

## Package Deals

By Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen

(An excerpt from Dr. Bahnsen's new book manuscript *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*).

Van Til saw that the dispute in apologetics was not simply over isolated religious claims or conclusions, but was in principle a dispute regarding entire worldviews. "It is in-deed impossible for any man to make any statement about any fact of experience without doing so in terms of an all-inclusive view of reality. And we can only rejoice if there seems today to be some measure of appreciation of this fact, for to the extent that this is the case we need no longer concern ourselves with the idea of 'neutrality.' And to the extent that such is the case, we may start from the assumption that every bit of scientific search for facts already proceeds upon a basic view with respect to reality.... All men presuppose, whatever the name they use for it' a synoptic view of reality as a whole.

We continue to call it metaphysics." Alternatively: "For convenience we speak of this total outlook on reality as a world and life view."<sup>2</sup> "The fight between Christianity and roI~Chr~anity is, in modern times, no piecemeal ~\*m1I It is the life and death struggle between two mutually opposed life and worldviews." The Christian, perhaps thinks that his argument with the non-Christian is simply over the truth of such eternal matters as creation (vs. evolution), may set out to prove from science that the alternative is simply implausible, but he soon realizes (if he is at all thoughtful) that the two of them also disagree over the genuine character of science and scientific theorizing. The Christian, perhaps thinking that his argument with the non-Christian is simply over a fact such as Christ's resurrection from the dead, may set out to prove from history that this event occurred, but he soon realizes (if he is at all thoughtful) that the two of them also disagree over the proper character of historical research, reasoning and evaluation. The Christian, perhaps thinking that his argument with the non-Christian is simply over the philosophical coherence and pmcticality of the Biblical perspective, may set out to defend it or offer reasons in support of it, but he soon realizes (if he is at all thoughtful) that the two of them also disagree over the nature of rneanrng, utility, possibility, explaation, ~etc. Because they operate out of the context of conI¶I~ worldviews, the believer and unbeliever will find

**1:1-** if they are consistent and their dialog pushes into ~'deecer reasons for differing with each other—their disagreement covers their theory of knowledge (method and criteria of knowing) as well as what they claim to know (or what cannot be known) about God, the world, man, life, conduct or values. Thus Van Til taught that "lfman does ~e notowntheauthorityofChristinthefieldofsci.;e~ ence, he assumes his own ultimate authority

as back ofhis effort. Theargumentbetween the covenant-keeper and the cov

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facts. It is always, atthe sarne time, about the natrrre offacts. Andbackoftheargument about the natrrre of facts, there is the

argument about the nature of man. However rest[ic]ted the debate between the believer and the non-believer may be at any one time, there are always two world views ultimately at odds with one another."~

This explains why the apologist must not see his dispute with the unbeliever as a matter of faith (the Christian) versus reason (the non-Christian). It is rather one worldview (a faith which controls reasoning) versus another worldview (a different faith which controls reasoning). The worldviews may not have been explicitly explained or acknowledged in the dispute, but they determine the course ofthe

argument. “All men do their thi~g on the basis of a position accepted by faith. If your faith is not one which has God in Christ speak-

4 *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, p.5.

mg infallibly in Scripture for its object, then your faith is in man as autonomous. All of one’s reasoning is controlled by either of these presuppositions.”<sup>5</sup> In apologetics we must become accustomed to thinking in terms of “package deals.” The unbeliever has a certain view of reality, man, etc., and his theory of knowledge or method of reasoning not only are used to support that particular view but are also determined by it; it is a package deal. Likewise, the believer has a certain view of reality as well as a theory of knowledge which supports, as well as being determined, by that view of reality; it too is a package deal. The believer’s “package” should not be reduced to some isolated or abstract elements thereof as though what we defend is “theism in general” rather than the specific character of the full Christian conception of God.<sup>6</sup> “From the point of view of the sinner, theism is as objectionable as is Christianity. Theism that is worthy of the name is Christian theism. Christ said that no man can come to the Father but by him. No one can become a theist unless he becomes a Christian. Any God that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not God but an idol.”<sup>7</sup> Nor does the believer’s “package” (worldview) allow for an isolation or abstraction of its epistemology and metaphysics. Van Til denounced an apologetical strategy which says “First the inspired Bible and secondly the divine Christ,” because you cannot intelligibly have one without the other. “We must rather take the Bible simultaneously with Christ and with God as its author.”<sup>8</sup> As we say, it is a package deal.

5 *The Case for Calvinism*, pp.128-129.

6 This does not mean that we can say everything about God *Simultaneously* with everything else that can be said about God. Obviously we can only talk “about one thing at a time.” Nevertheless, when we talk about the existence or intelligence or power (etc.) of God, the object of our discussion is specifically or concretely that God the conception of whom is the fully Christian conception. There is, for instance, no abstract sovereignty for God which is not the sovereignty of a covenant-keeping God - any more than there is any divine covenant which is not enacted by the sovereign God. Whenever the Christian talks about the aspect of covenant or about the aspect of sovereignty, he always “keeps in mind” the fuller and implicitly definitional context of what he is narrowly discussing. The only kind of “omniscient” God the Christian defends is the one who is simultaneously considered “omnipotent,” etc. “Nature and Scripture,” p.280.

*The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, p.61.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 12,57.

Accordingly in apologetics the believer’s package deal (worldview) stands over against the challenges the unbeliever’s package deal (worldview).... Van Til wrote: It is the idea of the interrelatedness of every aspect of the revelation of God [in nature and in word] to man that is all important. It is only when this interrelatedness is stressed that, as Christians, we can effectively challenge the wisdom of the world and show that it has been made foolish by God. Only thus can the total interpretation of life and the world, as given by Christ in Scripture, be that on which alone every aspect of human experience must be based in order to have significance. If then the Christian is to fulfill his calling he must set the Christian approach to men and things over against that of modern science, philosophy, and theology. If he does not do so in all three fields he cannot effectively do so in any one of these fields.”~

*The Case for Calvinism*, p.115.

*The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, p.103 -

*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.6.