

Preface 10

Ecclesiastes 12:12

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William Kirk Kilpatrick's PSYCHOLOGICAL SEDUCTION

by James B. Jordan

I believe David Chilton was the first person here to read this remarkable book. He gave a copy to one of the pastors at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Robert Dwelle. Rev. Dwelle was so excited about it, that he asked Chilton to get copies for all the staff people at the Church. Thus, during Christmas, when Tyler, Texas, was frozen for two weeks, we all read William Kirk Kilpatrick's *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology*. It influenced our sermons and conversations for several weeks, and I continue to regard it as one of the best books I have ever read. Thus, I was very happy to accept Dr. North's invitation to write this Preface to Kilpatrick's book.

Critiques of modern psychologism have appeared steadily during the last few decades. One thinks of the many works of Thomas Szasz, which expose the tyranny and horror of the psychiatric hospital syndrome in the Western (and Communist) world, as the "myth of mental illness" is used to justify indefinite incarceration, torture, experimentation, and so forth.

Then there are the works of Prof. Jay Adams, formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Adams opened the eyes of the Bible-believing world to the fact that most seemingly-complex personality disorders have their roots in rather common sins and sin-tendencies. Dr. Adams encouraged pastors everywhere to believe that, armed with the Biblical doctrine of sin and redemption, they were "competent to counsel."

Two other outstanding studies which have appeared in recent years are Paul C. Vitz's *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-worship* (Eerdmans, 1977), and Rousas J. Rushdoony's *Revolt Against Maturity* (Thoburn Press, 1977—unfortunately, out of print). Vitz's was a scholarly study of modern psychologism, while Rushdoony engaged in a theological analysis of the Biblical doctrine of human nature, making continual reference to both the helpful and the horrible aspects of modern psychological study. (Rushdoony is most helpful, throughout his writings, in tying modern insights into sado-masochism to the Biblical doctrine of sin, guilt, atonement, and justification.)

Kilpatrick's book is on a somewhat more popular level, but his insights are no less profound for it. Kilpatrick confesses that he gradually abandoned his Roman Catholic upbringing in favor of the modern creed of self-help, self-esteem psychologism. In time, however, though a psychology teacher himself, he found that this new god was false, and he turned back to a catholic, evangelical Christian faith.

Thus, Kilpatrick writes as someone who has been an "insider," and his book is written at about the same level as modern popular self-help books. I should also say that Kilpatrick's style compares favorably with that of C. S. Lewis, someone he clearly admires greatly. He has Lewis's ability to conjoin profundity and lucidity. One's interest never lags in reading this book.

Throughout the first part of the book, Kilpatrick argues that modern psychologism has failed in its stated objectives, and that it is positively harmful to the individuals who subscribe to it, as well as destructive to society and to the Church at large. In the second half of the book, Kilpatrick suggests a number of avenues of personal and social reconstruction which the Church has always employed to get the results which modern psychologism seeks. This positive section of the book is most remarkable, especially since the things Kilpatrick brings up are almost universally ignored by conservative Christians, though they are things that the Church today desperately needs.

It should be clear to the reader at this point that *there is no substitute for reading this book for yourself*. If I could, I'd just stop writing now, and fill the rest of this newsletter with the opening pages of Kilpatrick's study. Then you, courteous reader, would find yourself impelled to go to your local Christian bookstore and purchase a copy for yourself, in order to read the remainder. But, that's not really kosher, and so in the remainder of this essay, I shall be calling attention to what I regard as some (but by no means all) of the most valuable of Kilpatrick's points, and I shall be making some applications of these points which go beyond what Kilpatrick himself actually says. I shall also register a few minor criticisms. Since these Preface newsletters are designed to serve as reading guides, I shall go through the book chapter by chapter, making comments.

If you have not yet read the book, go ahead and finish reading this Preface. But let me assure you that you are only cheating yourself if you do not go out right away and buy a copy of the book, and read it as soon as you can.

Chapter 1: Wolf in the Fold. This is an introductory chapter. Kilpatrick bears testimony to his own Spiritual pilgrimage, and registers his concern that the modern, pagan psychological religion of "self-esteem" has made tremendous inroads into conservative Christendom, both Roman Catholic and evangelical.

Chapter 2: Good Intentions. Here Kilpatrick argues that in spite of the (apparent) good intentions of modern psychology, its effects on persons and on society have been bad. Later in his book, Kilpatrick will identify the heart of psychologism's problem as man's belief that he can and

should play god, and be totally self-sufficient. Given the gentle, and evangelistically persuasive tone of his book, it probably would not do for him to have said, at this early point, that the "good intentions" of modern psychologists are actually a masquerade for Satanism. But in fact, if modern "experts who guide the psychological society" show that they are "dedicated and self-sacrificing," showing "care and concern" for the "ultimate betterment of the human race" (p. 28), then we as Christians have to say, at some point, that this serious, earnest commitment is in reality a reflex of man's sinful desire to play god and do it all for himself. Kilpatrick makes just this point in Chapter 5.

In this chapter (ch. 2), Kilpatrick provides a great deal of evidence that psychologism is harmful. "Neurotic people who do not receive therapy are as likely to recover as those who do," he says. "Untrained lay people do as well as psychiatrists or clinical psychologists in treating patients" (p. 29). In fact, with the increase in the number of trained "psychiatrists, psychologists, psychometrists, counselors, and social workers," has come not a decrease but an increase "in the rate of mental illness, suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, child abuse, divorce, murder, and general mayhem" (p. 31). Indeed, he argues that "psychology and related professions are proposing to solve problems that they themselves have helped to create" (p. 31), by destroying the conventional barriers to personal and social disaster.

At the end of this chapter, Kilpatrick appeals to our "common sense" against modern psychologism (p. 34). We don't have to wait for research and statistics to know that a lot of psychologism is rubbish, he argues. It might seem that Kilpatrick is setting aside the Bible here. After all, our "common sense" is fallen, too. But, throughout the book Kilpatrick engages in a specifically Christian and Biblical critique of psychologism. Thus, his ultimate appeal is not to common sense, but to God's revelation. Common sense is useful, he rightly notes, in making men aware that there is *something* wrong with psychologism.

Chapter 3: Self-Esteem. Kilpatrick takes up the apparent sameness of the psychologistic "love yourself" doctrine, and the Christian doctrine of self-esteem (love your neighbor as yourself). He shows that there is a vast difference. The pagan view is based in a doctrine of self-help, while the Christian view is grounded in the doctrine of our creation as images of God, and as valuable to Him. We are not valuable in ourselves, and thus our reference point is not in ourselves. Rather, we are valuable because we are valuable to God, which places our reference point in Him.

Because we have this external, Divine reference point and standard for our behavior, loving ourselves may and often does mean being hard on ourselves. And, loving others often means that, using C. S. Lewis's words, we "would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes" (p. 39; from Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*).

Kilpatrick confesses, "I know in my own case that the most shameful incidents of my life—things I now wince to think about—were the product of a happy self-acceptance, the period during which I was most smitten with self-esteem, 'innocently' following what I had convinced myself were good or at least neutral impulses. My self-esteem simply wouldn't allow any honest self-awareness: that only came much later" (p. 41).

I want to expand on this point. What Kilpatrick points to here has been a common malady in American fundamental Christianity for a century or more. It goes by the name "higher life," or "Spirit-filled life." It is the heart and soul of modern pentecostalism, but it is not limited to those sects. Basically this movement teaches that we are not to be down

on ourselves, because we are accepted in Christ. Self-judgment is minimized, or rejected altogether. It is not necessary to confess sin, or to war against it. Rather, we need only yield to the influences of the Spirit, and do what comes naturally. As anyone knows who has had much contact with this movement, or with the charismatic movement, doing what comes naturally leads straight into sexual license and perversion. This was a problem with the Great Awakening and all the emotion-laden revivals of the past, and it is a rampant problem in pentecostal and fundamentalist Christianity today. The finest expose of this evil is H. A. Ironside's classic *Holiness: The False and the True* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1912—still in print, still doing good work).

It can come as no surprise that this is the form that evangelical Christianity in America increasingly takes in what Tom Wolfe has called "the Me Generation." Robert Schuller is only the best known of the modern, Pelagian purveyors of the perversion of self-help self-esteemism. The answer is, of course, not a morbid and equally self-centered introspection; rather, the answer is to take sin seriously, and gird up one's loins to battle it through discipline. Kilpatrick has much good to offer along these lines later in the book.

Chapter 4: Wishful Thinking. By this Kilpatrick means that psychologism is not interested in reality, only in perceptions. The belief is that "you make your own reality" (p. 49). If this seems like magic, well, Kilpatrick tells us that about half the practising psychiatric community is into such things as yoga, Eastern religion, astral projection, mediums, and the like (p. 99). Part of the essence of man's desire to play god is the desire to be able to change the real world merely by the force of will and thought.

In our modern era, as Cornelius Van Til has pointed out in all of his writings, this belief that the external world is not important came to full expression in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. According to Kant, reality is "noumenal." Nothing can be said about it. The real world, as it is in itself, cannot be understood or approached by the mind of man. We are only concerned with the "phenomenal," by which Kant did not mean the surface appearance of things, but rather things as they *appear to us in our minds*. In order for man to play god, he has to pretend that there is no real world out there that he can understand. Thus, he is free to manipulate the world of his imagination, and pretend that he is governing all things at will. If this looks like pure insanity, that's because that's exactly what it is.

Now, neither philosophers nor anybody else is very consistent with this worldview. Even Kant knew that he could not pretend a bullet away from his chest if one were fired. Thus, philosophers have to construct elaborate intellectual systems to defend this kind of thing. So do psychologists. Part of Van Til's apologetic method is to demonstrate that Kant and his followers actually must presuppose the reality of the Christian world in order to deny it. But this is not Kilpatrick's approach. Kilpatrick simply sets the Christian view over against the modern philosophical/psychological one. Faith must be anchored in objective fact, says the Christian. A healthy mind is one which is adjusted to reality as it really is. Now, I don't fault Kilpatrick for not going further in an apologetic attempt to answer unbelief, because he is writing this book as a Christian to other Christians, in order to contrast the faith with its psychologistic counterfeits.

All the same, there is a weakness in the argument on page 52, "The main question to be asked of any faith, be it faith in Christ or faith in psychology, is not 'Does it answer needs?' but 'Does it answer questions?'" Well, in fact psychology tries and fails to do both, and Christianity, as Kilpatrick shows so well, succeeds at both. What we have here is the subtle influence of a belief in the "primacy of the

intellect," the notion that in the whole person, the mind is most important. This is a Greek, not a Biblical, idea. Rather, we should say that Christianity addresses the whole person. Kilpatrick himself defends the propriety of "need love" later in the book, so he is not blind to the fact that addressing men in terms of their (real, not necessarily perceived) needs is a healthy part of the gospel. Again, however, there is no point in being too hard on Kilpatrick here, because he is really making a simple and popular point ("don't believe something just because it feels good"), and not trying to get into philosophy. All the same, I can express the hope that Mr. Kilpatrick will find the time to peruse the writings of Cornelius Van Til and R. J. Rushdoony at some point. They would only strengthen his whole approach.

Chapter 5: The Burden of Self. Kilpatrick here takes up the fact that the psychological society is unrelenting in its earnestness and seriousness. When men play god, they cannot laugh any longer. In contrast, Christians are a child-like (though hopefully not childish) people, who realize that they are not designed to control all things, and consequently are not responsible or accountable for all things. Christians can laugh.

Kilpatrick argues that "(1) the attempt to make the self supreme—a replacement for God—puts an enormous burden on us; (2) concentration on the self is self-defeating since it leads not to self-actualization but to self-seriousness; (3) self-preoccupation leads to a withdrawal of interest in the world and in turn makes the self less interesting" (p. 64). Modern psychologized man, preoccupied with himself, can never forget himself, and thus can never laugh at himself, or lose himself in laughter.

In this same chapter, Kilpatrick points out that when men attempt to take complete control of their lives, they renounce the traditional props that helped them govern society and rear children: "authority, community, tradition, and spouses." While it is immediately obvious to all of us that these things are largely gone or scorned in modern secular society, it is also true that they tend to be missing from the evangelical Christian community as well. "Tradition" for instance is a bad word, since Roman Catholicism used to make so much of it. The result is that Bible-believing Protestantism is riddled with spurious ethical traditions derived from Unitarianism (no smoking, no drinking, Victorian view of art and literature, etc.), and the real heritage of the Church is not known, and not drawn on for strength. Similarly, American Christianity is by and large anti-authoritarian in sentiment, as if God had not constituted rulers in this world to which we are called to submit. Community life is all too slight in the modern evangelical Church, since there is no liturgical focus for it. And even though divorce is still frowned upon, the teamwork relationship of spouses is too often negated either by too much "women's lib" equalitarianism, or else by a view that women should be silent and have nothing to say while the men make all the decisions. These are problems that Kilpatrick addresses later in the book.

Kilpatrick discusses depression on p. 68. This is one of the few places in the book that I think could use improving. The depressed person, according to Kilpatrick, fears and negates his self and his autonomy. He is down on himself. "The depressed person has already tried self-reliance, and when the real test came, it failed. If the self is all he has to live for, he'd rather die." Being depressive by constitution, I don't believe this analysis is accurate. Depression is a form of masochism, and depressed people enjoy being depressed. They caress and cultivate their depression. Depression is not only a consummate form of selfishness, it has also come to be used by people in today's society as a means of eliciting pity. "Poor Jim. He's all depressed. Let's cheer him up."

Poor Jim, indeed! Poor Jim is nursing his rage, hatred, and rebellion against God for what God has "done to him." Jim needs a swift, hard kick in the . . . well, pants.

Chapter 6: Sin and Self-acceptance. Kilpatrick here displays the end product of the self-esteem philosophy. Men are taught to "accept yourself as you are." The result is that men no longer are suspicious of their inner motives, the petty sins that beset us day by day. The failure to discipline and mortify little sins brings about hardening of the spirit, and eventual destruction. Kilpatrick cites the Roman Catholic catechism he was taught as a child, "Little boys and girls are not usually in danger of committing mortal sins. But they can commit little sins. And if they commit venial sins on purpose when they are small and do not try to avoid them, they will commit big sins when they grow up" (p. 81). Theologically, it is true that every little sin is infinitely dishonoring to God, but practically it is true that little sins, unmortified, lead to bigger sins, and to harder hearts. Men should be suspicious of themselves, for their hearts are wicked.

Chapter 7: On Being Born Again. In this interesting chapter, Kilpatrick points out that all pagan religions as well as modern psychology believe that men must be born again. Only Christianity has the true doctrine of rebirth. We must be aware of the differences, so that we can avoid the influences of the counterfeits.

Chapter 8: Moral Education. How is the self educated concerning moral reality? Kilpatrick isolates four components in traditional teaching of morality:

1. There is a right way to behave and a wrong way.
2. You learn the right way by being trained in it.
3. You all need models of virtue to imitate.
4. These models can be found in stories of wisdom and courage. (p. 105)

Thus, Christianity teaches that God is the sovereign Lord of history. All of history is a play, written by God, acted by men. Each self has a part to play, a destiny to fulfill, an importance of his own. What each of us needs to do is live out his role, his part, properly as best he can, with faith in God, the Master Playwright.

Psychologism cuts men off from history, from roots, from larger meanings, from any sense of destiny and purpose. Speaking for modern men, Kilpatrick says, "We prefer to think of the self not as a character-in-a-story but as a character-at-large bound to nothing but its own development" (p. 111) (Van Til would call this the "integration into the void" of the isolated self "adrift in a sea of chaos.") The result is statism, for the state remains the only organizing force in society. Kilpatrick cites Hauerwas on this, "To be trained to resist the state requires nothing less than an alternative story and society in which the self can find a home" (p. 121).

Chapter 9: The Dismal Science: 1984 and Beyond. The study of statism continues here. The goal of totalitarian societies and of psychologism is the same, to "wipe out all special ties of emotion or allegiance such as might exist between husband and wife or parent and child" (p. 127). The isolated individual of today is told that it is "somehow more interesting to be a 'person' than it is to be an heir to a kingdom prepared from the beginning of time" (p. 128).

Unfortunately, evangelicalism and especially Calvinism (and I write as someone who is both) have to bear a large amount of criticism here. By emphasizing the individual alone before God, elect or non-elect; by stripping away all ceremony, ignoring the Church Year, downplaying the narratives of Scripture in favor of catechisms which are nothing more than a series of definitions of terms; by eliminating beautiful music, careful color and decor, etc. from the Church; by all these things and others, Calvinists and evan-

gelicals have removed many of the God-given and Biblically-prescribed reinforcements of the faith which enable men to stand wholistically before the world, the flesh, and the devil. Much of the remainder of Kilpatrick's study is devoted to getting such things back into their proper places.

Chapter 10: The Sacred and the Secular. Here we come to what I regard as the best chapters in this excellent book. It will be impossible for me to summarize the remaining chapters, for they are too rich with insights, and I am running out of space. But briefly, concerning chapter 10, those looking for a precise theological and/or philosophical delineation of the sacred/secular distinction will not find it here. Of course, men cannot and never will exhaustively penetrate or describe this bipolarity, for it is a reflex of the very essence of God Himself (His Oneness and Threeness, His Unity and Diversity). We can only approximate the distinction, and Kilpatrick does a good job, certainly adequate for his purposes. If some ages of men have tried to reduce all to the sacred, modern men have tried to reduce all the the secular.

This chapter deals with things American Christianity has lost, like the analogy between common life and special events, the importance of good attire for worship, the importance of ceremony, the importance of obedience. It needs to be read and re-read.

Chapter 11: The American Spirit. This chapter contrasts Christianity with American independence, individualism, self-reliance, autonomy, and equalitarianism. American Christianity is too simplistic ("God did not create a simple world, and He has not given us a simple religion," p. 165), too informal, to cozy and comfortable, too much given to despising anything high and beautiful (too cheap), and too self-centered. Read this chapter. It's a blast! And it's all too true.

Chapter 12: Secular Temptations. Kilpatrick cuts through the Unitarian notion of worldliness (booze and tobacco) to expose the real worldliness in conservative Christianity today. Come to Jesus and He'll make you well, or rich. Come to the meeting and hear the famous athlete, the famous Las Vegas singer, the famous Indian Chief, the famous rock star, the famous reformed politician, talk about Jesus. That's the theme of this chapter, but Kilpatrick talks about a lot more than just the things I mentioned!

Chapter 13: Answers to Suffering. Pain and suffering. We all want to avoid them, but is it Christian to avoid them at all costs? How about the "positive mental attitude" toward pain and suffering, advocated by psychologists and their Christian camp followers? Kilpatrick shows that this approach actually demeans the sufferer, denying him the real comfort of believing that he is suffering for a reason, or that his suffering has any value or destiny.

Kilpatrick discusses briefly the late-19th century notion, common in some Christian circles, that sometimes a good person suffers in order to alleviate the suffering of some other. Since we are all, as Christians, members of one Body, and we can bear one another's burdens, then maybe my suffering has some value or meaning that I am not even aware of. This is a comforting notion, and not absurd, though I'd like somebody to provide real Biblical grounding for it. Kilpatrick admits that the notion is controversial.

I might add that the play "Dialogues of the Carmelites" by Bernanos, set to music by Poulenc, deals with just this subject. When the Godly Mother Superior dies in great agony and full of doubts, it is commented that she seems to be taking someone else's death. Maybe her Spiritual maturity will enable that someone to face death bravely, as a result of the substitution. Sure enough, faced with the possibility of martyrdom at the guillotine during the French Revolution, novice Blanche flees the convent, only to return in the final scene to die the martyr's death in courage.

That's the kind of thing Kilpatrick is speaking about here. His overall point is that for the Christian suffering is never purposeless, and thus suffering can be faced and accepted. For the psychologist, however, suffering is meaningless. The psychological teaching is thus most cruel, depriving men of the comfort which lies in suffering, whether or not the substitutionary theory is correct.

Chapter 14: Like Little Children. There is no way to summarize this chapter's richness. The theme is this: The Bible tells us to become like little children in our faith, and modern psychology also holds up the child as a model for the man. But what a difference there is! Kilpatrick explores those differences. Here's his summary: "We should indeed become like little children, but we should be clear what we mean by this. The happiness of children (and their particular virtue) comes not from their freedom, or from their self-awareness, or from their self-esteem (these are all adult and adolescent preoccupations) but from their sense of marvel and from the security that a properly ordered adult society provides" (p. 208).

Chapter 15: Love. Because man is a creature, he can only love because he gets benefits from the Creator. This is "need love," scorned by modern psychologists because they want to pretend that they need nothing. Kilpatrick goes further in this chapter, however, and defends the notion of romantic love as peculiarly Christian.

For some strange reason, people in Calvinistic circles often tend to try to downplay romantic love. It does not last, we are told, so Biblical love is really "only obeying the law," or "only a principled attitude." This is rubbish, of course. In fact, Christ's romance with His Bride is the foundation for all romance. When the romance goes out of a marriage, a salutary dose of worship directed to the Divine Husband is the key to getting it back.

Here is but one choice statement from Kilpatrick on the subject: "We can say here that marriage ought to be a shared story; something to look forward to, something to look back on. . . . It is to this need for a vision and a shared story that Christianity can respond where psychology cannot. Appropriately, it responds with the story of a wedding—the story of Christ and His Bride. It is, says the church, the story you were born for. And though you may be old in years, you are still only in the early chapters of that book. Among all the voices that presume to instruct us about our lives, this one speaks with immeasurable comfort. For by a wise provision, so we are told, the Master of the feast has saved the best wine for last" (p. 220).

Buy this book.