations concerning human psychology and behavior, a Christian theory of knowledge asserts that non-Christians will not ultimately understand these observations and facts without the corrective lenses of Scripture. “The Bible sheds its indispensable light on everything that we as Christians study,” writes Van Til.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Susannah Cahalan, *Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Evidences*, 199.

<sup>65</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 71, 70.

<sup>66</sup> See Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, 87–89.

<sup>67</sup> Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, 104–105.

<sup>68</sup> For clarification, this paragraph should not be read to conclude that Van Til would argue that non-Christians are unable to offer prescriptions or therapies until they fulfill this epistemological requirement. Rather, the non-Christian lacks the rational justification for their therapies and prescriptions until they are able to provide a comprehensive intellectual foundation based solely upon human reason for psychology, an impossible task for a finite creature, unless they repent and begin their reasoning in God.

<sup>69</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37.

Van Til discusses the relationship between the truths of Scripture and the facts within God's creation in the following quote:

The Bible is at the center not only of every course, but of the curriculum as a whole. The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football, games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or by implication. . . . This view of Scripture, therefore, involves the idea that there is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account. We do not mean, of course, that one must go to the Bible rather than to the laboratory if one wishes to study the anatomy of the snake. But if one goes only to the laboratory and not also to the Bible, one will not have a full or even a true interpretation of the snake.<sup>70</sup>

Van Til argues that non-Christians are capable of making true observations about the world, often having a “better knowing of the things of this world than Christians have.”<sup>71</sup> Yet, he also asserts that there are two inevitable outcomes for these facts discerned from outside of Scripture. Either, these facts will find their place and meaning within “the system of truth presented in the Scripture” or a system of truth that has no reference to Scripture.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it is inevitable that the various systems of secular psychology will find themselves in competition with a Christian understanding of these same facts, resulting in conflict between Christian and non-Christian approaches to man and his problems.<sup>73</sup> Therefore,

<sup>70</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 19–20. Herman Bavinck writes, “Precisely as the book of the knowledge of God, Scripture has much to say also to the other sciences. It is a light on our path and a lamp for our feet, also with respect to science and art. It claims authority in all areas of life. . . . A great deal of what is related in Scripture is of fundamental significance also for the other sciences. The creation and fall of humankind, the unity of the human race, the flood, the rise of people and languages, etc. are facts of the highest significance also for the other sciences. At every moment science and art come into contact with Scripture; the primary principles for all of life are given us in Scripture. This truth may in no way be discounted.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 445.

<sup>71</sup> Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 150.

<sup>72</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 28.

<sup>73</sup> For clarification, the Christian and non-Christian systems of thought (and therefore biblical and non-Christian systems of counseling and psychology) are not entirely antithetical to one another (as Jay Adams originally proposed in *Competent to Counsel*). Since non-Christians live in

the label “clinically-informed” must not only confront the problem of mystery, but also, hostility.

## Hostility

Central to Van Til’s theology is a particular view of the doctrine of sin. For many Christians, sin is merely a matter of “falling short” or a “mistake.” It is a failure to fulfill God’s commandments. While these components are true, Van Til stresses the reality that the sinful heart is actively hostile and opposed to God. The natural man is “*absolutely* or utterly, not partly opposed to God.”<sup>74</sup> As Paul writes in Romans 8:7–8, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Van Til goes as far as to say that this principle is “Satanic. It is exclusively hostile to God. If it could it would destroy the work and plan of God. So far then as men self-consciously work from this principle, they have no notion in common with the believer. Their epistemology is informed by their ethical hostility to God.”<sup>75</sup>

As Van Til’s reflections reveal, if the non-Christian is consistent in their principle—“so far then as men self-consciously work from this principle”—their entire epistemology is opposed to God. Thankfully, the non-Christian is “not fully self-conscious of his own position.”<sup>76</sup> Contrary to many interpretations of Van Til, the Dutch apologist recognizes that non-Christians struggle to be consistent in their rejection of God. Rather, because of the “knowledge of God by virtue of his creation in the image of God” and “the restraining power of God’s common grace,” the ideas “with which he daily works do not proceed consistently.”<sup>77</sup> These necessary ethical qualifications explain how Van Til can allow room for the value of non-Christian knowledge and their relative moral goodness.<sup>78</sup>

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God’s world and interact with facts from creation that have their origins in God, it is impossible for them to construct a system of thought that is entirely antithetical to the Christian system of truth. Nevertheless, how Christians and non-Christians synthesize these facts will result in conflict. Non-Christians will seek to synthesize these facts apart from Scripture, Christians with Scripture, resulting in two conflicting systems.

<sup>74</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 192.

<sup>75</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 192.

<sup>76</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 192.

<sup>77</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 192.

<sup>78</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 195; Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 196.

Nevertheless, these ethical qualifications do not provide Christians with the license to baptize every secular theory or practice under the guise of “common grace.”<sup>79</sup> While non-Christians know God and his law according to their nature, they suppress this truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). Like Van Til, “I am now speaking of [man] as the covenant breaker.”<sup>80</sup> Epistemologically, or at the level of man’s consciousness, there is active hostility toward God. Therefore, even though man *ought* to believe in God’s existence because of the testimony to God throughout creation and in man’s heart, Van Til follows Calvin who argues that “no sinner reacts properly to God’s revelation.” He continues,

Is that too sweeping of a statement? It is simply the doctrine of total depravity. All sinners are covenant breakers. They have an axe to grind. They do not want to keep God in remembrance. They keep under the knowledge of God which is within them. That is they try as best they can to keep under this knowledge for fear they should look into the face of their judge. And since God’s face appears in every fact of the universe they oppose God’s revelation everywhere. They do not want to see the facts of nature for what they are; they do not want to see themselves for what they are.<sup>81</sup>

Van Til would be suspicious of the label “clinically-informed” for a specific reason. At face value, the label “clinically-informed” contains a supposed neutrality.<sup>82</sup> “Clinical knowledge” is the modern equivalent to hammers and saws—

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<sup>79</sup> Common grace should be understood as recognizing that non-Christians are capable of producing relative knowledge (from their reflections upon God’s creation, general revelation) and relative moral goodness (being made in God’s image, having the antithesis restrained) that is outside of Scripture but nevertheless consistent with the system of truth contained in the Scriptures and therefore useful for Christians in understanding human psychology and offering counsel. Common grace is always a limiting concept of the antithesis. Therefore, common grace cannot be a license to adopt non-Christian systems, to overlook the moral nature of secular systems and their methodologies, or to expose Christians to every conceivable non-Christian therapy. At the same time, it is impossible for non-Christians to avoid stumbling upon facts, observations, and methods that Christians would recognize as true and helpful, even if non-Christians are unable to understand ultimately why or how they are effective.

<sup>80</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 258.

<sup>81</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 301.

<sup>82</sup> See also the following quote from the SEBTS statement on CIBC, “RC/CIBC affirms alongside nouthetic counselors that common grace allows for extrabiblical knowledge to be of significant value in counseling. However, we disagree that all methods emerging from secular psychotherapy are by necessity tainted by their worldview. RC/CIBCers draw a distinction between an approach’s



morally neutral tools that man can use however they please. Nevertheless, there is nothing morally “neutral” (in relation to God) about the label of “clinically-informed” since the methods and systems of clinical psychology are the products of moral creatures who are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers. As Van Til writes, “The idea of disinterested or neutral knowledge is out of accord with the basic ideas of Christianity.”<sup>83</sup> The methods of the secular (i.e., non-Christian) sciences are the products of covenant breakers. Yes, these covenant breakers are who made in God’s image and experience the restraint of common grace, allowing glimmers of knowledge and relative moral goodness to appear in their labors, but they are also sinners who look at the world with “colored glasses” cemented to their faces.<sup>84</sup>

Jay Adams believed that non-Christian systems of thought, and therefore non-Christian systems of counseling, inevitably find themselves in conflict with God’s system of interpreting human experience and God’s methods of change found within the Scriptures. Adams writes,

The Bible itself provides the principles for understanding and for engaging in nouthetic counseling and directs Christian ministers to do such counseling as part of their life calling in the ministry of the Word (other Christians should counsel as God gives opportunity). Therefore, those who develop other systems, based on other sources of information, by which they attempt to achieve these same ends, by the very nature of the case *become competitive*.<sup>85</sup>

Van Til would have agreed. He comments,

The standards by which the fallen man judges himself are false

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worldview and its methods.” Nate Brooks, Tate Cockrell, Brad Hambrick, Kristin Kellen, and Sam Williams, “What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?” Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, July 8, 2024, <https://www.sebts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/What-is-RCCIBC.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 40. David Powlison concurs that “because science is not neutral and objective, its findings must always be evaluated and reinterpreted by Christian presuppositions.” David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (2007): 35.

<sup>84</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 302. The statements in this paragraph may sound absolute, but Van Til would have agreed and included them within his system, while recognizing the tensions of holding these truths together within an analogical system.

<sup>85</sup> Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, ix.

standards. That is the most important point in his case. Fallen man cannot by his own adopted criteria make a true analysis of his own condition. The remedies that he employs for his own salvation are the wrong remedies just because the diagnosis that he has made of his own disease is made by the wrong criterion. A medical doctor is able to prescribe the right medicine for a patient just because he, rather than the patient himself, has given the correct diagnosis of the patient's disease. In an infinitely deeper sense only Christ, the great physician, can diagnose the disease of men.<sup>86</sup>

In summary, Van Til would have found the descriptor “clinically-informed” unclear and potentially deceptive. The label feigns objectivity in a discipline fraught with moral judgments, frameworks, and choices, doing little to protect Christians from the moral (i.e., sinful) baggage associated with the counsel of non-Christians.<sup>87</sup> There are many “experts” leading secular counseling organizations, presenting “academic” papers, and conducting clinical trials who would fail every biblical test necessary for a counselor, and should never serve as a voice of guidance for Christians and pastors in their care of Christ's flock. Which clinical “experts” should inform the practice of biblical counseling?

## Priority

Finally, Van Til would have challenged the label “clinically-informed” on the matter of priority. A conscious choice confronts every counselor in the counseling room. When it becomes the counselor's turn to speak, *whose words does the counselee need to hear the most? Whose words are most relevant to the counselee's circumstances and situation?* Distinctive to the biblical counseling perspective of counselees is a “God-centered” view of life, meaning that counselors will fundamentally misunderstand people and their problems apart from recognizing human beings are made in God's image and made to live in relationship with him. This “God-oriented” insight informs the rich reflections on human experience that defined the legacy of David Powlison. In his defense of biblical counseling, Powlison writes,

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<sup>86</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> For clarification, this comment is the application of a Van Tilian concept, not an accusation that clinically-informed biblical counselors are trying to be deceptive. Van Til would have found the label morally deceptive at face value since he firmly believed that systems and methods are not neutral.

Christian faith understands psychology and psychotherapy as implications and outworkings of this God-centered point of view. We are told about God . . . and we realize the God-referential psychodynamic running through every human heart. We are told about God . . . and we learn what it means to be human. When other psychologies abstract people out of this true context, they theorize about an abstraction, never quite seeing the person.<sup>88</sup>

Most biblical counselors may not be aware that Powlison picked up this God-centered orientation from the writings of Van Til. In an interview at Westminster, Powlison comments that, despite his first difficulties with understanding Van Til's writings,

all that he is saying is that everything has its being, its existence, its meaning with respect to God. That's all it is. And it is just—Life is lived before the face of God. His famous diagram was—there is a big circle called God. There's a line, and there's a little tiny dot, and it's you or any other piece of creation. And that dot depends upon for its existence and its interpretation, God himself.<sup>89</sup>

Powlison argues that the “Bible locates the core motivational dynamic as existing in covenantal space, not merely in psychological, physiological, or psychosocial space.”<sup>90</sup> This impulse to view life covenantally defines Van Til's approach to a biblical view of life in this world. For Van Til, the idea of covenant “expresses the idea that in all things man is face to face with God,” and “in all of man's activities,” whether “philosophical and scientific enterprises,” or in the workplace, at home, or in the privacy of one's mind, “men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, Van Til would argue that, first and foremost, covenant creatures need covenant and redemptive words that help them (1) to understand human experience according to God's authoritative and ruling perspective and (2) to restore their human functioning according to God's

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<sup>88</sup> David Powlison, “A Biblical Counseling View,” in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric Johnson, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 247.

<sup>89</sup> David Powlison, “Powlison on Van Til. Can you relate?” X, April 17, 2024, 11:27am, <https://x.com/WestminsterTS/status/1780618998696079569>.

<sup>90</sup> Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” 25.

<sup>91</sup> Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 62.

design for human flourishing and Christian discipleship through the sanctification and renewal of the inner man—words found in Scripture alone. Counselors must shine the “superior light” of God’s Word upon the lives of counselees.<sup>92</sup> Every major secular counseling system is blind to the spiritual realities presented within Scripture, most chiefly, the reality of conversion and the inner renewal of the Holy Spirit, not to mention the reality of sin and the necessity for repentance, humility, faith, love, and cross-bearing for the restoration of human functioning.<sup>93</sup>

If these are the goals of biblical counseling, are there any problems with this task being informed by “clinical insights”? In principle, no. In reality, secular systems of counseling and human analysis do not play “nice” with the Bible’s approach to counseling. Using historical Reformed language, it is naïve to assume that non-Christian psychologists and therapists would be content functioning as a “handmaiden” or “servant” to Scripture’s framework for counseling.<sup>94</sup> Secular clinical knowledge and modalities aim to defend and advance their own system, posing challenges to Christians seeking to adapt these therapies to align with biblical counseling without undergoing significant renovation.<sup>95</sup> Many secular counselors would argue that religions such as Christianity expose people to influences that may negatively affect their mental health, resulting in religiously inspired guilt and shame, dogmatic thinking, prejudice, obsessive thinking, perfectionism, and even abuse, domination, and violence.<sup>96</sup> Van Til comments,

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<sup>92</sup> “There is no speech or knowledge of grace in nature. God has accordingly condescended to reveal it in Scripture. . . . The light of grace outshines in its brilliance the light of nature as the sun outshines the moon. . . . When the sun of grace has arisen on the horizon of the sinner, the ‘light of nature’ shines only by reflected light. Even when there are some ‘circumstances concerning the worship of God, the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence,’ they are to be so ordered ‘according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.’ The Light of Scripture is that superior light which lightens every other light. It is also the final light.” Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” 265.

<sup>93</sup> Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, 132–66.

<sup>94</sup> See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), I.XIII.2.

<sup>95</sup> Significantly, The Biblical Counseling Coalition’s response to EMDR comments that the method cannot be separated from its worldview: “The EMDR worldview and the biblical worldview are not compatible. To the degree that we break it apart and reconstruct it with biblical categories and aims, it ceases to be EMDR.” “BCC Statement on EMDR,” The Biblical Counseling Coalition, December 16, 2021, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2021/12/16/bcc-statement-on-emdr/>.

<sup>96</sup> See Harold G. Koenig, *Faith and Mental Health: Religious Resources for Healing* (Philadelphia: Templeton, 2005).

“What would be considered the best psychological approach to a person from the non-Christian point of view may be the worst from a Christian point of view. From the non-Christian point of view it will usually be considered a wrong policy to seek to inculcate a sense of sin in people.”<sup>97</sup> In the Western world, a main competitor to pastors and counselors seeking to provide biblical solutions to their church members are the secular counselors—and increasingly Christian counselors trained in secular psychology—who offer their counseling services to the men, women, and children within our churches. Many Christians are leaving their secular or even the “Christian” counseling office with a framework for understanding their problems that fundamentally conflicts with the biblical view of life and their problems they receive on Sunday mornings from their pastor. Regretfully, there are many stories of pastors and counselors getting involved in situations outside of their competency and knowledge, resulting in harm to the people under their care. At the same time, countless stories could also be told of pastoral care situations that were trending in the right direction until a secular psychologist or a supposedly “Christian” counselor got involved.

As biblical counselors begin to open themselves to “clinically-informed” counseling insights, the issue of priority emerges. Van Til’s covenantal paradigm places all of life in relation to God. If counseling methodologies are not neutral, paraphrasing David Powlison, the label “clinically-informed” risks offering counsel informed by secular methods which conflict with “the biblical view of the active heart by considering suffering (socialization, trauma, unmet needs, biochemistry, and genetics) to be determinative and finally causative.”<sup>98</sup> Are secular counselors

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<sup>97</sup> Van Til, *Psychology of Religion*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” 28. Elsewhere, Powlison writes, “On the one hand a Christian engagement with our times will include a radical critique of psychotherapeutic and psychological systems. They are wrong. They’re all committed to be wrong because every single one is committed to say, in the last analysis, that people are not sinners. People can be explained in some way or other either by what happens to them or by choices occurring in a moral vacuum. When a humanistic theory says your needs were not met by primary caretakers or when a psychodynamic theory says that the trauma you endured as a child has determined your life, or when a behavioral theory says you were conditioned by socio-cultural forces to be the kind of person you are, or when a physiological theory explains the problems of living in terms of genetics, neurophysiology, and chemical imbalance, every one of them is committed to defining people in a way in which Christ, the Savior, will not be the answer. That is part of the deceitfulness of sin. Systems are not neutral. If the Bible is right that, indeed, real people are always doing something with God, and I create an interpretive system that rules that truth out, I am committing myself to a fundamental error on the foundational level. As Christians, we can bring a feistiness and a vigor to our critique.” David Powlison, “Modern Therapies and

and therapists interested in following a pastor's lead in the care of his flock?"<sup>99</sup> A conversation about being "clinically-informed" should begin here.

## CONCLUSION

The time has come for Van Til's closing argument—how would the Dutch apologist assess the label "clinically-informed" as a qualifier to "biblical counseling"? In principle, "clinically-informed" is an adequate qualifier for biblical counseling. In reality, the label "clinically-informed" confronts various theological challenges that must be addressed by Christians seeking to inform their counseling from Scripture with insights from secular psychology. In principle, counsel offered from Scripture should be informed by scientific and philosophical reflections upon the revelational truths of human psychology embedded within the creation. In reality, biblical counselors must be vigilant to guard their counsel from speculative ideas and pop psychology masquerading as "established" science. Biblical counselors will confront many psychological systems that will conflict with the system contained in Scriptures which alone authoritatively explains and interprets human experience. Finally, even as secular counseling may offer interventions that provide temporary relief and help to manage psychological dysfunction, biblical counselors must not allow these secular modalities to usurp the ministry of the Word as God's primary means of reclaiming sinners and conforming them to the image of Christ.

In conclusion, would Van Til himself adopt the label "clinically-informed"? This author cannot conclusively say. Van Til may have acknowledged the efforts of "clinically-informed" biblical counselors inasmuch as they are following the theological reasoning presented above, while growing concerned if they did not

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the Church's Faith," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 15, no. 1 (1996): 38. For questions that aim toward the issue of priority, see David Powlison, "Vive la Différence!" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 1 (2014): 2–7.

<sup>99</sup> This comment should also not be read to ignore the fact that pastors should recognize their limitations and be willing to seek out help in complex counseling situations. At the same time, there is a difference between biblical counseling occurring within the context of the local church and biblical counseling occurring *under* the authority of rightfully-ordained and qualified (i.e., 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) pastors and elders (who are appointed by God and ultimately called to give an account for the souls of those under their care (Heb 13:17)). Biblical counseling should occur under the direction and oversight of church leadership, following and serving the shepherding ministry of the local church.

heed his warnings and qualifications. At the same time, Van Til would have most likely found the label “clinically-informed” imprecise and unclear for the approach he would recommend to biblical counselors. As a man who, in his lifetime, equated a Reformed apologetic with a Christian and biblical apologetic, Van Til would most likely call the approach outlined above “*Reformed* counseling” or “*Reformed* biblical counseling.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, xxxv.