

# MEDIA SPOTLIGHT



A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT



## PSYCHOLOGY SCIENCE OR RELIGION?

by Martin & Deidre Bobgan

**W**hat William Law wrote two centuries ago is even more evident today: “Man needs to be saved from his own wisdom as much as from his own righteousness, for they produce one and the same corruption.”

It is paradoxical that at a time when secular psychological researchers are demonstrating less confidence in psychological counseling, more and more Christians are pursuing it. Christian counseling centers are springing up all over the nation offering what many believe is the perfect combination: Christianity plus psychology. Furthermore, Christians who are not even in the counseling ministry look to psychologists for advice on how to live, how to relate to others, and how to meet the challenges of life.

In their attempts to be relevant, many preachers, teachers, counselors, and writers promote a psychological perspective of life rather than a biblical one. The symbol of psychology overshadows the cross of Christ, and psychological jargon contaminates the Word of God.

Psychology is a subtle and widespread leaven in the Church. It has permeated the entire loaf and is stealthily starving the sheep. It promises far more than it can deliver and what it does deliver is not the food that nourishes. Yet multitudes of Christians view psychology with respect and awe.

Now, when we speak of psychology as leaven we are not referring to the entire field of psychological study, such as valid research. But our concern is with those areas that deal with the nature of man, how he should live, and how he can change. These involve some values, attitudes, and behavior that are diametrically opposed to God’s Word. We will see, therefore, that psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have no compatibility with the Christian faith.

### FOUR MYTHS ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY

Among Christians, there are four major myths about psychology which have become entrenched in the Church. The first major myth is common to Christians and non-Christians alike: that psychotherapy (psychological counseling along with its theories and techniques) is a science—a means of understanding and helping humanity based on empirical evidence gleaned from measurable and consistent data.

The second major myth is that the best kind of counseling utilizes both psychology and the Bible. Psychologists who are also Christians generally claim that they are more qualified to help people understand themselves and change their behavior than are other Christians (including pastors and elders) who are not trained in psychology.

The third major myth is that people who are experiencing mental-emotional-behavioral problems are mentally ill. They are supposedly psychologically sick and therefore need psychological therapy. The common argument is that the doctor treats the body, the minister treats the spirit, and the psychologist treats the mind and emotions. Ministers, unless they are trained in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, are then supposedly unqualified to help people who are suffering from serious problems of living.

The fourth major myth is that psychotherapy has a high record of success—that professional psychological counseling produces greater results than other forms of help, such as self-help or that provided by family, friends, or pastors. Thus, psychological counseling is seen as more effective than biblical counseling in helping some Christians. This is one of the main reasons why so many Christians are training to become psychotherapists.

### IS PSYCHOLOGY A SCIENCE ?

Men and women of God seek wisdom and knowledge from both the revelation of Scripture and the physical world. Scripture contends that everyone is accountable before God because of the evidence that creation gives of His existence:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. (Psalms 19:1)

Scientific study is a valid way of coming to an understanding of God’s work, and can be very useful in many walks of life. True science develops theories based on what is observed. It examines each theory with rigorous tests to see if it describes reality. The scientific method works well in observing and recording physical data and in reaching conclusions which either confirm or nullify a theory.

During the mid-19th century, scholars (philosophers, really) desired to study human nature in the hope of applying the scientific method to observe, record, and treat human behavior. They believed that if people could be studied in a scientific manner there would be greater accuracy in understanding present behavior, in predicting future behavior, and in altering behavior through scientific intervention.

Psychology and its active arm of psychotherapy have indeed adopted the scientific posture. However, from a strictly scientific point of view they have not been able to meet the requirements.

In attempting to evaluate the status of psychology, the American Psychological Association appointed Sigmund Koch to plan and direct a study which was subsidized by the National Science Foundation. This study involved eighty eminent scholars in assessing the facts, theories, and methods of psychology. The results were published in a seven-volume series entitled *Psychology: A Study of Science*. Koch describes the delusion in thinking of psychology as a science:

The hope of a psychological science became indistinguishable from the fact of psychological science. The entire subsequent history of psychology can be seen as a ritualistic endeavor to emulate the forms of science in order to sustain the delusion that it already is a science.<sup>1</sup>

Koch also says, "Throughout psychology's history as 'science,' the hard knowledge it has deposited has been uniformly negative."<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that psychological statements which describe human behavior or which report results from research can be scientific. However, when we move from describing human behavior to explaining it, and particularly changing it, we move from science to opinion.

To move from description to prescription is to move from objectivity to opinion. And opinion about human behavior, when presented as truth or scientific fact, is mere pseudoscience. It rests upon false premises (opinions, guesses, subjective explanations) and leads to false conclusions.

The dictionary defines pseudoscience as "a system of theories, assumptions, and methods erroneously regarded as scientific."<sup>3</sup> Pseudoscience or pseudoscientism includes the use of the scientific label to protect and promote opinions which are neither provable nor refutable.

One aspect of psychology riddled with pseudoscience is that of psychotherapy. Had psychotherapy succeeded as a science we would have some consensus in the field regarding mental-emotional-behavioral problems and how to treat them. Instead, the field is filled with contradictory theories and techniques, all of which communicate confusion rather than anything approximating scientific order.

Psychotherapy proliferates with many conflicting explanations of man and his behavior. Psychologist Roger Mills, in his article, "Psychology Goes Insane, Botches Role as Science," says:

The field of psychology today is literally a mess. There are as many techniques, methods and theories around as there are researchers and therapists. I have personally seen therapists convince their clients that all of their problems come from their mothers, the stars, their biochemical make-up, their diet, their life-style and even the "kharma" from their past lives.<sup>4</sup>

With over 250 separate systems of psychotherapy, each claiming superiority over the rest, it is hard to view such diverse opinions as scientific or even factual. The actual foundations of psychotherapy are not science, but rather various philosophical world views, especially those of determinism, secular humanism, behaviorism, existentialism, and even evolutionism. Research psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey is very blunt when he says:

The techniques used by Western psychiatrists are, with few exceptions, on exactly the same scientific plane as the techniques used by witch doctors.<sup>5</sup>

### **PSYCHOLOGY AS RELIGION**

Explanations of why people behave the way they do and how they change have concerned philosophers, theologians, cultists, and occultists throughout the centuries. These explanations form the basis of modern psychology. Yet psychology deals with the very same areas of concern already dealt with in Scripture.

Since God's Word tells us how to live, all ideas about the why's of behavior and the how's of change must be viewed as religious in nature. Whereas the Bible claims divine revelation, psychotherapy claims scientific substantiation. Nevertheless, when it comes to behavior and attitudes, and morals and values, we are dealing with religion—either the Christian faith or any one of a number of other religions including secular humanism.

Nobelist Richard Feynman, in considering the claimed scientific status of psychotherapy, says that "psychoanalysis is not a science" and that it is "perhaps even more like witch-doctoring."<sup>6</sup>

Jung himself wrote:

Religions are systems of healing for psychic illness... That is why patients force the psychotherapist into the role of a priest, and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian.<sup>7</sup>

Note that Jung used the word religions rather than Christianity. Jung had repudiated Christianity and explored other forms of religious experience including the occult. Without throwing out the religious nature of man, he dispensed with the God of the Bible and assumed the role of priest himself. Jung viewed all religions, including Christianity, as collective mythologies. He did not believe they were real in essence, but that they could affect the human personality, and might serve as solutions to human problems.

In contrast to Jung, Sigmund Freud reduced all religious belief to the status of illusion and called religion "the obsessional neurosis of humanity."<sup>8</sup> He viewed religion as delusory and therefore evil and the source of mental problems.

Both Jung's and Freud's positions are true in respect to the world's religions, but they are also anti-Christian. One denies Christianity; the other mythologizes it.

Repudiating the God of the Bible, both Freud and Jung led their followers in the quest for alternative understandings of mankind and alternative solutions to problems of living. They turned inward to their own limited imaginations and viewed their subjects from their own anti-Christian subjectivity.

The faith once delivered to the saints was displaced by a substitute faith disguising itself as medicine or science, but based upon foundations which are in direct contradiction to the Bible.

Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, in his book *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, says, "The basic ingredients of psychotherapy are religion, rhetoric, and repression."<sup>9</sup> He points out that while psychotherapy does not always involve repression, it does always involve religion and rhetoric (conversation). Szasz says very strongly that "the human relations we now call 'psychotherapy,' are, in fact, matters of religion—and that we mislabel them as 'therapeutic' at great risk to our spiritual well-being."<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, in referring to psychotherapy as a religion, Szasz says:

It is not merely a religion that pretends to be a science, it is actually a fake religion that seeks to destroy true religion.<sup>11</sup>

Szasz also says that "psychotherapy is a modern, scientific-sounding name for what used to be called the 'cure of souls.'"<sup>12</sup> One of his primary purposes for writing *The Myth of Psychotherapy* was:

...to show how, with the decline of religion and the growth of science in the eighteenth century, the cure of (sinful) souls, which had been an integral part of the Christian religions, was recast as the cure of (sick) minds, and became an integral part of medicine.<sup>13</sup>

The cure of souls, which once was a vital ministry of the Church, has now in this century been displaced by a cure of minds called "psychotherapy." Biblical counseling has waned until presently it is almost nonexistent.

### **TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Although all forms of psychotherapy are religious, the fourth branch of psychology—the transpersonal—is more blatantly religious than the others. Transpersonal psychologies involve faith in the supernatural—something beyond the physical universe. However, the spirituality they offer includes mystical

experiences of both the occult and Eastern religions.

Through transpersonal psychotherapies various forms of Eastern religion are creeping into Western life. Psychologist Daniel Goleman quotes Chogyam Trungpa as saying, "Buddhism will come to the West as psychology." Goleman points out how Oriental religions "seem to be making gradual headway as psychologies, not as religions."<sup>14</sup> Jacob Needleman says:

A large and growing number of psychotherapists are now convinced that the Eastern religions offer an understanding of the mind far more complete than anything yet envisaged by Western science. At the same time, the leaders of the new religions themselves—the numerous gurus and spiritual teachers now in the West—are reformulating and adapting the traditional systems according to the language and atmosphere of modern psychology.<sup>15</sup>

### **PSYCHOLOGY PLUS THE BIBLE**

The Church has not escaped the all-pervasive influence of psychotherapy. It has unwittingly and eagerly embraced the pseudoscientisms of psychotherapy and has intimately incorporated this spectre into the very sinew of its life. Not only does the Church include the concepts and teachings of psychotherapists in sermons and seminaries, it steps aside and entrusts the mentally and emotionally halt and lame to the "high altar" of psychotherapy.

Many Church leaders contend that the Church doesn't have the ability to meet the needs of people suffering from depression, anxiety, fear, and other problems of living. They therefore trust the paid practitioners of the pseudoscientisms of psychotherapy more than they trust the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the confusion between science and pseudoscience, Church leaders have elevated the psycho-therapist to a position of authority in the modern Church. Thus, any attack on the amalgamation of psychotherapy and Christianity is considered to be an attack on the Church itself.

Although the Church has almost universally accepted and endorsed the psychological way, there are Christians who have not. Jay Adams says:

In my opinion, advocating, allowing and practicing psychiatric and psychoanalytical dogmas within the church is every bit as pagan and

heretical (and therefore perilous) as propagating the teachings of some of the most bizarre cults. The only vital difference is that the cults are less dangerous because their errors are more identifiable.<sup>16</sup>

Psychotherapy is a most subtle and devious spectre haunting the Church, because it is perceived and received as a scientific salve for the sick soul rather than for what it truly is: a pseudoscientific substitute system of religious belief.

The early Church faced and ministered to mental-emotional-behavioral problems which were as complex as the ones that exist today. If anything, the conditions of the early Church were more difficult than those we currently face. The early Christians suffered persecution, poverty, and various afflictions which are foreign to most of twentieth-century Christendom (especially in the West). The catacombs of Rome are a testimony to the extent of the problems faced by the early Church.

If we suffer at all, it is from affluence and ease, which have propelled us toward a greater fixation on self than would likely have occurred in less affluent times. However, the cure for the sins of self-preoccupation existed in the early Church and is just as available today. In fact, biblical cures used by the early Church are just as potent if used today.

The Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit are applicable to all problems of living and do not need to be superseded by talk therapies and talk therapists.

Has the modern Church given up its call and obligation to minister to suffering individuals? If so, it is because Christians believe the myth that psychological counseling is science when, in fact, it is another religion and another gospel.

The conflict between the psychological way of counseling and the biblical way is not between true science and true religion. The conflict is strictly religious—it's a conflict between many religions grouped under the name of psychotherapy (psychological counseling) and the one true religion of the Bible.

The worst of the primrose promises of Christian psychology is that the Bible plus psychotherapy can provide better help than just the Bible alone. While this idea has been promulgated and promoted by many Christian psychotherapists, there is no research evidence to support it. No one has ever shown that the Bible needs psychological augmentation to be more effective in dealing with life's problems.

No one has proven that a Christianized cure of minds (psychotherapy) is any more beneficial than the original unadulterated simple cure of souls (biblical counseling).

### **CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY?**

The Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) is a group of psychologists and psychological counselors who are professing Christians. At one of their meetings the following was stated:

We are often asked if we are "Christian psychologists" and find it difficult to answer since we don't know what the question implies. We are Christians who are psychologists but at the present time there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology. It is difficult to imply that we function in a manner that is fundamentally distinct from our non-Christian colleagues...as yet there is not an acceptable theory, mode of research or treatment methodology that is distinctly Christian.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the hodge-podge of unscientific opinions and contradictions, "Christian psychologists" proclaim, "All truth is God's truth." They use this statement to support their use of psychology, but they are not clear about what God's truth is. Is God's truth Freudian pronouncements of obsessive neurosis? Or is it Jung's structure of archetypes? Or is God's truth Rogers' ideas on human love? Or is God's truth the behaviorism of B.F. Skinner? Or is God's truth "I'm OK; You're OK"?

Psychology, like all religions, includes elements of truth. Even Satan's temptation of Eve included both truth and lie. The enticement of the "All truth is God's truth" fallacy is that there is some similarity between biblical teachings and psychological ideas. However, similarities do not make psychology compatible with Christianity any more than the similarities between Christianity and other religious systems of belief. Even the writings of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Moslem religions contain statements about attitudes and behavior which may be similar to some Bible verses.

The similarities between psychology and Christianity merely indicate that the systems of psychological counseling are indeed religious. Christians should no more turn to psychologists than to leaders of non-Christian religions to find wisdom and help with problems of living.

Since there exists no standardized Christian psychology, each so-called Christian psychologist decides for himself which of the many psychological opinions and methods constitute his ideas of "God's truth." In so doing, the subjective observations and biased opinions of mere mortals are placed on the same level as the inspired Word of God.

The Bible contains the only pure truth of God. All else is distorted by the limitations of human perception. Whatever else one can discover about God's creation is only partial knowledge and partial understanding. It cannot in any way be equal to God's truth.

To even hint that the often conflicting theories of such unredeemed men as Freud, Jung, Rogers, etc. are God's truth is to undermine the very Word of God. The revealed Word of God does not need the support or help of psychological pronouncements. The Word alone stands as the truth of God. That psychologists who call themselves Christian would even use such a phrase to justify their use of psychology indicates the direction of their faith.

The statement "All truth is God's truth" is discussed in the popular "Christian" publication, Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology. The book claims that its contributors are "among the finest evangelical scholars in the field."<sup>18</sup> In his review of this book, Dr. Ed Payne, Associate Professor of Medicine at Medical College of Georgia, says, "Almost certainly the message of the book and its authors is that the Bible and psychological literature stand on the same authoritative level."<sup>19</sup>

Payne also states:

Many pastors and laymen may be deceived by the Christian label of this book. Such psychology presented by Christians is a plague on the modern church, distorting the Christian's relationship with God, retarding his sanctification, and severely weakening the church. No other area of knowledge seems to have such a stranglehold on the church. This book strengthens that hold both individually and corporately.<sup>20</sup>

Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology merely reflects what the Church has come to accept. Unscientific, unsubstantiated, unproven psychological opinions of men have now been leavened into the church through the semantic sorcery of "All truth is God's truth." The equating of psychology and theology reveals that the leaven has now come to full loaf.

## THE GOSPEL OF SELF

One of the most popular themes in psychology is that of self-fulfillment. Although this is an extremely popular theme, it is a theme of recent origin having arisen only within the past forty years outside of the Church and in the past twenty years within the Church itself.

As society moved from self-denial to self-fulfillment, a new vocabulary emerged which revealed a new inner attitude and a different view of life. The new vocabulary became the very fabric of a new psychology known as humanistic psychology. Its major focus is self-actualization and its clarion call is self-fulfillment. And self-fulfillment, with all its accompanying self-hyphenated and self-fixated variations such as self-love, self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-worth, has become the new promised land. Then as the Church became psychologized, the emphasis shifted from God to self.

Christian books began to reflect what was accepted in society. Some examples are Love Yourself, The Art of Learning to Love Yourself, Loving Yourself, Celebrate Yourself, You're Someone Special, Self Esteem: You're Better than You Think, and probably best known, Robert Schuler's Self Esteem: The New Reformation. Books and examples of a psychological self-stroking mentality are numerous.

According to the psychologizers of Christianity the greatest detriment to a fulfilling life is low self-esteem. In their quest to bring their followers to the realization of their full potential (self-actualization), they substitute one form of self-centeredness (high self-esteem) for another form of self-centeredness (low self-esteem). In either case, self is the focal point of the cure as well as the problem.

Low self-esteem is popular because it's much more palatable to accept the idea of having "low self-esteem" than to confess evil, ungodly, self-centered thoughts and then repent through believing what God has said in His Word. While low self-esteem calls for psychological treatment to raise self-esteem, sinful thinking calls for confession, repentance, restoration, and walking by faith in a love relationship with God provided by the cross of Christ. We would suggest that one look to Scripture to discover one's greatest need and to find an antidote to life's problems, rather than attempt to scripturalize some psychological

fad. Mankind's greatest need is for Jesus Christ, not self-esteem.

John Piper says sadly, "Today the first and greatest commandment is 'Thou shalt love thyself.'" He rightly complains that today the "ultimate sin is no longer the failure to honor God and thank Him but the failure to esteem oneself."<sup>21</sup>

Unless Scripture is molded to conform to the teachings that promote self, the Bible clearly teaches one to be Christ-centered and other-oriented. Loving God above all else and with one's entire being, and loving neighbor as much as one ALREADY loves oneself, are the primary injunctions of the Bible. The admonition to love oneself or to esteem oneself is missing.

Rather than self-love being taught as a virtue in Scripture, it is placed among the diabolical works of the flesh. Paul addresses the issue of self-love from just the opposite perspective of present-day promoters both inside and outside the Church:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (2Timothy 3:1-5)

The teachings of self-love, self-esteem, and self-worth have been gleaned from the world rather than from Scripture. They are products of humanistic psychologists rather than the truth of God's Word.

Numerous are the examples of Christian psychologists who are ordained ministers. They begin with a desire to Christianize psychology and end up psychologizing Christianity. Dr. Richard Dobbins, founder and director of Emerge Ministries, is one example of the many ministers who have turned to psychology.

In his teaching film *The Believer and His Self Concept*, Dobbins leads the viewers through a series of steps to end up chanting, "I am a lovable person. I am a valuable person. I am a forgivable person."<sup>22</sup> In Dobbins's exercise is found the confusion between the biblical fact that God loves, values, and forgives us and the humanistic psychological lie that we are intrinsically lovable, valuable, and forgivable. If we have one iota of loveli-

ness, or one iota of value, or one iota of forgivability, then it makes no sense that Christ should have to die for us.

God has chosen to set his love upon us because of His essence, not because of ours, even after we are believers. His love, His choice to place value upon us, and His choice to forgive us are by grace alone. It is fully undeserved. It is not because of who we are by some intrinsic value of our own or by our own righteousness.

The paradoxical, profound, and powerful truth of Scripture is that though we are not intrinsically lovable, valuable, or forgivable, God loves, values, and forgives us. That is the pure theology of Scripture and the overpowering message of Christ's death and resurrection. The biblical truth is better presented as: "I am not a lovable person. I am not a valuable person. I am not a forgivable person. But Christ died for me!"

The alternative to self-love is not self-hate, but rather love in relationship with God and others. The alternative to self-esteem is not self-denigration, but rather an understanding of the greatness of God dwelling in a weak vessel of flesh. The alternative to self-fulfillment is not a life of emptiness and meaninglessness. It is God's invitation to be so completely involved with His will and His purposes that fulfillment comes through relationship with Him rather than with self.

The realization that the God and Creator of the universe, has chosen to set His love upon us should engender love and esteem for Him rather than for self. The amazing truth that He has called us into relationship with Him to do His will far surpasses the puny dreams of self-fulfillment.

The psychologizers in the Church are not providing spiritual sustenance to those they try to make comfortable in their self-centeredness. They are robbing them of the riches of Christ offered to all who will humble themselves before Him.

Humility is not in the language of psychology to any great degree. Dobbins even goes so far as to encourage individuals to express anger at God. He says, "If you're angry with God, tell Him you're angry with Him. Go ahead and tell Him. He's big enough to take it."<sup>23</sup> Where in Scripture do we have an example that it's okay to be angry with God? Jonah was angry to his own detriment, but no example can be found where anger at God is condoned, let alone encouraged.

The wise King Solomon warns, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God" (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Whenever psychology is intermingled with Scripture it dilutes the Word and deludes the Church. Anger is more complex than the dangerous simplicity that Dobbins portrays. His biblical basis for expressing anger is weak at best and misleading at least. Dobbins' articles and his book are based upon his own personal, unproven psychological opinions. Unfortunately, his opinions and conclusions do not square with reality. Apparently Dobbins would like us to believe what he says because he says so. However, to subscribe to the defunct hydraulic-ventilationist theory and to prescribe tackling dummies, pounding mattresses, punching a bag, etc. (as he does in his writings), and to recommend getting angry with God without research or biblical proof is scientifically inexcusable and biblically unreliable.

#### **THE ROAD MORE TRAVELED**

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck has become an extremely popular speaker and writer among Christians. His books *People of the Lie* and *The Road Less Traveled* have appeared on a leading evangelical magazine's Book of the Year list. The list is a result of votes cast by a group of evangelical writers, leaders, and theologians selected by the magazine. A New York Times book reviewer reveals, "The book's main audience is in the vast Bible Belt." The reviewer describes *The Road Less Traveled* as "an ambitious attempt to wed Christian theology to the 20th-century discoveries of Freud and Jung."<sup>24</sup>

In an interview which appeared in *Christianity Today*, Peck was asked "what he meant when he called Christ 'Savior.'" The reviewer writes,

Peck likes Jesus the Savior as fairy godmother (a term I'm sure he does not use flippantly) and as exemplar, or one who shows us how to live and die. But he does not like the idea of Jesus the Atoner.<sup>25</sup>

Peck's understanding of the nature of God and the nature of man comes from a blend of Jungian psychology and Eastern mysticism rather than from the Bible. He says of God and man:

God wants us to become Himself (or Herself or Itself). We are growing toward godhood. God is the goal of evolution. It is God who is the source of the evolutionary force and God who is the destina-

tion. This is what we mean when we say that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.<sup>26</sup>

The Bible says quite the opposite:

Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

Peck continues:

It is one thing to believe in a nice old God who will take good care of us from a lofty position of power which we ourselves could never begin to attain. It is quite another to believe in a God who has it in mind for us precisely that we should attain His position, His power, His wisdom, His identity.<sup>27</sup>

The only words that approach this description are those of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:13-14. And indeed Peck claims godhood for those who will take the responsibility for attaining it:

Nonetheless, as soon as we believe it is possible for man to become God, we can really never rest for long, never say, "OK, my job is finished, my work is done." We must constantly push ourselves to greater and greater wisdom, greater and greater effectiveness. By this belief we will have trapped ourselves, at least until death, on an effortful treadmill of self-improvement and spiritual growth. God's responsibility must be our own.<sup>28</sup>

Peck goes further into the morass of Eastern mysticism and Jungian occultism when he says, "To put it plainly, our unconscious is God. God within us. We were part of God all the time. God has been with us all along, is now, and always will be."<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Peck, the Bible reveals that the only way a person comes into relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Way to the Father. Until a person is born of the Spirit he resides in the kingdom of darkness and is under the dominion of Satan:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (Ephesians 2:1-5)

No matter how personable and well-meaning Christian therapists (or therapists who claim to be a Christian) may be, they are heavily influenced by the ungodly psychological perspective. Psychology thus becomes the means for both interpreting Scripture and applying it to daily living. When one reads the Bible from the psychological perspective of Freud, Jung, Adler, Maslow, Rogers, et al, he tends to conform his understanding of the Bible to their theories. Rather than looking at life through the lens of the Bible, he looks at the Bible through the lens of psychology.

Amalgamators add the wisdom of men to fill in what they think is missing from the Bible. They take the age-old sin problem rooted in self-centeredness, give it a new name, such as “mid-life crisis,” or some other idea, and offer solutions from the leavened loaf. They integrate psychological ideas with a Bible verse or story here and there to come up with what they believe to be effective solutions to problems they mistakenly think are beyond the reach of Scripture.

### **PASTORS UNDERMINED**

Psychological counselors undermine the counseling of pastors and have developed a formula for referral: (1) Anyone who is not psychologically trained is not qualified to counsel those people with the really serious problems of living. (2) Refer them to professional trained therapists. This is one predictable and pathetic pattern of the psychological seduction of Christianity.

Pastors have been intimidated by the warnings from psychologists. They have become fearful of doing the very thing God has called them to do: to minister to the spiritual needs of the people through godly counsel both in and out of the pulpit. Some of that intimidation has come from pastors trained in psychology.

A spokesman for the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, a psychotherapeutically trained group of pastors, says, “Our concern is that there are a lot of ministers who aren’t trained to handle their parishioners’ psychotherapy.”<sup>30</sup> And of course, if the pastors are not trained they are not considered qualified. Therefore, the predictable benediction to the litany is: “refer to a professional.”

Within the confines of the psychotherapists’ office, the pastoral message confronting sin in the individual’s life is subverted. There has been a subtle change in the meanings of words and phrases. The word sin has been substituted with less convicting words such as shortcoming, mistake, reaction to past hurt. Words such as healed and whole replace sanctified and holy. In fact, the word holy has been redefined to mean some kind of psychological wholeness. For the psychologizers what is literal in Scripture often becomes metaphorical, and what is metaphorical becomes literal.

But these redefinitions are not accepted only by those who pay the price to receive them from psychotherapists; they have become standardized within the Christian community at large through the influence of psychotherapy in books, magazines, and in the Christian media in general.

Is it any wonder that the few godly pastors that are left today are at their wit’s end in attempting to counsel from Scripture those under their care.

Ultimately those who trust in psychotherapy rather than in Scripture will suffer because they are not brought face-to-face with their sin nature. What psychological system justifies a person before God and gives him peace with God? What psychological system gives the kind of faith in which a person can live by all of God’s promises? What psychological system fulfills its promises the way God fulfills His? What psychological system gives the hope of which Paul speaks? What psychological system enables a person to exult in the midst of tribulation? What psychological system increases the kind of perseverance that builds proven character, gives hope, and produces divine love—love that extends even to one’s enemies?

Throughout the centuries there have been individuals who have suffered from extremely difficult problems of living who have sought God, and they have found Him to be true and faithful. They looked into the Word of God for wisdom and guidance for living with and overcoming the problems of life. The lives of those saints far outshine the lives of such pitiful souls as those who have followed the siren song of psychotherapy.

God warned Israel not to trust in man, but to trust in God alone:

Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. (Jeremiah 17:5)

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. (Jeremiah 17:7)

### **THE MYTH OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

The terms mental disease, mental illness, and mental disorder are popular catch-alls for all kinds of problems of living, most of which have little or nothing to do with disease. As soon as a person’s behavior is labeled “illness,” treatment and therapy become the solutions. If, on the other hand, we consider a person to be responsible for his behavior, we should deal with him in the areas of education, faith, and choice. If we label him “mentally ill,” we rob him of the human dignity of personal responsibility and the divine relationship by which problems may be met.

Because the term mental illness throws attitudes and behavior into the medical realm, it is important to examine its accuracy. In discussing the concept of mental illness or mental disease, research psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey says:

The term itself is nonsensical, a semantic mistake. The two words cannot go together...you can no more have a mental “disease” than you can have a purple idea or a wise space.<sup>31</sup>

The word mental means “mind” and the mind is not the same as the brain. Also, the mind is really more than just a function or activity of the brain. Brain researcher and author Barbara Brown insists that the mind goes beyond the brain. She says:

The scientific consensus that mind is only mechanical brain is dead wrong...the research data of the sciences themselves point much more strongly toward the existence of a mind-more-than-brain than they do toward the mere mechanical brain action.<sup>32</sup>

God created the human mind to know Him and to choose to love, trust, and obey Him. In the very creative act, God planned for mankind to rule His earthly creation and to serve as His representatives on earth. Because the mind goes beyond the physical realm, it goes beyond the reaches of science and cannot be medically sick.

Since the mind is not a physical organ, it cannot have a disease. While one can have a diseased brain, one cannot have a diseased mind, although he may have a sinful or unredeemed mind. Torrey aptly says:

The mind cannot really become diseased any more than the intellect

can become abscessed. Furthermore, the idea that mental “diseases” are actually brain diseases creates a strange category of “diseases” which are, by definition, without known cause. Body and behavior become intertwined in this confusion until they are no longer distinguishable. It is necessary to return to first principles: a disease is something you have, behavior is something you do.<sup>33</sup>

One can understand what a diseased body is, but what is a diseased mind? It is obvious that one cannot have a diseased emotion or a diseased behavior. Then why a diseased mind? Nevertheless, therapists continually refer to mental-emotional-behavioral problems as diseases.

Thomas Szasz criticizes what he calls the “psychiatric imposter” who “supports a common, culturally shared desire to equate and confuse brain and mind, nerves and nervousness.”<sup>34</sup> Not only are brain and mind not synonymous, neither are nerves and nervousness. One might nervously await the arrival of a friend who is late for an appointment, but the nerves are busy performing other tasks. Szasz further says:

It is customary to define psychiatry as a medical specialty concerned with the study, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness. This is a worthless and misleading definition. Mental illness is a myth...the notion of a person “having a mental illness” is scientifically crippling. It provides professional assent to the popular rationalization—namely, that problems in living experienced and expressed in terms of so-called psychiatric symptoms are basically similar to bodily diseases.<sup>35</sup>

Although a medical problem or brain disease may bring on mental-emotional-behavioral symptoms, the person does not and cannot rationally be classified as “mentally ill.” He is medically ill, not mentally ill. The words psychological and biological are not synonymous. In the same way, mental and medical are not synonymous. One refers to the mind, the other to the body.

Psychological counseling does not deal with the physical brain. It deals with aspects of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Therefore, the psychotherapist is not in the business of healing diseases, but of teaching new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. He is a teacher, not a doctor.

Many have dishonestly used the term mental illness to describe a whole host of problems of thinking and behaving which should be labeled as “problems of living.” Though the term mental illness is a

misnomer and a mismatch of words, it has become firmly ingrained in the public vocabulary and is glibly pronounced on all sorts of occasions by both lay and professional persons. Jonas Robitscher says:

Our culture is permeated with psychiatric thought. Psychiatry, which had its beginnings in the care of the sick, has expanded its net to include everyone, and it exercises its authority over this total population by methods that range from enforced therapy and coerced control to the advancement of ideas and the promulgation of values.<sup>36</sup>

The very term mental illness has become a blight on society. If we really believe that a person with a mental-emotional-behavioral problem is sick, then we have admitted that he is no longer responsible for his behavior. And, if he is not responsible for his behavior, who is?

The psychoanalytic and behavioristic approaches preach that man’s behavior is fixed by forces outside of his control. In the psychoanalytic approach man is controlled by inner psychic forces; in the behavioristic approach man is controlled by outer environmental forces. If man’s behavior is determined by internal or external uncontrollable forces, it follows that he is not responsible for his behavior. Thus criminals are allowed to plea bargain on the basis of “temporary insanity,” “diminished capacity,” and “incompetent to stand trial.” The full impact of the evils unleashed upon society by the psychoanalytical professionals is yet to be realized.

Meanwhile, the mystique surrounding the term mental illness has frightened away people who could be of great help to those suffering from problems of living. Many people who want to help individuals with problems of living feel “unqualified” to help a person labeled “mentally ill.” The confusion inherent within this strange juxtaposition of terms has led to errors which have often been more harmful than helpful to those thus labeled.

Case histories abound of governmental intrusion into personal lives, forced incarceration in mental institutions, deprivation of personal rights, and loss of livelihoods because of the stigma attached to the term “mental illness.” Nevertheless, the profession continues to promote the false concept of mental illness, to align it with medicine, and consign it to science—and the public follows. Worse yet, the Church follows.

## IS PSYCHOTHERAPY SUCCESSFUL?

Because of the great faith in what is believed to be science and the ever expanding numbers of people labeled “mentally ill,” psychotherapy continues to flourish with promises for change, cure, and happiness. Assurances are undergirded by testimonies and confidence in psychological models and methods. Yet research tells us something different about the effectiveness and the limitations of psychotherapy.

The best-known early research on the success and failure rates of psychotherapy was reported in 1952 by Hans J. Eysenck, an eminent English scholar. Eysenck compared groups of patients treated by psychotherapy with persons given little or no treatment at all. He found that a greater percentage of patients who did not undergo psychotherapy demonstrated greater improvement over those who did undergo therapy. After examining over 8,000 cases, Eysenck concluded that:

...roughly two-thirds of a group of neurotic patients will recover or improve to a marked extent within about two years of the onset of their illness, whether they are treated by means of psychotherapy or not.<sup>37</sup>

The American Psychiatric Association indicates that a definite answer to the question, “Is psychotherapy effective?” may be unattainable. Their research book, *Psychotherapy Research: Methodological and Efficacy Issues*, concludes: “Unequivocal conclusions about causal connections between treatment and outcome may never be possible in psychotherapy research.”<sup>38</sup> In its review of this book, the *Brain/Mind Bulletin* says, “Research often fails to demonstrate an unequivocal advantage from psychotherapy.” The following is an interesting example from the book:

...an experiment at the All-India Institute of Mental Health in Bangalore found that Western-trained psychiatrists and native healers had a comparable recovery rate. The most notable difference was that the so-called “witch doctors” released their patients sooner.<sup>39</sup>

If the American Psychopathological Association and the American Psychiatric Association (as well as other independent study groups) give mixed reports about the efficacy of psychotherapy, why do so many Christian leaders promote the un-

tenable promises of psychology? And if there is so little sound research, and virtually no empirical evidence to support psychotherapy, why are Christians eager to substitute theories and therapists for Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit? These are legitimate questions, especially in view of the obvious religious nature of psychotherapy.

### CONCLUSION

The Church exists in a hostile world. If its members do not reject the philosophies of the world they will reflect them in their lives. If we are friends with the world (its religions, philosophies, psychological systems and practices) then we must seriously ask ourselves why we do not heed Jesus' words:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:18-19)

Obviously, if we do not heed His words, it's because we don't believe His words. Or perhaps, although we might believe His words we really don't want to obey His words. We find them too difficult to adhere to.

The Church has been called to reflect Jesus, not the world. Even though we are in the world we are not of the world. Thus, every ministry of the Body of Christ must be biblical and must not attempt to incorporate worldly philosophies, theories, or techniques.

Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life," not Freud, Jung, Adler, Rogers, Maslow, Ellis, or any other man. A church that does not seek the Lord as its source but relies on the philosophical and psychological ideas and techniques of men will become as secular as the world. Such a church may indeed have a form of godliness but it has denied the power of God. It has established man as its god.

As the Body of Christ we need to pray for cleansing. We need to pray for pruning. We need to seek His face with diligence. We need to put off the old (all that is of the world, the flesh, and the devil), and put on the new (all that is in Jesus Christ).

Let us therefore drink from the springs of living water that flow from Jesus rather than the broken cisterns of psychological systems. ❖

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