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OF CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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Forming the Performers: How Christians Can Use Canon Sense to Bring Us to Our (Theodramatic) Senses

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Christian self-understanding involves understanding God, and this means understanding the Bible, the written means of God's self-presentation. Christianity is viewed neither as a philosophy nor system of morality but theodrama: God's good-doing in the Son through the Spirit (i.e., the gospel of Jesus Christ). Doctrines – summary statements of the meaning of salvation history – help us to understand the triune drama of redemption and our role in it, thus enabling disciples rightly to participate in what God is doing to renew creation by cultivating new habits of heart and mind. The Christian counselor resembles an acting coach that forms the performers. Similarly, theology fosters "canon sense": the ability to make biblical judgments concerning the meaning of life. Disciples do the truth and align themselves not only with Scripture but with reality when they speak and act "according to the script." The doctrine of justification by faith serves as a case study of what it means for Christian psychologists to bring people to their theodramatic senses.

An American couple visiting Greyfriars kirkyard (that's Scottish for "cemetery") in Edinburgh wended their way along the path when the wife suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! They buried two men in a single grave." Her husband asked, "Why do you think that?" upon which the wife replied, "Because the tombstone says, 'Here lies a pastor and a theologian.'"

This joke, with its subversive point that too many people fail to imagine how one who proclaims the faith should also think about it (and vice versa), always goes over well in the context of a seminary. Would it work as well, I wonder, if the punch line were instead "Here lies a psychologist and a theologian"? Those who have difficulty conceiving how counseling and formulating doctrine can work together may well think, upon hearing this phrase, that such an epitaph really does refer to two different individuals. By contrast, I shall assume that Christian psychologists and theologians are engaged in a common enterprise, namely, interpreting God, world, and especially the self first and foremost by interpreting Scripture.¹

Biblical interpretation, Christian doctrine, and personal identity

The first Christian thinker who could legitimately lay claim to the title psychologist-theologian (not counting the apostle Paul) is arguably Saint Augustine. His *Confessions* narrate the story of his life and conversion, a story that is as much about reading Scripture as it is coming to Christ. Yet for Augustine, it is all of a piece: his self-understanding is related to his understanding

of God, which in turn is related to his ability to read the Bible, and to let the Bible "read" him. Reading, after all, is the way in which we live temporarily in someone else's shoes, and thoughts. Reading was for Augustine the critical step of an awakening from illusion in which the reader is not merely reading but contemplating, perchance to gain illumination: "Scripture offers the reader . . . a privileged medium, through which God's will, framed in narrative, can be internalized and directed outwards as ethically informed action" (Stock, 1996, p. 12). For Augustine, reading Scripture was the key to achieving wisdom, in particular with regard to oneself, and thus an ingredient in personal transformation. Hence my claim: the best way to respond both to Socrates' "Know thyself" and to the biblical injunction "Be ye perfect" (or "complete") is to know oneself before God, and that means knowing Scripture.

John Calvin (1960) opens his 1559 edition of the *Institutes* with twin theses that make a similar point: "Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God;" "Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self" (p. 35). Scripture is the norm for our knowledge of God here too. Extrapolating from Calvin thus yields the following: without knowledge of Scripture there is no knowledge of God and hence no knowledge of self. In short: our sense of self is intimately and ineluctably related to our doctrine of God.

Doctrine (from the Latin *sacra doctrina* - "sacred teaching") sets forth the contents of *sacra pagina*, the beliefs held on the basis of Scripture and passed on in

church tradition. It is no secret that doctrinal theology has fallen on hard times in the contemporary church. There are three common objections:

- it is irrelevant, unrelated to life.
- it is unbiblical, abstracted from Scripture.
- it is unspiritual, disconnected from the real issues of personal growth.

There is, alas, an element of truth in these observations. Some theology falls short of all it should be. But we would be wrong to throw the theological baby out with the theoretical bathwater.

To the objection that theology is unrelated to life, we may cite the Puritan William Perkins's 1592 definition of theology as the "science of living blessedly forever" (Perkins, 1970). Knowing God is the most important thing human persons need to know in order to flourish rather than wilt on the vine. To the objection that theology is removed from Scripture, we may recall Anselm's definition - faith seeking understanding - and the challenge of Proverbs to get wisdom and insight (Prov. 4:5). This sapiential imperative demands not merely that we know the right answers, but that we become the kind of people who display right judgment, together with the virtues from which good judgment arises. Theology exists to promote biblical wisdom and understanding; it is the joyful science of getting understanding and of forming the mind of Christ in his disciples.³

In response to the third objection, sound theology is neither unspiritual nor disconnected to personal growth but rather a means of spiritual formation. It is about not only knowing, but loving the truth to the point that truth transforms us "by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Doctrine is therefore a means of spiritual formation to the extent that it succeeds in cultivating the mind of Christ. We need sound doctrine if we are to grow in our faith, that is, in understanding and holiness. The one type of growth leads to the other: it is in coming to understand (to see who we really are in Christ) that we get the vision to be a people set apart as his followers (holy).

We read Scripture and learn doctrine in order to gain understanding. "Understanding" involves much more than theory; it has rather to do with worldview, with grasping our place in the whole of Scripture and history. Only such a grasp of the big picture (why we are here at all) enables us to know what we are to do here and now. This kind of understanding requires imagination, the "power of synoptic vision," the ability to see together and connect apparently unrelated elements into a meaningful pattern. Understanding involves grasping the relation of parts to a larger whole in relation to which the parts have meaning. The psychologist-theologian must not be content merely with stating truth but must take every imagination captive

to Scripture so that we can see ourselves in proper context, as creaturely parts in a created whole, where everything has meaning thanks only to its relation to God. Yes, Virginia, there are vain imaginings. But this no more disqualifies the imagination from serving theology than the existence of logical fallacies disqualifies reason.

So: we interpret the Bible and the text interprets us.⁴ This reciprocity is not limited to texts and individuals. Gerhard Ebeling (1968) observes that the history of the church is the history of biblical interpretation. We can go further: the way in which persons interpret the Bible is not only evidence of their spiritual condition, but a barometer for discerning what is happening in the academy and in culture more broadly. If I am right that every approach to philosophical hermeneutics and type of literary theory eventually appears in biblical interpretation too, then this has consequences for the use of the Bible in pastoral counseling as well.

Setting the stage: towards which indoctrination?

To this point, I have argued that self-understanding requires knowledge of God. It also involves some knowledge of the world. Enter biotechnology, and so-called "transhumanists." The latter want to engineer better human beings: stronger, smarter, taller, and so on. Would it be right to do so if we could? That depends on our doctrine. Our core beliefs about what it is to be human will affect what means we take to cure our bodies, and our souls. In psychopharmacology we trust: do we? Should we?

Everyone has a set of doctrines that they accept, ideas and values on the basis of which they act. The only question is "Which set?" or "Where does it come from?" All the world is a stage, but we do not have time to visit every part of it. It suffices here to attend to two ways in which Christians in North America have become indoctrinated with sub-Christian doctrine.

Alan Wolfe (2003) argues that contemporary American religion is utterly different from what it was a generation ago. "In every aspect of religious life, American faith has met American culture - and American culture has triumphed. . . .the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else" (Wolfe, p. 3). This is in part because of what he calls "the strange disappearance of doctrine in the church": "Talk of hell, damnation, and even sin has been replaced by a non-judgmental language of understanding and empathy. Gone are the arguments over doctrine and theology; if most believers cannot for the life of them recall what makes Luther different from Calvin, there is no need for [disagreement and schism]" (Wolfe, p. 3). In many cases, spirituality - feeling intimate with God - has replaced doctrine.

And what doctrines we hold appear to be non-

Christian, at least according to Christian Smith (2005), another sociologist of religion. While the majority of American teenagers are still religious, the majority of these are largely inarticulate about their faith, religious beliefs, and practices. However, just because they cannot articulate them does not mean that teenagers do not hold to certain doctrines. Indeed, Smith discovered that America's teenagers hold a theology that he names "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" whose main theological tenets are that God wants us to be nice (moral) and to be happy (feel good).⁵ Nice people go to heaven, and nearly everyone is nice. A pretty doctrine, to be sure, but wholly unbiblical! It is also non-Trinitarian: as Smith notes, the god of Moral-Therapeutic Deism neither dies on a cross nor transforms people through his Spirit.

Smith does not examine the impact the changes documented in these two books have had on Christian counseling, but it is a legitimate question. Has Moralistic Therapeutic Deism become the default doctrinal mode not only of America's teenagers but also of its psychologists? What difference would it make to offer counsel out of a Redemptive Trinitarian Theistic framework?

What difference indeed? For many Christians today, orthodox doctrine is disconnected from the rough and tumble of real life. We have become experts in compartmentalizing our faith. The modern world encourages specialists, after all. But Christian faith is not a specialization. Nor does it have anything to do with wish fulfillment or brain-washing. On the contrary, it has to do with awakening the sleep-walkers of the world whose waking dreams of materialism are only a poor imitation of what is truly real. For the real matter and energy on which the universe depends is the word and work of the triune God. Theology is nothing less than the ministry of reality and, by implication, the critique of idols and illusions.

"Theodrama": the gospel as thing done and word made

Christianity is neither a philosophy, a system of morality, nor even a religion, at least not in the first instance. It is rather about what God has done in Christ through the Spirit. The term "drama" comes from the Greek verb *drao*: "to do." Dramas are about people doing things. The gospel is *theodramatic*: it's all about the speech and acts of God. Christianity is all about what God has done, is doing, and will do with words, and with the Word and Spirit of life.

The gospel is something done by God, a "theodrama" (*theo* + *drao*). This way of thinking about Christian faith leads us to see the Bible as a script, doctrine as theatrical direction, and human identity as intimately related to the speaking and acting parts

persons play. The dramatic analogy may also provide a useful way of thinking about Christian psychology as a strategy for helping persons to understand their identities and roles and for equipping them to be competent participants in the action.

Theater occurs when one or more persons "present" themselves to others. So it is with the drama of redemption: the Bible begins with the self-presentation of God who in creating sets the stage of world history. Theodrama is a matter of God's taking the initiative to make himself known to others, of God's parting the heavenly curtain in order to reveal and redeem. Unlike philosophical systems where the medium is ideas, or film where the medium is celluloid images, the medium of theodrama is *living persons in dialogical interaction and covenantal relation*.⁶ The *form* of drama is story; the *material* of drama is interpersonal action and relation (Kurtz, 2007). Theology is merely the shadow cast by the theodrama; God's doing - God's speech and action - is prior to the church's response.

The first premise of the Christian theodrama is that God can and has entered freely into relation with the world. The Incarnation is simply the climax of a whole series of divine entrances. There are also some dramatic exits. The exodus - God's delivery of Israel from their oppression in Egypt - is the great saving event of the Old Testament. It is also the singular act that, more than any other, identifies the God of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt" (Ex. 20:2). Now Jesus refers in Luke 9:31 refers to his own his death as the "departure" (*exodos*) which he would accomplish in Jerusalem. This, along with the resurrection, is arguably the climax of the New Testament drama. Both the Old and New Testaments, then, highlight "exits": of Israel from Egypt and bondage; of Jesus from Jerusalem and ultimately from the grave. Note, too, that the resurrection itself makes possible another entrance: that of the Holy Spirit: "it is to your advantage that I go away [exit, die], for if I do not go away the Counselor [and tempting though it may be, Jesus is not referring to psychologists!] will not come to you" (Jn. 16:7).

These comings and goings that make up the dramatic action are actually missions or sendings (from the Latin *missio* = "sending"). God makes good on his *promissio* to Abraham by the *missios* of Son and Spirit. God moves in mysterious - missionary! - ways. The theodrama is thoroughly missional. Jesus sends us the Spirit and then he sends us out to make disciples. The purpose of all these sendings is to enable all who are in Christ to return to God. What Christians have to understand is the theodrama: what God has done and is doing to create a community, a communion. For the gospel is the good news that, because of the missions of Son and Spirit, we have a share in the very life

of God. The Spirit unites the church to Christ and, through the Son, believers have a relationship with the Father. The doctrine of the Trinity, in identifying the divine *dramatis personae* - the leading actors - is thus a *précis* of the whole drama.

The drama also has a script - words the actors seek to follow and embody - together with a climax (Jesus' cross and resurrection) and ending (the Last Judgment). The theatrical analogy opens up a fresh perspective (performance) on what it means to live biblically and thereby gives us new purchase on the nature of the Bible itself. Whether we acknowledge it or not, most of us live according to words: lessons we have heard from our parents or teachers, lyrics from the songs that loop in our heads, principles drawn from philosophers, or perhaps simply advice gleaned from investment counselors, astrologists, even fortune cookies. Many aspects of our everyday lives are socially scripted, sometimes explicitly so by "how to" books. So: whose script are we following?

Disciples of Jesus Christ should be following and embodying the Bible, their holy script: Scripture. Just these texts represent the divinely authorized version of the theodrama. The Bible is the authoritative account of the mighty acts of God in the past. As such, it is a dogmatic text that regulates Christian belief. But it also regulates Christian behavior, prescribing - which is to say, directing by writing - the way of Jesus Christ as the way of *salus* (health, salvation). There is thus good reason to see the Bible as a holy script in both the pharmaceutical and theatrical sense of the term.

Understanding: knowing how to perform the holy script

To understand the story of Jesus is to be able to follow it. Doctrine is a vital aid to following, theoretically and practically, the story of what God is doing in Christ. If dogmatic theology concerns the speech and action of the triune God, and moral theology the church's response in word and deed, then doctrine is direction for the church's fitting participation in the drama of redemption. *Doctrine is the way we come to understand the drama and our role in it.* Doctrine is a special kind of directive instruction: doctrine gives theatrical direction, as it were, to actors - directions that enable them to understand the play and their own parts within it. Doctrine gives direction for right speaking, right acting, and right opinion (*ortho-doxo*) as concerns God's world-making and good-doing in Christ through the Spirit.

This definition of doctrine assumes that one can participate in the action rightly only if one has an adequate understanding of (1) what the drama is all about, (2) who the principal *dramatis personae* are, (3) the scene we are in, and (4) the role we are playing.

Doctrine as direction tells us what has already been done (by God) and what remains to be done (by us). Those who read Scripture are called to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22).

To know God is to participate in the missions - the dramatic actions - of Son and Spirit. It is to engage in a kind of participatory theatre. Doctrine makes explicit what we need to know in order to bear effective witness to what God is doing in Christ through the Spirit for the salvation of the world. We need to know, for example, who the principal actors are, and this is precisely what the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon provide: identity descriptions for the triune God and for Jesus Christ. We also come to know ourselves as active participants in God's mission to the world. What we say and do counts: for the stuff of theodrama is not abstract propositions but embodied personal relationships - people doing things with words and bodies.

It is one thing to have a high view of Scripture, quite another to embody it. The Bible is the mirror that shows us to ourselves as we truly are (Jas. 1:22-25). To be biblical is to remember who one is in Christ and act accordingly. It is a matter not simply of believing information but of responding to the many different things God is saying and doing in Scripture. Those who take up the book in order to see themselves must be more than biblical information processors: they must obey the commands, trust the promises, sing the songs, heed the wisdom, and hope for the ending. The word of the Lord demands not only belief but the obedience of faith: in a word, *performance*.

The task of understanding is to "unfold" (to open or spread out) what has been "infolded" (implied) in the discourse: the world "of" the text. "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:130). Strictly speaking, Christians do not perform the script but the world/theodrama that the text presupposes, entails, and implies. Readers gain understanding when they appropriate - perform - the worldview proposed by the biblical text by actively following its direction of thought and its design for living. To understand is to acquire "a set of capacities for action in relation to something" (Kelsey, 1992, p. 125). We understand our situation when we grasp what we are to do in it, and we demonstrate our understanding by doing it.

Doctrinal direction

Far from being impractical and irrelevant to life, doctrine helps us view ourselves in theodramatic perspective and, in so doing, helps us come to our biblical senses. Doctrine aids our search to understanding God, the world, and ourselves by teaching us what God has done for us and what we are to do for God. Doctrine provides direction for participating in (per-

forming) the reality indicated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be sure, following dramatic direction is different from following, say, driving directions. Dramatic direction suggests a different picture, that of an actor receiving instruction in how best to play her part. Similarly, doctrine provides direction for the disciple's (and the church's) faithful speech and action, direction for embodying the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ in new situations.

Sound doctrine leads us to be wise by cultivating certain habits of mind, imagination, and action - habits of the heart. By "habit" I mean a disposition towards a certain pattern of desiring, deliberating, and doing. At its best, doctrine both teaches (informs) and trains (forms). Doctrinal catechisms, for instance, provide direction both in the substance of the faith and in how the catechumen ought to participate in or engage this substance. In the early church, catechism prepared a convert for baptism, that is, for one's initiation into the drama of redemption. The purpose of doctrine is to enable one to be a competent participant. For the primary purpose of doctrine is not to form systems of theology but to form disciples. Stated differently: theology exists to minister Christian understanding.

The model of theatrical direction here comes into its own, enriching the concept of biblical authority by providing us with a new model for conceiving the relation between text and interpretation: performance. In the context of the theatre, to interpret a script is to act, and to act is to interpret. As we have seen, doctrine provides direction for the disciple's (and the church's) faithful speech and action, direction for embodying the way, the truth, and the life faithfully and fittingly in new situations. "Fittingness" is the operative concept. Fittingness designates a relation between a whole and its constituent parts. What is "fit" rightly finds its place in the "whole." Theological fittingness is less a matter of logical than of dramatic consistency, for the wholeness in question concerns a pattern of action, and not only a system of thought. For the whole into which all else fits is none other than the history of Jesus Christ, the concrete embodiment of the love and wisdom of God. Dramatic fittingness with what God has done in Christ is the supreme criterion for truth, goodness, and beauty alike.

Giving direction to others

The director is perhaps best viewed as the midwife of a text's performance, the mediator between the word written and the word enacted with and before others. Who does the Bible identify as the "director" of Christian understanding?

The Holy Spirit is the primary director: "He will guide [direct] you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13). The analogy is entirely apt, for the Spirit speaks not on his own

authority, "but whatever he hears he will speak" (Jn. 16:13). The director's primary task is to preserve the communicative import of the author's drama. Doctrine is one of the means the Spirit uses to direct the church to abide in the biblical word and to embody the script in new situations.

While triune providence oversees the global production of biblical truth, it is the pastor who bears the primary responsibility for overseeing local performances. Pastors are assistant directors. Their task is primarily that of communication: to the actors about the meaning of the script and then, indirectly through the actors, to the "audience" (i.e., the world) about the meaning of the play. The church, the company of actors, communicates the meaning of the play through its bodily action. What the pastor/director really needs to do is take the congregation's imagination captive to the Scriptures so that theodrama becomes the governing framework of the community's speech and action (2 Cor. 10:5).

Elsewhere I have argued that the theologian best corresponds to the dramaturg, the person who makes drama work by helping the director and the players to understand the script (Vanhoozer, 2005, see especially part 3). It is the dramaturg's responsibility to research the play, to keep it historically accurate, to think about the playwright's intent, to study the play's production history, and to collaborate with the director on the play's interpretation. The dramaturg's task continues during rehearsal, ensuring that the director and the actors remain in line with the overall vision of the production, its meaning and truth. The dramaturg "must be the artistic conscience of his theatre" (Cardullo, 1995, p. 5).

What of the Christian psychologist or pastoral counselor? Where might he or she fit into my dramatic model? "Stage manager" is not quite right, nor is "scenic designer." Some may think "make-up artist" comes closer insofar as it pertains to one's "face" or manner of one's self-presentation to the world. Much to be preferred, however, is "acting coach": the person who works most closely with aspiring actors to prepare them for their roles. The acting coach coaches actors in acting. Stated less redundantly: the acting coach helps persons to "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (Meisner & Longwell, 1987, p. 15). Of course, in the case of Christian counselors, the "imaginary" circumstances - the theodrama perceived with the eyes of the heart (Eph. 1:18) - are, in fact, the true ones. Yet many of us need help in learning how to live truthfully in a theodramatic situation that is largely invisible to the naked eye. The imagination is a cognitive faculty, however, and can be a servant of the truth. Indeed, only with an eschatological imagination can we see the reality of the "already" and the "not yet" of

the kingdom of God in our midst.

Acting coaches help actors to render their characters truthfully. Their challenge is to help actors come into their own, that is, to become the person they are cast - or rather, called by God - to be. The media have dubbed Susan Batson the "Oscar Coach" because she works with A-list actors like Tom Cruise who have thanked her publicly in their acceptance speeches. She has also been called a "technician of the spirit," a particularly intriguing epithet given the analogy between acting coaches and counselors. Batson has explained her coaching methods in a recent book: *Truth: Personas, Needs, and Flaws in the Art of Building Actors and Creating Characters*. The introduction was written by Nicole Kidman, who has worked with Batson for eleven years and acknowledged her in an Oscar acceptance speech. Kidman writes: "Susan helps me to find the truth in myself and use its purity, intimacy and honesty to make my work real. She's helped me to nurture and protect truth in myself and in the characters that I've played" (Batson, p. iii). That is not a bad job description of the Christian counselor as well.

There are various schools of acting, just as there are different schools with regard to Christian counseling. This is not the time to explore parallels, though it would be interesting to see how integrationists, biblical counselors, and Christian psychologists line up with regard to their theatrical counterparts: I leave it to you to fight over who wants to be Juilliard and who wants to be the Yale School of Drama (for a survey of different philosophies and approaches in contemporary acting schools, see Brestoff, 1995). Suffice it to say that Christian counselors, like drama coaches, are involved in doctrinally directed soul care: training people to be functional members of the company of Christian actors, all of whom are engaged in the God-glorifying project of living truthfully under evangelical circumstances. In sum: Christian counselors resemble acting coaches who help actors to understand the parts they have to play and encourage them to play them with integrity to the glory of God. This involves training the client's mind, heart, imagination, and will to think, desire, see, and act in ways that accord with the way things are as we know them to be through the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ, the one through whom all things were made and in whom all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).

Presenting oneself to others in everyday life

Training in theodramatic righteousness involves cognitive therapy, but this has nothing to do with brain washing or wish fulfillment. The only washing here has to do with what C. S. Lewis (1946, p. 21) calls the "baptism" of the imagination, the only wish fulfillment with the wish to conform one's life to reality,

understood as the order of things structured by God's word. There is no other way to achieve integrity as a person than to correspond to God's word, that is, to have one's life brought into alignment with the meaning and truth of human existence, which is what God says it is. The Bible, as God's word, is the plumb line by which we take the measure of reality and ourselves: the "rule" to which things that purport to be real, including ourselves, have to measure up. To look at oneself in the mirror of Scripture involves more than getting information. Reading one's life through the lens of Scripture ultimately involves not only learning about the distant past but renewing and transforming our present habits of seeing, thinking, and acting.

Reading the Bible as a canonical whole with the eyes of faith fosters theodramatic vision: the ability to view history, including one's personal history, as the field of divine action. It is by indwelling the diverse "word views" of the Bible that we develop, with the help of the Spirit, the "mind of Scripture," and ultimately the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Jesus is the embodiment of the ideal reader of Scripture, the paradigm of one who has 20-20 theodramatic vision. Jesus knew exactly where he stood in the theodrama. Soul care, I submit, is similarly a matter of right theodramatic orientation, of cultivating the mind of Christ in those whose minds are blinded, confused, and generally in the dark

I am not the first to apply the model of the theater to human behavior. Erving Goffman (1959), a social psychologist, said something similar in his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Everyday life is theatrical: individuals present themselves to others wherever they are and whatever they happen to be doing. This is the essence of theater: one or more persons "presenting" themselves to others (Beckerman, 1970, p. 8). In particular, Goffman uses theatrical concepts to analyze how people create and maintain their public personas. Each of us presents a public face to the world, he believes, and we all do what we can to guide and control the impressions that others form of us. Goffman defines "performance" as "the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). It takes tremendous energy to stage a character; it also takes what Goffman calls the "arts of impression management" (which is the title of the sixth chapter in his book). It is easier to manage impressions, of course, when one is part of a team of performers (i.e., a social group) "who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation" (Goffman, p. 238). Humans form groups through socialization; we begin to learn our cultural lines as soon as we begin to talk. What is schooling (and the playground) if not a rehearsal for the various dramas of social life? It is not

greatness that is thrust upon us, but our socially defined roles. The mass-marketed masks are the hardest to take off. Yet, such is the challenge of coming to our senses, and our true faces.

Everyday life is easy - if one does not think about it overmuch. Those who do think about it, however, know otherwise. Mikhail Bakhtin (1993), the Russian literary theorist, was keenly aware of his moral responsibility for each moment of his life, an awareness he expressed in the haunting thought, "There is no alibi for being" (p. 42). He makes this statement knowing full well that humans are adept at inventing alibis for being. We call them "excuses"; their purpose is to maintain the illusion that we are the heroes of our own life-story. Deep down, however, many of us worry - or worse, know - that this is not in fact the case.

How then do we, Christian theologians and psychologists, dramaturgs and acting coaches, form the performers so that people will present not masks but real faces to one another? How can we help people to understand themselves as creatures and covenant servants of God and to act in ways intended to please God rather than men? Before we are blinded by the stage lights or drunk with applause as we present ourselves to others, we need to heed the apostle Paul's words to Timothy: "present yourself to *God* as one approved . . . rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Status anxiety: a case study

We turn now to a case study in order to illustrate how the dramatic paradigm for theology and Christian counseling plays out with regard to a common real-life crisis. In this connection let me mention a book by Alain de Botton. Though de Botton is neither a theologian nor psychologist, he has latched on to what is perhaps as universal a truth about the human condition as Ernst Becker's (1973) suggestion, in his *Denial of Death*, that the mainspring of much human activity is our inability to face our mortality and the need practically to deny it by keeping busy, distracting ourselves with activities. The title of de Botton's (2004) book, like Becker's, points to what he has discovered: *Status Anxiety*.

Status has to do with one's standing or position in society. Wherever two or three are gathered, there are ways of assessing status: royal/commoner; white collar/blue collar; master/slave; Ph.D./ABD. We typically defer to people of high status and expect those who have less status than we do to defer to us. Status colors all our interactions with other people.⁷ Every society has its ways of awarding high status to some people and low status to others based on what they do or have done, their looks, how they talk, and so forth. It is important to most of us to maintain a certain standing in the eyes of our family, friends, and teachers. Our

status-hunger motivates much, if not most, of what we do: the way we dress, converse, and generally present ourselves to others.

What complicates matters is that our status is volatile, and this makes us vulnerable. Our assessment of our own looks, intelligence, and even spirituality depends to a great extent on how others view us. De Botton (2004) notes that we define life by two great love stories: the quest for romantic love and, less known, the quest for love from the world. The attention of others matters to us because we are afflicted by a congenital uncertainty as to our own value.

Status anxiety refers to our need to be assured of our status in the eyes of our peers. A status anxiety attack - that panicky feeling that others are looking down at us in contempt or, worse, indifference - may strike at any time, for status anxiety runs like a psychological fault line through the geology of our sense of self worth. Status anxiety afflicts as many people as the common cold. It is the pernicious fear that we are not living up to the standards of success laid down by our society and that, as a result, that we are on the verge of becoming a nobody. Those who suffer from especially acute cases of status anxiety may feel that they are social lepers: "Unworthy! unworthy!," they cry from the cave of their ugly inner child.

Individual Christians and churches too may display symptoms of status anxiety in the face of a hostile empire, the "empire" not of the ancient Romans but of contemporary global culture (Hardt & Negri, 2000). Some congregations, like status-anxious individuals, may feel tempted to employ the tools of capitalist-consumerist empire - marketing techniques, for example - in order to achieve larger numbers and be reckoned a success in the eyes of the world. "Success" in today's empire, and thus high status, is ultimately a matter of what works, or rather, of what sells. Nevertheless, popularity is a false and fickle god, as both Christians and worshipers at the shrine of American Idol ought to know. It is a terrible thing when one's sense of identity "is held captive by the judgments of those we live among" (de Botton, 2004, p. 8).

Wretched man or woman that I (barely) am! Who will deliver me from this debilitating anxiety about my standing before others? It is time to explore how a Christian psychologist might employ a theodramatic perspective in order to counsel such a status anxious person in order to bring that person to his or her theodramatic senses.

Canon sense

People with status anxiety need a dose not of common but canon sense: sound judgment about practical matters that comes not from worldly society but from the "society" of biblical literature - from the various

forms of literature and points of view that make up the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The canon is far more than a mere list of books in the Bible. It is a measuring or even *divining* rod that enables us to discern what we should say and do today in order to continue and correspond to the way, truth, and life made known in Jesus Christ. As such, it is both source and norm of the disciple's individual identity as well as the church's corporate identity. In short: the canon is the Christian framework for knowing who you are and what you are supposed to do *coram Deo* ("before God").

The one true God is a communicating and self-communicating God who takes the communicative initiative in order to establish interpersonal (i.e., covenantal) relations (Vanhoozer, 2010). God calls both Israel and the church into being by making promises: "I will be your God." Viewed in theodramatic perspective, the canon is a covenant document, a sign and seal of the triune God's commitment to be "for us," "with us," and "in us."

The canonical Scriptures are ultimately means of covenantal formation, of cultivating "canon sense." Where common sense is that sound practical knowledge that allows us to get by in everyday situations, canon sense is by contrast a habit of thinking about God, the world, and ourselves that follows biblical patterns and canonical templates.

Canon sense refers, in the first place, to one's ability to locate oneself in relation to the overall creation-fall-redemption-consummation story-line of the great theodrama: What scene am I playing? Canon sense means, secondly, thinking in ways that have been schooled by the different kinds of biblical texts. This is more than a matter of processing information. It is rather a matter of having our perception, reason, and imagination trained - or, why not say it, *disciplined* - by Scripture so that our habits of making sense of our experience are more biblical than cultural. In a different arena, Martha Nussbaum (1990) has argued that literature has its own contributions to make to the study of ethics and philosophy. There is more than one way to be precise, more than one way to look at things: "Forms of writing were not seen as vessels into which different contents could be indifferently poured; form was itself a statement, a content" (p. 15). The Bible, similarly, is made up of a large variety of literary forms, including narratives; it is a coat of many canonical colors.

To learn canon sense is to cultivate what Saint Athanasius referred to as the "mind of Scripture."⁸ No one had the mind of Scripture more than Jesus himself. Jesus can answer the key questions - Who am I? What am I to do? - because he knows the answer to the prior question, "Of what story do I find myself a

part?" He answers these questions about the nature of his mission and identity by reading his life in the light of the Scriptures. This is precisely how he begins his public ministry according to Luke 4: he read in the synagogue from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" and then announced "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:17-21).

Out part is not that of Messiah; disciples have different roles to play. Still, we must imitate Jesus if we are to learn canon sense: we must acquire the habit of viewing ourselves, and everyday life, in theodramatic perspective. To view ourselves *sub specie theodramatis* ("from the perspective of the theodrama") means viewing every moment of every day as an opportunity and invitation to speak and act in ways that fit with what God is doing in the world in Christ through the Spirit. It is a matter of indwelling as a disciple the world projected by the biblical text. Canon sense means letting the word of God dwell in us as we dwell in the word: "A theologian is someone who is interpreted by the Holy Scripture, allows himself or herself to be interpreted by it, and as someone interpreted by it interprets it for others" (Oswald Bayer as cited in Hutter, 2000, p. 72).

The Bible is a means through which the triune God engages us on all levels of our being, transforming us dialogically and effectually through our hearing, meditating on, and doing what is written (Vanhoozer, 2009). It is ultimately the Spirit of God who ministers the word of God and brings us to our senses. We come to our canonical senses by studying and praying the Scriptures. For this reason, it is hard to say whether we do the word or the word does something to us, catching us up imaginatively into the world it unfolds. Again, it is important to approach the Bible not merely as a source of information or even of timelessly true principles but rather as a medium for a variety of divine communicative acts whose collective purpose is not simply to inform but transform: to nurture right vision, right attitudes, right actions - to provide "training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). In encouraging us to "perform" the text, then, I do not mean simply repeating its words, but inhabiting the world it projects, living so as to demonstrate one's theodramatic understanding, one's grasp of what God did back then, and of what God is doing now. "Performing the script" is shorthand for living in the world implied by the script.

What theologians, psychologists, and pastoral counselors alike are after in applying ourselves to the biblical text is the ability to inculcate habits of good *judgment* in those whom we teach and counsel. As actors in the drama of redemption, life constantly confronts us with situations that compel us to see, judge, and act. We all necessarily make judgments whose

consequences demonstrate either our wisdom or folly. Theology's aim is to cultivate persons with theodramatic wisdom: the ability to know what to say and do in order to advance the main action of the play. It follows that we must become, to use the title of Keith Plummer's (2009) recent doctoral dissertation, *canonically* competent to counsel.

Performing justification by faith

Doctrine trains and disciplines our minds, hearts, and imaginations so that we develop good canonical habits of viewing everyday life *sub specie theodramatis*. Stated differently: *doctrines are intellectual habits that draw upon the synthetic power of the imagination to enable us to see this world in other-worldly - which is to say, eschatological - terms so that our hearts may be aligned with the heart of God.* To the extent that Christian theology and psychology help to insert us into the drama of redemption, to understand our parts, to accept our identities, and to grow into our assigned roles, they undertake the ministry of reality: that is, they become ministerial aids in transforming us into the image of the one whose words define reality. To suggest how this is so, let me offer a brief example.

While every doctrine helps us to understand and participate in the theodrama, perhaps no doctrine comes nearer the heart of the matter than that of justification by faith. Greek and Shakespearean tragedies often end with blood on the stage. Blood spilt - or rather shed - figures in Scripture as well, for "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). How can we "perform" this shed blood and the doctrine of justification that goes with it? By putting on Christ; by having the mind of Christ.

Performing the doctrine of justification by faith means acquiring a particular habit of theodramatic judgment: that of thinking, imagining, and feeling that we really have died and been raised with Christ and so have his status before God. What faith imaginatively grasps (because it cannot be empirically observed) is God's acceptance of us despite our sin and our subsequent union with Christ. Christian identity is theodramatic: who we truly are, is ultimately a function of Jesus' unique person and work: "Only in the drama of the God-Man do we find identity between the sublime actor and the role he has to play" (von Balthasar, 1988, p. 646). In everyone else, there is a certain gap or tension between identity (who we are; our personhood) and role (what we say and do; our *persona*), between what we are called to be "in Christ" and what we are actually able to realize of our destiny in this life. Christian identity is thus both gift and task. Justification clarifies the nature of the gift (union with Christ) and sustains us in the task (becoming like Christ).

The cross is not simply some historical event to which we are distantly related, but rather the constitutive event of a new humanity. The apostle Paul locates his identity squarely in the death of Jesus: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20a). Moreover, the "I" who lives in Paul is no longer Paul's, but Christ's ego: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20b). Paul considers his own personal identity inseparable from Christ's. To be "in Christ" is to be part of the new creation animated by Christ's Spirit. Those "in Christ" share or participate in Jesus' death and resurrection so that events that happened to him become part of the narrative of their own lives. Doctrine does more than confer a role on us; it describes our deepest self, our truest identity, our "life hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

The question of personal identity (Who am I?) has become thoroughly politicized in late modernity, a function of race, gender, class. More radical yet, however, is the identity descriptor "in Christ." One's identity "in Christ" is more fundamental than race, gender, or class, so much so that the apostle Paul can say that "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . neither slave nor free . . . neither male nor female . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The first way we participate in or perform the saving significance of Jesus' death then, is by realizing our union with Christ.

Only a God who communicates can make a promise or enter into a covenantal relationship. Only a God who can pronounce forgiveness can make things right when that covenant relationship has been broken. Only the speaking God can help, and this is precisely what God does in justifying; he *declares* sinners righteous. Luther was right: only a clear word from God - the gospel - can assure us of salvation and give us the peace that comes from knowing that we are right with God (because God has made us right with him).

Justification is a divine declarative, the kind of speech act that does not so much describe a state of affairs as bring it about (i.e., "I now pronounce you man and wife"; "Your sins are forgiven"). The doctrine of justification by faith thus refutes the modern assumption that we are the authors of our own being who define ourselves by our works. Justification rejects the Pelagian premise that who we are is the sum total of what we have been able to do (e.g., win, build, buy, publish). On the contrary, justification is about God declaring us to be *other than* we "actually" are. For the truth of who we are as persons cannot be determined by historical or empirical analysis, but only by attending to the word of God. Justification is a divine statement that, in declaring also determines "what is." Who we are is ultimately a function not of our own works, but of God's say-so. What we learn from justification, then, is that God has decided to regard those who trust

in Christ as Lord and Savior as something better than the sum total of their own paltry performances. We are what God does with his words: we are forgiven, declared righteous, because God says so. When we think about ourselves in the theodramatic perspective of what God has said/done in Christ, status anxiety is no more.

To be sure, only Jesus Christ perfectly lives up to what he was called to be. The rest of us have to struggle to bring our lived existence into conformity with our God-declared essence in Christ. The gospel truth, however, is that Christians are more than what we do. My true identity is in Christ, and that means that I have been adopted into the family of God. To be truly human is to live in conformity to the truth of what, and who, I am: a member of God's covenant people and new humanity.

Conclusion: The phronetic imperative

What do Christian psychologists have to say and do that no other group of psychologists can say or do? Call it the "sapiential" imperative: "Get wisdom; get insight [understanding]" (Proverbs 4:5). Wisdom and understanding lead to human flourishing. We get wisdom - mental health - by cultivating the mind of Christ, a mind that understands God, world, and oneself from the standpoint of the Scriptures and the theodrama that unites them, a mind that, among other things, understands (and accepts) justification by faith. We could equally well call it the "phronetic" imperative, and link it with Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:5: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."

The verb Paul uses here - which is also the key verb in the epistle - is most interesting: *phronein*, the same term that Aristotle uses in speaking about "practical reason." Practical reason is thinking oriented to decision-making about what to do in particular situations. Paul is not asking the Philippians to become robots and all do the same thing. He is asking them rather to adopt the same perspective - a theodramatic perspective - so that they will understand their respective situation rightly and act accordingly. Paul wants the church to adopt the same attitude - the same theodramatic vision; the same disposition to act - as Jesus Christ. This means a whole pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that corresponds to the nature of the coming kingdom of God, where "what [God] wants done is done" (Willard, 1998, p. 25). This is, after all, the main action of the play: the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ through the Spirit.

Paul here ministers to his readers' hearts and minds. It is not merely that he wants to add one more belief to faith's inventory. No, he's after bigger game than that. He wants to change the whole pattern of

our thinking. He wants to convert our imaginations: "Have this mind among yourselves;" "let this be your pattern of thinking, acting, and feeling." Which pattern? The one displayed in Jesus Christ.

We can only respond to Paul's exhortation by learning to see things in a new way. Like the Philippians, we live in a status-conscious empire where a person's net social worth is a function of the social capital that person has accumulated. The church, if it is to be the body of Jesus Christ, must learn new habits. We must learn to see things, especially other people, as citizens of a different kind of kingdom whose king has set the pattern for our life together. We must learn to view God, the world, and ourselves according to the strange new status symbol of the cross.

What does Paul have to contribute to our case study, status anxiety? Much, in every way! First: the gospel responds to the problem of status anxiety with *status peace*. The gospel is the good news that our status before God is secure, not because of what we have achieved in this life but because of what Jesus Christ did in his. Christ did not exploit his own status (as God), but exchanged it for our guilty status, making us sons of God. Through faith in Christ we have been adopted into God's own family, with all the rights and privileges that accompany our status as God's children. Once you were dead in your status anxiety, but now you are alive to Christ. There is therefore now no status anxiety for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:1).

A second point follows from the first. The way God sees us is the way we truly are. Worldly status is a game of smoke and mirrors. It's all about appearance, not reality. In asking us to live a life worthy of the gospel, Paul is asking us to live in a way that corresponds to the way things really are. Perhaps the best rendering of Paul's thought would be: "Speak and act in ways that befit the way the world really is 'in Christ'." Outside the church, there is only play-acting and wish-fulfillment. The real action, the way of truth and life, takes place in the church.

Theology, like psychology, exists to bring sinners captive to sinful delusions back to their right senses. The purpose of doctrine is to serve actors who want to live lives in conformity to reality and truth. We have canon sense, and truth, only when we acknowledge ourselves as creatures before the Creator and as forgiven sinners before the covenant Lord. We correspond to reality when we bear true witness to what God is doing in Christ through the Spirit. We bear true witness when we embody the truth of the drama of redemption in our lives.

Coming to our senses involves more than medicating our way back towards normal behavior. We do not want merely to function, but to flourish. Human

flourishing is a matter not of filling prescriptions but of following our holy script. The actor-disciple must practice the three D's: he or she must discern, deliberate on, and do what citizens of the kingdom of God would do in this or that situation. It is not a matter of literally replicating what Jesus did; we don't need to die on wooden crosses as criminals in order to be crucified daily. But we do need to discern, deliberate on, and do what it means to be crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and to die daily (1 Cor. 15:31). Such is the way of wisdom, and of wholeness.

The purpose of soul care is to equip actors to play their parts in God's great drama of redemption with integrity and joy, speeding persons on their way, or rather, on the way of Jesus Christ, the one who is truth and life. To this end we need more, but not less, than cognitive therapy. We need the guidance of doctrine as we seek to join the great theodrama that is the subject of Scripture. We need to learn the habit of right theodramatic judgment. This is a matter of forming, reforming, and transforming our thoughts and imaginings, our hearts and minds, according to the canonical scriptures. Church and world alike desperately need coaches ready and able to train actors to be willing and wise agents of God's *salus* and *shalom*.

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Notes

¹See especially Part II of Thiselton (1995), "Interpreting Texts and Interpreting the Self," Gerkin (1984), and Capps (1984). These works have now largely been superseded by Johnson (2007), which has raised the discussion of pastoral counseling and biblical interpretation to a new level.

²According to Thiselton (1992), the transformative purpose of Scripture involves a "hermeneutics of the self."

³By "mind" I mean "outlook, attitude," as shall become apparent below in our discussion of Phil. 2:5 ("Have this mind among yourselves...").

⁴Cf. Ernst Fuchs's comment that "one does not interpret the parables, the parables interpret him" (cited

in William Beardslee, *Literary Criticism and the NT* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977] p. 80).

⁵"Deism" refers to the early modern position that although God created the world, he does not intervene in its operation. Deism is closely associated with the natural or rational religion of the eighteenth century rather than with the supernatural and biblical religion of genuine Christianity.

⁶Dialogue, because persons are communicative agents; covenantal relation, because to enter into conversation with another is to invoke tacit obligations. In the words of J. L. Austin (1975, p. 10): "Our word is our bond."

⁷This explains why improvisers are taught to recognize status and to see every social encounter as a "status transaction" (Johnstone, 1981, pp. 36-37).

⁸The phrase comes from Athanasius (see Young, 2005).

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Commentaries on Kevin J. Vanhoozer's "Forming the Performers: How Christians Can Use Canon Sense to Bring Us to Our (Theodramatic) Senses"

Each issue of *Edification* begins with a discussion article followed by open peer commentaries that examine the arguments of that paper. The goal is to promote edifying dialogues on issues of interest to the Christian psychological community. The commentaries below respond to Kevin J. Vanhoozer's "Forming the Performers: How Christians Can Use Canon Sense to Bring Us to Our (Theodramatic) Senses." Dr. Vanhoozer reacts to these commentaries in the next article.

The Parts We Play: Anthropology and Application to Expand Vanhoozer's Proposal

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Vanhoozer's proposal brings a healthy dose of creativity to what, at times, can appear to be the creatively-challenged *kitsch* of theological-psychological integration. Indeed, his proposal breathes new life into theological reflection, challenging us to view good theologizing as formative in its intent. I share Vanhoozer's desire. I have taught a course at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) called *Psychology in Relation to Theology* for six years, but lament the absence of greater collaboration between theologians and psychologists. While there are exceptions (Shults & Sandage, 2006; Charry, 1997; Johnson, 2007; Allender & Longman, 1994), there are far too few examples of the seamless theologizing and psychologizing that was seen in notable figures of the past like Augustine, Baxter, Flavel, or Kierkegaard. I have attempted my own biblical narrative-based proposal using the theme of New Exodus (DeGroat, 2009).

While I share Vanhoozer's desire, I find his proposal to be too limited in both its theological anthropology and application. While Vanhoozer hopes his proposal will pave a new way for psychologists to "bring people to their theodramatic senses," the way is not really very new at all. Though the metaphor of drama is highly imaginative and compelling, the result in my estimation is merely a re-framing of a Christianized cognitive-behavioral psychology – right thinking = right action. Though space constraints prevent a fuller discussion, I will make three observations, including a *praise*, a *problem*, and a *proposed direction*. I write as an ordained minister, a seminary professor in theology and psychology, and a clinician – all formative elements in my response.

A Praise

First, a *praise* - Vanhoozer is correct in his theological diagnosis. A deeper appropriation of our identity as chosen, forgiven, and adopted would change everything for struggling people. Believing our justification more fully can and does manifest in greater peace, as Vanhoozer argues in his illustration of status anxiety. I think of my many clients who have received spiritual encouragement from Manning's (1994) *Abba's Child* in its strong message that the grace of a compassionate Father embraces the son or daughter who feels like a failure. Yet, while the "eschatological imagination" that Vanhoozer talks about envisions human beings living into their new creation selves, eschatological humility requires us to see the futility so many face as theological answers fail to change their long-held habits, patterns, and affections. Sometimes, right theologizing does not manifest in right action. It is a frustrating problem for those of us who pastor and counsel, but it is nevertheless a real problem. I wish it were not the case, because this work would be less grueling than it already is. Yet, cultivating this mind of Christ is much more than transforming our intellectual categories, because our hearts resist this transformation at every turn.

A Problem

Enter Job, stage front – a *problem* for Vanhoozer. Job's acting coaches were great theologians. His friends tried to tell him the truth. Job responded:

"²⁵ How painful are honest words!

But what do your arguments prove?

²⁶ Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?"

My former colleague, Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke, once told me, "Job's friends were theologically correct, but Job was honest." Without reading modern psychotherapeutic assumptions back into the text, it is safe to assume that Job engaged in lament, where "the juices flow and the animal is loose" (Brueggemann, 1994, p. 20). Lament, in fact, is a heart-wrenching

work which defies mere rational explanation and transcends cognitive-behavioral talk therapy. It engages the full person, the whole self, giving a voice to parts of us that sometimes do not show up in ordinary talk therapy sessions. In fact, good theology may evoke lament, as it does for Job, silencing “acting coaches” who might see the process as more predictable and formulaic. In this case, therapy may look a bit less like conforming the mind and a bit more like performing the Psalms in their vivid and heart-wrenching cries.

Vanhoozer’s proposal, in other words, seems to be reductionistic, as dogmatic theology can often be, privileging the life of the mind at the expense of human affection and embodiment. Ultimately, this not only fails to take the noetic influence of sin seriously enough, but fails to lead to an improvisation of the entire Script, including those parts which seem to defy rationality (DeGroat, 2007).

A Proposed Direction

Thus, I conclude with a *proposed direction* for Vanhoozer’s proposal. He rightly notes, “Acting coaches help actors to render their characters truthfully. Their challenge is to help actors come into their own, that is, to become the person they are cast - or rather, called by God - to be.” In fact, he argues that this includes “training the client’s mind, heart, imagination, and will to think, desire, see, and act in ways that accord with the way things are as we know them to be through the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ.” Yes! Yet, we hear very little from Vanhoozer with regard to the heart and imagination’s change process. I suggest that we need to expand our view of this training process. Here is where Vanhoozer would do well to listen to a variety of practitioners. Let me add one voice to this mix.

My sense is that Vanhoozer’s proposal would be enhanced by a creative dialogue with psychotherapists who have thoughtfully engaged in a wider variety of theories and practices like Gestalt Therapy, Psychodrama, Jungian theory, Attachment Theory, Mindfulness, Body Memory, Psychodrama, and perhaps, as the most integrative and intriguing proposal to date, IFS, or Internal Family Systems Therapy (Schwartz, 1997). Of course, we recognize that much of what we see in these theories begins from a fundamentally flawed starting point. However, I suggest them because they take more seriously than many of us do the integral relations between mind, body, heart, imagination, and perhaps even brain chemistry. I will expand on my IFS as one potential dialogue partner that provides a fuller anthropology and paves a fruitful way for a more holistic “training process” of both heart and mind.

Schwartz (1997) theorizes that human beings have a core self which is inherently good, motivated towards compassion, curiosity, and care, and capable of bring-

ing healing to problematic parts of us that have lost their way, becoming extreme and polarized in great part due to the pain of life. These parts, like members of an orchestra, are at their best when playing in concert with one another and being led by the conductor (self), but become problematic when they attempt to cope with life’s pain apart from the guidance of self. As Vanhoozer might say, the client then lives out of a false self, an illusory self, a part of herself that attempts to form an independent identity or manage life on its own.

Theologically, we might argue that the core self of Schwartz (1997) is best envisioned as the “new self” that St. Paul talks about in Romans 7, the “I” when he says, “it is no longer I *myself* who do it, but it is sin living in me” (Rom. 7:17). What is the mysterious “I”? It is nothing less than the new self, the new creation, the temple of the living God, the place where God Himself resides by the Spirit. Perhaps Schwartz is on to something, albeit from a self-idolizing place which completely neglects the doctrine of sin. Maybe this new self is capable of bringing healing, by the Spirit, to parts of us that continue to operate by “another law at work,” as St. Paul says, “in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Rom. 7:23).

But what are these “members?” N.T. Wright (1992) calls them “parts of the psyche,” echoing the insights of Schwartz. Though many of us view the “members of our body” as physical and material - hands, feet, and limbs - Paul’s point is much more rich and holistic. These members are parts of inner psyches, acting out their theodramatic roles which were formed amidst the difficulties of life. Moreover, these inner parts, as St. Paul indicates, war against us and each other. Indeed, this is where Vanhoozer’s project might benefit from some good psychological legwork courtesy of IFS.

Schwartz (1997) contends (and I would agree) that these parts of us take on different roles. Some parts act as “managers,” protecting the person from feeling the full effects of life’s pain, which we might define as original sin plus the difficulties of life. “Managers” protect what Schwartz calls “Exiles,” parts of us that are hurt and wounded, buried by our internal pain-management strategists. When they do attempt to have a voice, our internal “Firefighters” act out, doing anything they can (binging, cutting, masturbating, etc.) to numb the pain. All of these parts acting in their extreme and polarized ways are false selves, as Merton (1996) called them, attempting to replace the core self, ultimately leading to inner chaos and war.

The real payoff, however, is in the therapeutic model that Schwartz (1997) develops. This is where Christians have much to glean. As both a client and a

therapist, I have engaged this model with great delight and success, as well as theological stimulation. Therapists work with each part through a very deliberate process that engages all aspects of a person. Clients find that their bodies often store memories, and that emotional pain can be located in a particular place within (Rothschild, 2000). Clients engage their imaginations which hold vivid images of these parts, often locked in early stages of life, or portrayed in particularly dramatic colors and textures. Clients engage their hearts as specific burdens which are carried by parts that are lamented, released, and handed over to the One who says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Clients engage their minds which carry strong beliefs, often very negative and idolatrous. And, very refreshingly, clients are invited to see how the outer relational struggles they experience represent inner conflicts, countering a very destructive tendency among psychotherapists to create victims who are taught that other people are to blame for pain. As IFS therapist Barbera (2008) contends, the feelings ignited in difficult situations may be triggered by another, but represent the feelings of parts anxious to deal with the pain. What she and other IFS therapists would call extreme reactions, I would call sinful and idolatrous forms of coping and managing life apart from Christ.

Thus, to grow and heal, Schwartz (1997) contends that clients need to be self-led. In Schwartz's system, the self is the savior. It is the self that can become an inner acting coach, calling the parts to new roles and relationships. I would contend that Schwartz stumbles upon the truth that the new self is where the fruits of the Spirit – love, self-control, patience – become the conduit of real inner healing of parts which resist God and attempt to manage life in their own creative, yet idolatrous and self-destructive ways. In "self," clients can be led by the therapist not only to recognize their maladaptive roles, false beliefs, and self-destructive strategies, but their emotional pain and burdens, as well. As Christians, though, we can invite client's parts to bring their burdens to a far better Savior, allowing our renewed and redeemed self the freedom to participate with God in a process which leads us ultimately to enjoy the benefits of being a redeemed child of God.

Conclusion: Status Anxiety Re-Visited

Status anxiety, as Vanhoozer indicates, is a common obstacle to living in freedom as the justified children of God. IFS would contend that status anxiety might be a burden carried by a particular part. How would a therapist pursue this? I would begin with curiosity about this part and the role it plays. What is it attempting to manage or protect in the client's life? How is this part visualized in the client's imagination? Does the client experience this part in a part of her body (clenched

fists, chest pain, headaches, etc.)? How does this part interact with other parts? How is this part attempting to manage life rather than surrendering to Christ and the wise guidance of the new self? What we might come to see is that the client's status-keeping part, as one of my clients experienced, is a middle school boy determined to make sure that he does not fail. This "protector" part guards against the shame felt by a 5-year old little boy inside who was told by his father that he was not good enough. The status-keeping part works in concert with other "manager" parts which assure that my client, as an adult, will not be harmed by anyone else and will, in fact, exceed Dad's expectations. Dad, however, has been internalized as well, acting as an "Inner Critic" who reminds my client that he is, indeed, a failure. When the message becomes too loud, my client's inner "firefighters" drive him to lust and masturbation, which temporarily eases the anxiety, but drives the cycle of shame and anxiety even harder. As a therapist, I have the wonderful privilege of engaging all of the internal actors on the stage, leading them into a new way of living offered by the master Script, the biblical narrative. Conformity to Christ, in the end, looks like conformity of the whole person, where the members of the body work in concert, led by Christ and the self-conductor to more harmonious relations.

In conclusion, the limitations of space make it difficult to fully engage the many possible interactions between Vanhoozer's model and the proposed direction offered in this response. Yet, it is my hope that the conceptual space offered by Vanhoozer's compelling proposal can be filled in with rich insights which may not originate among fellow Christians, but which offer possibilities for a more robust anthropology. I am confident that I am not alone in seeing Vanhoozer's insights as ground-breaking for theologians and counselors alike, and I hope the dialogue can continue.

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Forming the Performers: Canon Sense and “Common Sense”

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Applause! Leading evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has given mental health professionals (MHPs) an essay that deserves enthusiastic applause. Having such an inspirational, informative, and succinct application drawn from the Drama of Doctrine and targeted specifically to counseling is a remarkable blessing (Vanhoozer, 2005). Vanhoozer is to be commended for leaving the safety of the often cloistered community of theological scholars to speak into the lives and ministries of Christian people helpers. Such excursions by theologians are desperately needed; nonetheless, they are remarkably rare. A profound response on the part of Christian MHPs, beyond even rising for a standing ovation, would be to follow his example and engage theological doctrine with greater interest and intentionality.

“Forming the Performers” challenges Christian helpers to gaze beyond basic client functioning and towards human flourishing. In laying down his charge, the author offers a three “D” application formula. Christian disciples are to *discern, deliberate on, and do* what it means to be crucified with Christ, thus reflect-

ing the mind of Christ in a submissive effort to extend the kingdom of God. Scripture engages human beings on multiple levels to accomplish this divine purpose. There is a sophisticated and satisfying depth to the theological method that Vanhoozer demonstrates through the metaphor, or, if one can dare to imagine, the *reality* of theodrama. Given that Vanhoozer has done much to shape my appreciation and grasp of Christian theology over the past decade, this respondent is already a loyal fan. Thus, there will be no quarrel or dispute with the theological approach. Instead, another three D’s—*definitions, directives, and dynamics*—will be highlighted. My intent is to speak from my vantage point as a psychological/ theological educator and clinical supervisor of Christians who seek to counsel. The initial focus will be on how mental health professionals can appropriate crucial doctrinal themes. Following the exploration of its utility, two vital clarifications will be mentioned that relate to evidenced-based therapeutic endeavors and suitable ethical practice.

Counselor Applications

Definitions. The Christian counselor would do well to take a careful look at this article and ponder the numerous theological definitions peppered throughout. Therapists should note how terms are regularly given operational intelligibility. Doctrine is spoken of as “sacred teaching” and as “summary statements of the meaning of salvation history.” Theology is depicted as the “joyful science of getting understanding and of forming the mind of Christ in his disciples” for it is a “means of spiritual formation.” Wisdom contains an inherent imperative that positions it beyond right answers and into the territory of right judgments and right virtues. Internalizing a Christian worldview is “grasping our place in the whole of Scripture and history.” Growing in faith calls for understanding and doing holiness. Christianity is what God has done in Christ and through the Spirit. A “Redemptive Trinitarian Theistic” framework holds to the necessity of the cross and an unwavering commitment to personal transformation. My heart skipped a beat at the innovative recasting of the Great Commission for our global cultural context (Matt 28:19-20). Christians are tasked with

awakening the sleep-walkers of the world whose waking dreams of materialism are only a poor imitation of what is truly real. For the real matter and energy on which the universe depends is the word and work of the triune God. Theology is nothing less than the ministry of reality and, by implication, the critique of idols and illusions.

The application from such reflection is not to distill these refreshing definitions into a mundane glossary or vocabulary list. Such an effort would miss the

essence of the theological method demonstrated. Definitions are woven seamlessly into the discourse and appeal in pithy manner to human memory. As presented within the theological storyline, these characterizations have the potential to penetrate the schemas that govern thinking, feeling, and doing. Let us recognize the critical point. Doctrine in this portrayal is not a matter of abstraction for analysis (as useful as that process may be for increasing comprehension). Instead, doctrine surfaces biblical wisdom to blend into the narrative of theodrama as it directs the flow of dialogue towards prayerful action and reaction. When we engage in strategic and decidedly Christian helping conversations, there is an opportunity to intersperse workable and memorable doctrines that are so succinctly articulated. In this way, our speech communicates the living Word and the mind of Christ. Soak in the practical descriptions; more importantly, imitate this active and lucid style of discipleship dialogue.

Directives. From overture to finale, this article is packed with directions to guide the inner life and interpersonal activities of Christian MHPs. Early on, the premise is articulated that knowing self and living in the perfection that the Lord commands are each made possible by knowing Scripture. The follow-up to this directive is made plain. Christians are not simply to hold to a high view of Scripture; our occupation is to embody it. Hear the message. A high view of Scripture is not a matter of presuming the authority in the text, but submitting to its authority over our lives. Doctrine informs that activity. Later, when the role of acting coach to “form the performers” is assigned to counselors, helpers are directed to enable those we coach to imagine life as theodrama and advance their performance within it. Space does not permit rehearsing a comprehensive list of the stellar practical directives actually presented. Vanhoozer steps boldly into the role of “dramaturg” and becomes the theologian who helps us to understand the theodramatic meaning of the divine script in its historical context and for our vocation. The reader is exhorted to meditate on the substantial coaching guidance to assist performers to peel off their theatrical masks to become real creatures and covenant servants of God.

Dynamics. The thrill of theodrama is that doctrine vigorously drives ministry. Vanhoozer’s approach to doctrine is superbly suited for a post-modern and global stage. Theology is not a catalogue of static beliefs to be kept as a reference work on a dusty shelf. It offers a recorded history of divine-human encounter that actively shapes both present and future. Those trained in the scientific methods of psychological research are familiar with the ongoing necessity of using theory to generate a hypothesis that is tested in methods transparent to the scientific community to confirm

its validity, to refine understanding, and to increase the opportunity to generalize. Wisdom connected to doctrine is put to contemporary use in the community of believers, revealing its potency to shape persons and expand God’s kingdom. This is the continuous outworking of the reciprocal process described as Christians interpreting the Bible as the Bible interprets its adherents. Whereas the script, namely Scripture, is authored by God himself, and since the Creator is at work throughout salvation history to reveal his character and to be understood through the canon, the storyline of theodrama is constantly dynamic while always stable, reliable, comprehensible, and continuous. Christian MHPs who internalize this theological perspective can be entirely relevant yet nevertheless thoroughly grounded; current but steeped in Christian tradition.

Clinical Practice Considerations

The call has been issued for a renewed devotion to Christian theology. A commission to coach others to assume their unique role in the ongoing drama of God’s speaking and acting in history has been issued. This raises a central question. Are Christian therapists hereafter to function primarily as apprentice or amateur theologians? Is counseling a synonym for practical theology? Is this Vanhoozer’s intent when he challenges Christian counselors to participate in “doctrinally directed soul care”?

It is my prayer that the following reply to this plausible conclusion is consistent with the thrust of his essay. I answer that counselors are to bring Christian doctrine to bear on their clinical practice as the Holy Spirit who grants *wisdom* so directs. Counseling shines a spotlight on the relationship and dialogue between two unique human beings grappling with a particular defined task. Counseling exchanges prudently vary in approach and acumen. Wisdom is to be tested for “fittingness,” to apply Vanhoozer’s term, so that the parts are in relative tune with the whole. Therefore, in clinical practice, there are occasions when counseling conversations are preferably staged as applied exegesis; at other moments, the exchange has a close resemblance to the theological clarification of doctrine. There are also opportunities when the therapist will act more than speak by exhibiting compassionate listening that resembles Jesus silently washing the disciples’ feet. Lastly, MHPs venture into strategic helping encounters aimed to heal or nurture the relational contact itself. These strategic conversations blend methods to engage both interpersonal and cognitive schemas. Recall that theodrama is expressed in embodied personal relationships. Thus, tending to the quality of relational intimacy, alignment, and mutuality is an important task as counselors fulfill their mission. There is value in interpersonal work that acts out the love of Christ but does

not outwardly speak actual doctrinal content.

Vanhoozer references theology as a science. The inference is that it is a specialty discipline that has a defined object of study as it investigates, systematizes, and synthesizes information. The explanation of “canon sense” as sound judgment based upon various canonical books that comprise biblical literature is a premier example of an overarching organizational presupposition that Vanhoozer adopts for formulating doctrine in his methodology. Further review of the methods employed by this dramaturg would recognize how he reaches deep into the fields of philosophy, church history, linguistics, literature, sociology, and, at times, even psychology! Is this not an acknowledgement that traditional doctrines such as common grace (Matt 5:45) and general revelation (Ps 19) remain relevant? *Scripture arbitrates*. Still, it is understood that gaining theological wisdom is an ongoing and interactive process between Scripture, past and present Christian community with all of the accompanying cultural lenses, and the eschatological direction of the unfolding theodrama directed by the Holy Spirit.

Contemporary psychotherapy, an applied branch of psychology, like its fellow science, theology, involves the appropriation of scientific methods to systematize information regarding what enhances or detracts from helping conversations. Empirical methods of investigation are the standard means by which this medically oriented craft derives relevant, robust, and replicable “common sense” procedures. This technology may be useful for “soul care” where minds are shaped to conform to the mind of Christ. Vanhoozer in this theological portrayal of helping professionals places MHPs in a position parallel to acting coaches who employ an assortment of exercises in their trade. MHPs likewise access techniques to increase the effectiveness of helping dialogues. Counseling as creative conversation with defined relationships, roles, purposes, and procedures has in its empirical literature a refined and scrutinized blend of “common sense.” Christian helpers will additionally turn to canon sense to further *translate* material from their scientific discipline, with its inherent worldly biases, into sacred teaching that adheres well with the sacred pages (Johnson, 2007). A familiar watchword of clinical supervisors to counseling novices is to make good use of the best evidence-based guidelines that science has to offer while ever perfecting the art of relating. A Christian helper submits this principle to the Lord and seeks wisdom to realize how, when, and with whom to blend doctrine into the instructional and interpersonal helping process (Greggo, 2002).

One brief illustration on how Christian doctrine interacts with contemporary psychotherapy to aid helpers may be useful. Mental health professionals are aware of the burgeoning therapeutic literature address-

ing the options for incorporating spirituality into a therapeutic relationship (Aten & Leach, 2009a; Plante, 2009; Pargament, 2007; Miller, 1999). These represent a range of evidenced-based models for utilizing spirituality in clinical treatment. The astute Christian MHP will immediately recognize the sharp contrast between the definitions and purposes associated with psychologically oriented interventions and what Vanhoozer advocates. Spirituality is the subjective feeling of being intimate with God. Vanhoozer voices concern that this experience-based criterion has regrettably replaced Christian doctrine in the contemporary church, in the culture, and, by implication, in the counseling clinic.

The secular psychological therapeutic enterprise does call for MHPs to be spiritually “multilingual” (Pargament, 2007). The “sacred” may be characterized as any experience of purpose, striving, or quest towards the transcendent or something greater than oneself which may or may not be a deity (Aten & Leach, 2009b). Sanctification in psychotherapy may reference the process of altering one’s perception of the ordinary aspects of life by transforming these into matters that are sacred. In this way, “sanctification” gives secular routines and relationships divine or sacred significance (Pargament, 2007). The Christian helper not thoroughly familiar with core doctrine may diminish or miss entirely the absolute disparity between being spiritually multilingual and distinctively Christian. Given the extensive overlap of language and seemingly intertwining purposes between generic spiritually oriented therapy and Christian counseling, Vanhoozer’s warnings and admonitions regarding the eternally deadly creep of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism into Christian settings are extraordinarily relevant. Nonetheless, the psychological investigations into the intersection of faith and clinical practice are not without merit for shaping methods.

When is it prudent or wise to equate counseling with the practical application of Christian theology? My response is when the part is well-fitted with the whole. More precisely, this is the practice norm when the defined counseling roles, relationships, purposes, and procedures allow for such implementation with integrity. We trust in the Holy Spirit to direct the theodrama and orchestrate the conditions, setting, and client openness necessary so that the requirements of truly informed consent can be honestly established (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009).

Candidly, the MHP is not always cast by the patient or clinic into the role of pastoral care provider. Vanhoozer as a Christian theologian defines mental health as wisdom that reflects the mind of Christ. In this particular instance, he is not clarifying a doctrine but instead is adopting a psychological term. His interpretation may promote flourishing over mere func-

tioning. However, clinicians recognize that the term “mental health” has extensive criteria, descriptions, and a precision of meaning in the psychotherapeutic scientific literature tied to baseline and normative functioning. Diagnosis is linked to assessment in this key area. It would not be respectful of clients, relationally genuine, or within professional ethical parameters to transpose a theological meaning over a term that typically delineates the direction of a treatment agreement *without explicit clarifying communication*. Christians counselors attuned to the Lord are to be persistently prepared to offer doctrinally oriented soul care when the person and way are open. May the Holy Spirit grant discernment, courage and wisdom! MHPs engage others in therapeutic dialogue by demonstrating respect and clarifying our helping purposes with transparency. This is consistent with the essence of Christian hospitality (Nouwen, 1975). Clarification of the helping alliance via research and experience supports the conjecture that mutuality and integrity are prime ingredients for quality dialogue that can effectively open the heart to receive wisdom.

The growing psychotherapeutic literature on using spiritual resources in therapeutic relationships is useful. MHPs can realize the rich potential of faith-based treatments to construct appropriate plans, goals, and outcomes and to apply effective techniques that are well suited to particular clients. Practice guidelines assist counselors to remain within the ethical guidelines of their profession. The skillful art of relating productively is informed by the psychological material on decreasing distortions, curbing harmful counter-transference, and reducing any careless or callous use of therapeutic power when addressing matters surrounding a client's deepest convictions.

In conclusion, Christian MHPs would do well to respond to this neatly packaged scene from the Drama of Doctrine by taking in the unabridged version. How beneficial it would be to seek ongoing input from other evangelical theologians to further grasp doctrine and its usefulness for unfolding the divine story of creation, fall, and redemption. The privilege of forming performers for Christian helpers is a remarkable calling. Kevin Vanhoozer stirs our understanding so that we can use our professional skills to fulfill our role in God's dynamic and ongoing drama. By renewing our excitement and familiarity with Christian doctrine, mental health professionals can be well prepared to come alongside others to share wisdom that is derived from Scripture and reveals the mind of Christ.

Note

¹Vanhoozer delivered his lecture and wrote this article for the Society of Christian Psychology (SCP) and therefore consistently employs the term “Christian psy-

chologists.” The theme is plainly to challenge Christian mental health professionals overall (i.e. psychiatrists, social workers, counselors, nurse practitioners, pastoral counselors, etc). The purpose is not restricted to the single discipline of psychology or members of a specific society. This response will refer to the audience as Christian mental health professionals (MHPs) who offer counseling and pastoral care.

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Positive Psychology and Vanhoozer's Theodramatic Model of Flourishing

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In his groundbreaking book *After Virtue*, moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre states that "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 216). A human life must be understood, MacIntyre argues, in narrative terms, as characters who are (or should be) embarked upon a quest for that which is good.

But what is the "plot" of the story in which we find ourselves, and what is the good toward which we are (or should be) questing? For example, when I teach the course in Learning and Behavior Modification at my university, I use the textbook written by John and Janice Baldwin (2001), precisely because it is so useful in demonstrating a commonly-encountered version of the "story of science" to students, and then using that as a springboard for discussion of how differing worldviews influence one's approach to psychology. The authors present a unidimensional view of history, with the savage past at one end, and the enlightened future at the other. Baldwin and Baldwin see themselves as contributing to humanity's movement from evil toward good, and they invite students to join them on this quest by becoming proficient in behavioral psychology: "In essence, we are empowering people to analyze their lives and adjust their behavior to attain more beautiful outcomes. In the process of improving the human condition, we are giving people greater freedom for self-creation than could any prescientific knowledge... Freedom from pain and dysfunctional behavior. Freedom to create behavior that produces a beautiful 'canvas of life'" (p. vii).

Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen (2004) are among those who answer the question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' by pointing to the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. The Bible, they claim, is "the one *basic* story through which we understand our own experience and thought, and the foundation upon which we base our decisions and our actions. In other words, the Bible provides us with the basic story that we need in order to understand our world and to live in it as God's people" (p. 21). Believers are invited to join in this quest, with our efforts directed toward the goal of participating in the redemptive drama of God's creation (as opposed to Baldwin and Baldwin's goal of empowering individuals for "self-creation").

Kevin Vanhoozer in this issue of *Edification* connects this call to find ourselves as participants in the divine story (which he calls a "theodrama") to the

field of psychology. Christian psychologists can assist people in knowing their place in Scripture and history, and in equipping them to function well as competent participants in the theodramatic action. This process of equipping is connected to how well one "fits" into one's role in the drama, and involves the cultivation of a set of virtues that empower individuals to flourish in their roles.

Vanhoozer's approach is commendable, as it offers a way to bring together insights about the human condition drawn from psychology, philosophy, and theology. My intention in this paper is to develop some of these connections, focusing on how this theodramatic perspective interacts with Christian approaches to positive psychology and virtue ethics, and how work that has been done in these fields can contribute to the further elaboration of Vanhoozer's model.

The Psychology of Living Well

Vanhoozer's emphasis on virtue, flourishing, and completeness shows his affinity with the aims of the positive psychology movement. Positive psychology is "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). Beginning with Martin Seligman's presidency of the APA in 1998, the positive psychology movement is grounded in a desire to expand mainstream psychology's emphasis on the amelioration of dysfunction to include an equal emphasis on well-being and the cultivation of psychological strengths (Seligman, 1999).

In a previous article (Hackney, 2007), I argue that there is much in the positive psychology movement to attract Christian psychologists. Positive psychologists study numerous topics, such as gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2004), forgiveness (Fincham & Kahdan, 2004), and self-control (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007), which are of particular interest to Christians. Further, bringing a Christian perspective to bear on the positive psychology movement allows us to correct certain philosophical weaknesses found in some of the positive psychological literature.

Positive psychological thought is grounded in an Aristotelian approach to human flourishing (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004). Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) refers to current work done by virtue ethicists within the Aristotelian stream of thought as "neo-Aristotelian," as these thinkers hold to Aristotle's basic conceptual structure, but reject certain specifics, such as Aristotle's treatment of slaves and women. This philosophical system is teleological in nature, from the Greek word *telos*, meaning "end" or "goal" or "purpose." The *telos* of an object is a description of what the object does. The *telos* of a knife is to cut. The *telos* of an apple tree is to produce apples. The *telos* of an object provides a

functional approach to describing an object as good or bad. A good object fulfills its *telos*, while a bad object does not. So a knife that does not cut very well is a bad knife. The key question for us is not about knives or apples, though. The key question for us is the *telos* of humans. As Christians, we believe that humans exist for God, a concept that is summarized well in the Westminster Catechism's statement that "the true end [*telos*] of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." This becomes our functional definition of a good or bad human. A good human is one who does a good job of glorifying and communing with God, while a bad human is not.

A good object is described in terms of a set of characteristics (virtues, translated from the Greek word *aretè*) that empower the object to fulfill its *telos*. The virtues of a good knife include traits such as sharpness and sturdiness, which enable the knife to cut well. The virtues of a good human are a matter of considerable debate. Some (e.g., Comte-Sponville, 2001) do not attempt to construct a comprehensive list of the essential virtues, while others (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004) do, and not everyone's list will contain the same virtues. For example, Buss (1999) argues that politeness is a virtue, while Comte-Sponville (2001) argues that it is not. Driver (1999) argues that humility is not a virtue, while Tangney (2000) argues that it is.

Within this approach, the best kind of life possible for humans is a life spent developing into someone who better fulfills the human *telos*. This kind of good life is referred to as *eudaimonia*, the kind of happiness that characterizes "a complete human life lived at its best" (MacIntyre, 1984 p.149). Eudaimonic development is pursued by cultivating and exercising the virtues that empower one to fulfill the *telos*.

Different definitions of the human *telos* result in different descriptions of eudaimonic happiness, and different approaches to the virtues (Yearley, 1990). This is an area of weakness in the current positive psychological literature, as prominent positive psychologists such as Martin Seligman (2002) attempt to construct a eudaimonic psychology without specifying a *telos*. This results in attempts to describe the process of flourishing without the goal of flourishing, which have been described by some (e.g., MacIntyre, 1984, Sundararajan, 2005, Hackney, 2007) as fundamentally flawed. A Christian approach to positive psychology will not suffer from this weakness, as we do not hesitate to explicitly endorse a description of the purpose of human life.

As mentioned earlier, prominent neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) argues that a life spent pursuing the *telos* by cultivating and exercising the virtues must be understood in narrative terms. Despite the existence of narrative approaches within

psychology (e.g., McAdams, 1999), this is another area in which positive psychological work on the virtues has not lined up with work in the field of virtue ethics. Further work is needed connecting virtuous development with the idea of a human life as a narrative quest. Vanhoozer's theodramatic model provides Christian psychologists with a potentially powerful theological tool for bringing together neo-Aristotelian philosophy and positive psychology to engage in dialogue about a unified view of a human life lived well.

Developing Vanhoozer's Model

One area in which Vanhoozer's theodramatic model would benefit from dialogue with Christian approaches to positive psychology and virtue ethics is his description of flourishing and virtue. His approach to flourishing is strongly cognitive in tone, emphasizing concepts such as understanding, wisdom, good judgment, and self-interpretations guided by "canon sense." This tendency toward defining highly-functioning people in cognitive terms is so strong that wisdom and mental health are presented as synonymous: "We get wisdom—mental health—by cultivating the mind of Christ" (p. 14), a teleological statement that he calls the "phronetic imperative." Describing the goal and process of flourishing in terms of increasing Christlikeness fits well with current work connecting positive mental health with sanctification (Hackney, 2010), there are scholars in virtue theory (e.g., MacIntyre, 1984; Fowers, 2005) who support the idea of *phronesis* as the "master virtue" of highly-functioning people, and the importance of wisdom has strong scriptural support ("Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding." Proverbs 4:7, NIV).

However, while Vanhoozer presents wisdom as the supreme virtue, with other virtues existing in support of good judgment (p. 6), Christian thought on the virtues has not typically given this degree of prominence to *phronesis*. Connecting the acquisition and exercise of the virtues to sanctification, Millard Erickson (1985) discusses this kind of growth in terms of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26), a list which does not include *phronesis*. Jean-Marc Laporte (1997) and Nancey Murphy (2005) consider the supreme virtue of Christian development to be *kenosis*, a reference to Christ's self-emptying as described in Philippians 2:5-8. And considerable attention has been paid in Christian circles to the idea of love (self-sacrificial *agape*, specifically) as the supreme virtue (e.g., Outka, 1972; Meilaender, 1984). The emphasis on *agape* is most clearly seen in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13, in which faith, hope and love are placed above tongues, prophecy, and understanding. But even among the elevated triad of faith, hope, and love, "the greatest of these is love." As

Roberts (1993) puts it: “to love God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as oneself is what it *is* to be a fully functioning, fully formed, healthy person” (p. 12). So, while wisdom is necessary, Vanhoozer’s treatment of the “phronetic imperative” as synonymous with psychological maturation could be called into question by considering a “pneumatic imperative,” a “kenotic imperative,” or an “agapic imperative” as examples of alternative approaches to a Christian virtue-based description of mental health.

Conclusion

As Christian psychologists, we seek to develop a way of seeing humanity that does justice to both the revealed truth of scripture and the discoveries of psychological research. By providing a model of positive development in a narrative structure, Vanhoozer has made a significant contribution to this process. Work done by psychologists, philosophers, and theologians on the topic of human flourishing can be brought together in dialogue, enhancing our understanding and our ability to help others.

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Theodrama: A Means to Truthful Living

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In the article of Kevin Vanhoozer, Christianity is viewed as theodrama, which is explained as God's good-doing in the Son through the Spirit (i.e. the gospel of Jesus Christ). This analogy is applied in a deeply engrossing view on the relation between our understanding of God, the Bible, and ultimately ourselves. The author applies this analogy to the task of the Christian counselor/psychologist and as such views the Christian counselor/psychologist as an acting coach that forms the performers. It is an exciting paradigm that provides a fresh perspective on the task of the Christian counselor/psychologist. It furthermore triggers questions and ideas for the expansion and application of the analogy.

Although not the core of the article, the role of the Christian counselor/psychologist is presented as a point of discussion, and the title should have perhaps included a reference to the Christian counselor/psychologist.

The analogy the author employs points to the world as theodrama, indicating different roles for different people as formers of the performers (the pastors as assistant directors, the Holy Spirit as primary director, the theologian as dramaturg, and the Christian counselor as acting coach). The hierarchy depicted in these roles leads to questions pertaining to equality, free will, and responsibility before God. Romans 3:10 states: "As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one." We are all equal before God despite the different roles He has placed us in, whether as assistant director, a dramaturg, or acting coach. We are all under the direction of the primary director, the Holy Spirit. The roles do indicate different callings, tasks, and levels of responsibility and as such provide an interesting analogy for understanding the task of the Christian coun-

selor/psychologist. It emphasizes the responsibility the Christian counselor has before God for the process of helping the counselee to follow the script and live according to God's Word.

According to this perspective of Christianity as theodrama, God's good-doing in the Son through the Spirit, all created beings are performers of the play and subject to the same script. God as creator created the play which includes all actors and a variety of cultures. This aspect gives rise to questions such as: how would cultural interpretations of the script (doctrine) affect the directing and the action?

The Bible as script provides direction, but the script is interpreted differently by different actors. The interpretations are subjectively formed based on a variety of factors including cultural background and life histories. Further to this, although doctrine provides guidelines for interpretation of this script, doctrine is a product of the performers of the script – thus the creators of the doctrine form a subsystem of the system of performers, and they are part of the play.

The analogy emphasizes truthful living as the goal of the counseling process. This idea may be expanded by investigating the bilateral role of the counselor. If the counselor aims at coaching the performer (counselee) in how to live truthful to his character, this can only be done if the counselor lives truthfully. The counseling process is an interactive process in which all participants are being formed by the other. The Christian counselor is simultaneously a performer and acting coach. Being an acting coach is performing his or her role. Who forms the acting coaches? Writers of doctrine? Directors? Thus, this analogy may be expanded to express the complexity of Christianity as theodrama. If this analogy is applied in a linear fashion only, it falls short with regard to an investigation of the complexity involved in the world as drama.

The analogy places the counseling relationship in a captivating framework – the counselee, a performer in the drama, is coached by the counselor in how to perform. This perspective brings the counseling relationship to life in an innovative way and leads to interesting questions, such as, "Who monitors this process and determines the outcome of it? The director? The script writer or performer?" Another question entails the how of the monitoring process. In other words, "How is this process monitored?" The idea of the complexity of the theodrama is again presented in these questions.

Another area that should be explored in the application of this analogy is the spiritual dimension of being or the existence of the invisible world that forms an essential part of this drama. As the author points out, the task of the counselor or acting coach is to help performers "to live truthfully in a dramatic situation that is largely invisible to the naked eye." From a systems

perspective, the invisible world can be viewed as the all-encompassing system in which we are embedded. For example, 1 Colossians 1:16 says, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." The interconnectedness between the visible and invisible worlds provides such a powerful dynamic in our lives that it merits to be explored in the idea of Christianity as theodrama.

In the drama of the visible and invisible worlds, the Holy Spirit is the primary director and as He directs the performers (visible and invisible), reciprocal determinism enters the stage. As the drama in the invisible world unfolds, the performers in the visible world are influenced, and as the drama in the visible world unfolds, the invisible performers are affected. Reciprocal determinism in this context does not rule out free will, but indicates the interconnectedness of all the performers in Christianity as theodrama.

Luke, for instance, describes how Satan (a performer in the invisible world) entered Judas (a performer in the visible world) and motivated him to betray Jesus: Luke 22:3-4, "Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them." This is part of God's redemptive plan and thus directed by God, and the drama takes place in the visible and invisible world. Jesus, as human being, was visible on stage indicating how to live truthful to the calling of God, even to the point of death. Jesus, the man, served as an acting coach and taught us how to live truthful to our calling.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is the primary director of the drama, and although He is invisible, He is also on stage as He is directing performers. God as the creator and producer of the play is invisible. The interplay between the visible and the invisible worlds directs and affects the play continuously. On the other hand, the response of the performers affects God and may influence His directing, for instance prayer may move God to intervene in a terrible situation. This in turn may change the direction of the play. Some of the performers may bring joy to the Director, while others may grieve Him.

These ideas serve as examples of how this article succeeds in provoking a variety of questions and related ideas. The core of these questions and ideas revolves around the complexity of Christianity as theodrama and the realization that the different levels of involvement in the drama should be explored and described to express the complexity imbedded in this Theocratic perspective. The position of God and performers should be clearly defined in terms of who God is and

who we are in relation to God.

Theologians and pastors as human directors in their role, although depicted as being on a higher level as the other performers and implying that they know more about God, His will and His plans, are also in need of being formed. The assistant directors should listen carefully to the primary Director to be able to interpret and direct. Similarly the acting coaches should listen carefully to the primary Director to live truthfully and to coach others to live truthfully.

Everybody should take up his/her responsibility for his/her calling. We are equal in terms of responsibility and free will before God, and pastors and psychologists are also challenged in their roles as actors. It can be our Godly calling or vocation to direct others, but only under the direction of the Director. This calling has to be taken up with a position of humbleness and not one of superiority and by following the example of Jesus.

This article provides a fresh and captivating analogy that leads to challenging questions and related ideas. The complexity of Christianity as theodrama may be better accounted for by following a systemic perspective rather than a linear and hierarchical approach. A systemic perspective provides a framework for the exploration of the complexity of the drama that takes place on different levels and in different dimensions.

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"The Play's Not the Thing"

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I personally am so much more impressed by the dis-analogies between drama and Christianity, than the analogies, that when I examine Kevin Vanhoozer's stimulating essay, my first thought is to wonder why one ought to follow him in this, along with the other esteemed thinkers, such as Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Dorothy Sayers, who have taken a similar view. So why should we think that Christianity is a drama? One argument Vanhoozer gives is that Christianity is not a philosophy, a system of morality, or even a religion; therefore, it is about deeds and actions, and, in particular "about what God has done in Christ through the Spirit." However, that argument seems weak, because it relies on a false contrast. One needs to distinguish between the "mode" of something, and its "object."

Philosophies, moralities, and religions are modes, in this sense; God, Christ, The One, Being, the Olympian gods, and Primal Forces are “objects”. Anything of any mode can take any object. For example, there can be a religion of The One and a philosophy of The One; or a philosophy of The One and a philosophy of Being. Thus, to say that Christianity is not a philosophy is to say something about its mode, not its object; and no conclusion can be reached about its object by a premise about its modes. Indeed we might admit Christianity is “about what God has done in Christ and through the spirit” while insisting it is a philosophy about that, or a system of ethics in light of that, or a religion in response to that.

Similarly, if what was intended by the argument was that one draw a contrast between “mere thinking” (or attitudes) and “action,” with the suggestion that clearly Christianity does not fall in the realm of mere thinking but involves actions somehow—it will not follow from this worthy suggestion that, since Christianity is not a philosophy or system of ethics, it is a “drama” or like a drama. After all, there are all kinds of other things involving actions which might serve as apt candidates and images for what Christianity is. I have in mind: Christianity as a battle, an athletic contest, a wedding feast, a journey by sea, a garden, and a business enterprise. It will be recognized that these are all images which Our Lord and the apostles use to describe Christianity.

If we bring in the Bible in this way, it becomes natural to ask what the basis in Scripture is for the claim that Christianity is or may be likened to a drama. And then it is baffling what that might be. One might even wonder tongue-in-cheek whether the only time acting gets mentioned in the New Testament is in connection with the Pharisees, for their hypocrisy.

Now there is perhaps another contrast which was meant to be suggested, in the contrast drawn between “mere philosophy and system of ethics” on the one hand and “what God has done in Christ through the Spirit”—namely, a contrast not between mere thinking and action, but between us and God. Then the point would be that Christianity, as C. S. Lewis remarks, is not so much man’s search for God as God’s search after man.

That seems right, but then the analogy with drama seems to break down. A drama seems to require representation: there can be no drama, it seems, unless something is “acted out” (as we say) which imitates or represents a reality which is higher, more important, or somehow “more real” than the actors. So children can act and pretend at being parents, since they mean to imitate and represent them (as in “you be the Mommy, and I’ll be the Daddy”), and parental reality is “greater” for them, but parents in contrast, do not act at being

children, though they may strive to be childlike. Similarly, the Greeks represented gods and heroes on stage, or at least mortals of fame and repute. But if God is the actor, whom is He going to represent? Who or what is the greater Reality which His actions might imitate and strive to be like? My mind strains to think of what this could mean. To say that God *acts* is quite different from saying that God is an actor; yet the latter is required for the analogy.

Sometimes Vanhoozer speaks as though the drama is about God alone: “Christianity is all about what God has done, is doing, and will do” (p. 8). At those times I think he runs into the problem just mentioned. But in other places he speaks, instead, as though the drama he has in mind involves principally *us* and *our* response to God’s actions, or “what remains to be done (by us)”, as he puts it. The drama would presumably be one in which we are the actors. And yet, here too I find it difficult to see exactly what he has in mind, because the examples involving us which seem the most like “drama” do not in other respects correspond to Vanhoozer’s descriptions. For example, when the Israelites in faith relied on Moses’ statement that he represented the God of the patriarchs, and they followed Moses out of Egypt into the wilderness, liberated by God from slavery, through this “obedience of faith” (even though it was far from perfect), they sketched out, as it were, in the history of their nation itself, an image of the salvation which Christ was to bring. The Exodus of Israel was a “type” of the salvation of followers of Christ, when Our Lord liberated souls from the power of the devil. The Fathers of the Church interpret the Old Testament all the time in this way, in the manner of “typology,” as it is called. We might accordingly say that in the case of “types” the history described in the Old Testament is a kind of “acting out” of spiritual truths, which those historical events foreshadowed. A “type” seems like a drama or play, in interesting ways.

And yet in granting this, the dis-analogies become patent. Most importantly, there is no script for a “type:” that seems precisely to have been the point, namely, the historical narrative took on a meaning that was not known or foreseen by the actors (the Israelites), because this meaning arose as a consequence of their trust in God. Certainly Scripture could not have been their “script,” because it was written long after the events. Again, one might call these representations “plays” of sorts, but they come *before* what they represent, not after. They are a kind of “play” which seems to have no application to Christians today, precisely because all of the foreshadowings of earlier times have been fulfilled in Christ. Our task now, it seems, is not to let God work out “types” in our lives which represent greater realities that are to come: because the Alpha and Omega has already come to save us.

So just as the exception proves the rule, so the clear cases of things that look like “drama” in the Bible seem to display by contrast the fact that no similar idea applies to our situation. Must similar difficulties affect all attempts to liken Christianity to a drama? I suspect that Balthasar in his five volume work on *Theo-drama* can avoid many or even all of these problems because he understands doctrine in a different way from Vanhoozer, and because, as a Catholic, he has a rich understanding of the “sacramental” and indeed ecclesial character of the Christian life. Balthasar takes the entirety of God’s relationship with the world to be a kind of drama, because he considers that it can indeed represent something, namely the interior life of the three Persons of the Trinity. Creation and Redemption represent the eternal springing forth of the Word from the Father in the Trinity, and the giving back of the Son to the Father through love, who is the Spirit. On this view, the main doctrines of Christianity are true statements about divine realities (albeit “mysteries”), which the historical narrative of the People of God represents (the Israelites first, who foreshadow the Church). Doctrine, then, deals with realities which are *prior* to historical Theo-drama. Vanhoozer takes a different view: for him, apparently, doctrine is *consequent* upon Theo-drama and consists of something like “stage directions” for playing parts well. Doctrine does not refer to or define realities that this drama represents. Because it is consequent upon Theo-drama, Vanhoozer seems left with a drama that represents nothing.

Another resource which Balthasar can draw on is the notion of a sacrament understood as a “sign, instituted by Christ, which does what it signifies” (in accordance with a traditional definition). Sacraments are signs that need to be *acted out*: for example, baptism by *washing*; the Eucharistic sacrifice by the *actions of the Last Supper*; the marriage relationship by a *covenant unto death* mirroring the relationship between Christ and His Church. Yet they “do what they signify”, or, more precisely, it is understood that God binds himself to act and confer grace (a sharing in the divine life) through the sacrament: at baptism, the washing of water really does wash away the guilt of sin. Thus sacraments, as a Catholic such as Balthasar would understand them, fulfill the conditions of theodrama: they imply definite roles, which human actors are meant to follow; they carry along with them a real script which cannot be departed from (“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”); the roles involve some imitation of Christ; and it is God who acts, since Christ vouchsafes to do through that “acting” exactly what He did when on earth He carried out similar actions Himself. On this view, to say that Christian life is Theo-dramatic would be an interesting way of explaining how it is sacramental.

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Formation through Grace and Truth

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In his article, Vanhoozer’s main thesis is that Christianity may be viewed neither as a philosophy nor as a moral system, but as what he calls *theodrama*: “God’s good-doing in the Son through the Spirit (i.e. the gospel of Jesus Christ).” In Vanhoozer’s framework, doctrines serve a central purpose of providing meaning to God’s actions in history, thus enabling disciples to understand how they are to rightly participate in God’s purposes and plans. In the theodrama, Christian counselors resemble acting coaches who are engaged in forming the performers. Vanhoozer states, “Theology fosters ‘canon sense,’ the ability to make biblical judgments concerning the meaning of life.” These judgments provide what is needed for guidance in how to speak and act according to the script, the Holy Scriptures. The article appears to be written to Christian therapists and is a clarion call to return to the use of theological doctrine to inform how persons and change are viewed and how therapy is conducted.

Vanhoozer states that doctrinal theology does not seem to have a place in contemporary church culture, having been marginalized because of an erroneous view that it is “irrelevant, unrelated to life; unbiblical, abstracted from Scripture; and unspiritual, disconnected from the real issues of personal growth.” These are heavy indictments, indeed, and I found it striking that Vanhoozer did not present any sources of information or data from which he has derived these claims. Has he visited a number of churches and observed this? Conducted a poll? Reviewed data from the Barna organization? I am very curious to know on what he bases this claim. It may be more accurate to say that in some churches this may be the case. But in which churches? And if it is the case, what may be the reason for these views toward doctrine? If what Vanhoozer is saying is true, can anything be learned from studying contemporary church culture to understand why doctrine has

fallen out of favor? This is not the purpose of his article, but his reflections raise some interesting related questions.

If for the sake of this discussion we accept Vanhoozer's claim about contemporary church culture and the marginalizing of doctrinal theology, let us consider what then does doctrine provide? For Vanhoozer, theology and doctrine provide the means of knowing God (by knowing the Scripture), which is a key to thriving in life. One must know God to know self and vice versa (cf. John Calvin). Theology is needed to help organize what is known about God such that wisdom is gained by knowing the mind of Christ. Theology also provides the information needed for one to become spiritual through renewing of the mind (cf. Rom 12:2). Scripture provides doctrine, but more than that, it provides the worldview necessary to understand humanity. For Vanhoozer, the psychologist-theologian needs this theologically informed worldview in order to be effective in counseling. He goes on to say that "the way in which persons interpret the Bible is not only evidence of their spiritual condition, but a barometer for discerning what is happening in the academy and in culture more broadly" (p. 6). Here again is another compelling statement that needs to be further elaborated.

Vanhoozer believes that the erosion of the importance of doctrine has occurred in part because the church has been too influenced by American culture. One result of this has been a "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (Vanhoozer quoting Smith) among teenagers, whose theology centers on God's love for all and the need to be good and happy. Vanhoozer extrapolates this finding to psychologists asking "Has Moralistic Therapeutic Deism become the default doctrinal mode not only of America's teenager's but also of its psychologists?" I wonder what leads Vanhoozer to ask this question? What leads him to think this is happening? He goes on to pose the question, "What difference would it make to offer counsel out of a Redemptive Trinitarian Theistic framework?" What difference, indeed; (another) compelling question that deserves an answer, especially because there is a body of literature that explicates this very approach.

The heart of the matter for Vanhoozer is the presentation of Christianity as theodrama, not philosophy or morality. The theodrama reveals what God has done. The central focus is on doing: on the speech and acts of God. "Christianity is all about what God has done, is doing, and will do with words, and with the Word and Spirit of life" (p. 8). If the theodrama is about what God has done, then the Bible becomes a script, doctrine is theatrical direction, and "human identity is intimately related to the speaking and acting parts persons play" (p. 8). In this analogy, Christian psychology becomes a means for "helping persons to understand

their identities and roles and for equipping them to be competent participants in the action."

Up to this point in the article, Vanhoozer's theory to my ear sounds a rather mechanistic, non-relational tone. The emphasis is placed on understanding sound doctrine and using reason to perceive what God is doing and one's place in the theodrama. I do not disagree with Vanhoozer in principle; what I have difficulty with is the tone of the piece and the method he sets forth for how people are to respond to God's reality. Understanding God's movements in history, the reality of a biblical worldview, perceiving the importance of doctrine, all these provide the necessary information for action. Through reason one can know what to do.

At this point, the article takes a decidedly more relational turn when Vanhoozer states that "the medium of theodrama is living persons in dialogical interaction and covenantal relation." (p. 8) Theology is presented here as "the shadow cast by the theodrama." God acts and people respond, and this interaction is interpreted and reflected in theology. This statement captures and expresses an important reality: that theology is not exclusively objective; rather it is highly subjective and may even be said to be autobiographical. By this, I mean that one's lived experience with God, self, and others shapes the way one interprets and reflects the theodrama. Church history provides us with two millennia worth of wisdom in how to interpret the theodrama, but we must also allow for the particularity of each individual's dynamic encounter with God.

As Vanhoozer states, the theodrama provides the account of the revelation of God to humanity, most profoundly expressed in the incarnation. The reality of the incarnation casts the theodrama as primarily personal and relational rather than propositional. Propositional and doctrinal expressions reflect the dynamic personal encounter between God and humanity.

Vanhoozer states, "Disciples of Jesus Christ should be following and embodying the Bible, their holy script: Scripture." I would express this differently to say: Jesus said to his disciples: "follow me." This is relational and dynamic. The scriptures provide us an authoritative and faithful narrative of God's movements in history; they provide us with narratives of Jesus' life and ministry; they provide correspondence between the apostles and the churches. The bible is the Word of God, and we know at the same time that the WORD of GOD is first of all a person, the person of Christ. So Christians follow the person Christ, not merely a map, the book we know as the Bible.

I make these distinctions, however subtle or semantic they may or may not seem, because something I observe in some churches is that Christians are encouraged to live by biblically-derived scripts rather than live in communion with God. Obedience is something to

do because it is right and the bible reveals it, rather than obedience flows out of a life-changing encounter with God and is motivated by love of God and others. If contemporary Christian churches have lost the mooring of sound doctrine, it may be because the doctrine has lost the mooring of dynamic relationship with God.

Vanhoozer's main section of the article deals with how to perform the holy script. This, he relates, is accomplished through understanding. "To understand the story of Jesus is to be able to follow it." Doctrine aids in accurate understanding of the theodrama: what God is doing in Christ. One can participate in the theodrama only if one has adequate understanding of "(1) what the drama is all about, (2) who the principal *dramatis personae* are, (3) the scene we are in, and (4) the role we are playing." Vanhoozer does state that the "stuff of the theodrama is not abstract proposition but embodied personal relationships." However, I wonder if reliance on reason to accomplish the appropriate participation in the theodrama is rather one dimensional. There is little space given to experience, the dynamic life-changing encounter one has with God and the on-going dynamic relationship with God through the indwelling Spirit. Perhaps a thicker explication of the theodrama is needed, one in which tradition, reason, and experience are woven together in both the development and interpretation of doctrines surrounding the movements of God with humanity.

In my read of Vanhoozer's explication of the theodrama, doctrine seems to serve a rather static interpretive function that gives direction on how to live. However, as Peterson (2009) has recently noted, as Christians we are called to follow a person not a map. Perhaps I am overstating Vanhoozer's writing, but if so, it is to provide balancing emphasis on the dialectical tension between doing and being, where on the one side there is doing (a reliance on reason, understanding, and holy habits of living) and on the other side there is being (a reliance on dynamic on-going life-changing encounter with God whereby one becomes the kind of person who lives according to what scripture describes as a Christian, but as a result of Spirit-enabled transformation, not outward behavioral compliance).

Vanhoozer notes that pastors and counselors are two categories of persons who are involved in conveying sound doctrine. With the Holy Spirit as the primary director and guide, pastors are needed as "assistant directors" to proclaim sound doctrine from the pulpit and Christian counselors are needed as "acting coaches" to encourage right living in the context of the therapy room. Theologians (and would Vanhoozer include Bible scholars?) are the ones who research the text and provide the interpretive frameworks and doctrines that pastors and therapists may then use in their respective

roles in the theodrama. Sound doctrine becomes the basis for preaching and counseling. Doctrine, for Vanhoozer, "helps us view ourselves in the dramatic perspective and, in so doing, helps us come to our biblical senses." I agree with Vanhoozer that this helps, but I would contend that it is necessary, but not sufficient for transformation in the life of a Christian.

The bible is full of narratives describing the life of broken, imperfect people; even and especially those who knew God (OT references) and Christ (NT references). Most pastors and Christian counselors would have many moving narratives to tell about faithful Christians who knew what was right, who knew what the Bible said about who they are in Christ and how they should be living, and yet were unable to experience freedom and abundant life. Doctrine provides a necessary model to understand the context of the Christian life, but I believe is insufficient to exclusively supply a method for transformation. Transformation is more thoroughly explicated in scriptural understandings of the process of spiritual formation, rather than conformity or assent to right doctrine.

Vanhoozer notes that training in dramatic righteousness involves cognitive therapy, but cognitions are not the only dimension of the self involved in transformation. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love neighbor as self. As Willard (2002) has noted, this suggests a holistic model of the self and of transformation. Christian therapists do assist patients with exploring cognitions and cognitive schemas, but also emotions, choices, relationships, body image, and the capacity to live congruently. A pathway into understanding someone's experience may begin with thoughts, but very soon involves the entire person. Vanhoozer states: "Soul care, I submit, is similarly a matter of right theodramatic orientation, of cultivating the mind of Christ in those whose minds are blinded, confused, and generally in the dark." This perspective provides an important part of the picture, but what about the rest of the person? What about those whose emotions, actions, and relationships are in the dark? The assumption here is that right thinking automatically yields right living and I would respectfully disagree with Vanhoozer on this assertion.

An important and central question is posed by Vanhoozer: "How then do we, Christian theologians and psychologists, dramaturgs and acting coaches, form the performers so that people will present not masks but real faces to one another?" (p. 18). To answer this question, Vanhoozer describes a cultural artifact called status anxiety; an existential struggle about identity. The antidote to these culturally imposed negative images is the "canon sense" provided by a sound doctrinal understanding of whom one is in Christ. This

is a profound reality and reorients our understanding of our worth and purpose. But here again, my departure from Vanhoozer is not in his model, but in his method. Knowing this and attempting to inculcate this into a person's life is a matter of experience rather than indoctrination.

Admittedly, I am coming from a therapeutic framework that is psychodynamic rather than cognitive or cognitive behavioral. This is not the forum to debate those differences. What may be on point, however, is that in my clinical experience a person's capacity to internalize the reality of who they are in Christ is *relationally mediated*, not mainly cognitively mediated. In fact, distress is often associated with knowing theological truth and yet being unable to experience the reality of it. For example, a pastor shared with me recently that he knew that he was precious and valuable in the sight of God and that there was a purpose to his life, but he struggled to experience the reality of this, which he associated to being told by his mother that he was unwanted and that she tried to abort him during her pregnancy. Assent to right doctrine alone is not enough to provide a balm for this shattered person's soul and all of the broken and sinful patterns that have resulted from this deeply imbedded belief that they are worthless and unlovable. I believe what is needed is sound doctrine that is embodied and dynamically expressed by a community of believers who love and care for others and who are the Spirit-empowered incarnational reality of God in our day. The lens of our thinking is not all that needs adjustment to the reality of the theodrama. Our will, emotions, body, social relationships all need to experience holy alignment. This alignment is a process; throughout much of Church history this has been referred to as spiritual formation. Formation involves participation in God's redemptive movements in one's individual life and in the world. Participation includes right thinking, insight, and revelation; it also requires healing, healing that takes time. Healing that comes as a result of life-giving encounters with God and others alone and in community. In all those contexts, transformation is a work of grace.

I agree with Vanhoozer that we want to flourish not merely function. This reminds me of second century church father Irenaeus who said that the glory of God is man fully alive. Wholeness and holiness are from the same root word. As Christians, we need healing that leads to wholeness that leads to holiness. Do we want people who do holy things or who live holy lives? Conforming our behavior to doctrine is not enough for transformation. We need a Holy Spirit empowered process that leads to transformation of whole persons. I believe that this reality is also part of the theodrama; it is the good news of transformation in this life as well as eternity in the next.

Vanhoozer closes his article by saying: the purpose of soul care is to equip actors to play their parts in God's great drama of redemption with integrity and joy, speeding persons on their way, or rather, on the way of Jesus Christ, the one who is truth and life. To this end we need more, but not less, than cognitive therapy. We need the guidance of doctrine as we seek to join the great theodrama that is the subject of Scripture. We need to learn the habit of right the dramatic judgment. This is a matter of forming, reforming, and transforming our thoughts and imaginings, our hearts and minds, according to the canonical scriptures.

I respectfully counter this perspective by saying that to me the purpose of soul care is not indoctrination, but introduction. To introduce wounded, broken, sinful people to the triune God who is there; who loves and has redeemed them; who desires to cleanse them of their sin and restore them to intimate fellowship with God, self, and others. Who through grace by the indwelling Spirit will, with their active surrender to God, transform every dimension of their life so that they become the person they were created to be and that God will reveal to them their unique purpose in God's redemptive plan for their life and their place in the world.

Perhaps we are conveying a similar meaning in what we are saying. I happen to be of the persuasion that how we say something is as or more important than what is said. A similar truth can sound to the ear like good or bad news depending on how it is conveyed.

Within Vanhoozer's framework, I would be cast as an acting coach. I believe I understand his meaning with this framework, but I believe caution is needed lest the Christian life sound like a play where people act rather than live. I know this is not Vanhoozer's meaning, and is perhaps an illustration of how all analogies eventually break down. However, the point remains that we each have different roles, different gifts, different purposes in God's redemptive plan. As a theologian, Vanhoozer desires to provide faithful interpretations and frameworks of the scriptures. As a psychologist, I desire to be a faithful companion to those who are hurting and broken. We both want to point and lead others to God. We both want others to be transformed through encounter with the living triune God. Perhaps where we differ is in our understanding of the methods by which transformation is achieved and the language we use to describe the process. I appreciate Vanhoozer's creative approach in challenging us to consider again the compelling drama in which we are all involved.

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Canon Sense Needs Five Senses, Which Need Canon Sense: Science, Drama, and Comprehensive Psychological Understandings

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The exceptionally fine theatre program at the college at which I teach is housed, along with the English, Art, and Music Departments, in a postmodern building on the south side of Chew Street, a street bisecting the Muhlenberg College campus. North of Chew Street are the Natural and Social Sciences. However, the divide is not only geographical; it is also intellectual. The intellectual divide is similar to that between C. P. Snow's (1959/1993) two cultures.

On my campus, the culture of the sciences is to the north and the culture of the arts or humanities is to the south. Most academic psychologists have long sought to place psychology firmly in the sciences, and increasingly the natural sciences. Prognosticators now predict psychology will disappear into neuroscience, at last putting psychology on a firm foundation.

Those predictions will, I think, prove false. Moreover, I think that the 19th century architects of academic disciplines and divisions got it wrong concerning psychology. Psychology belongs in both cultures, because disciplines in both address different dimensions of a comprehensive, multidimensional, properly integrated understanding of the psychological dimensions of unified human beings, addressing body, soul, and spirit.

Because mainstream psychology is dominated by scientific approaches to the psychological dimensions of human beings (and because I like theatre), I was delighted to read Kevin Vanhoozer's South-Side-of-Chew-Street account of an account of a theodramatic psychology, and most of what I read rang true.

Nevertheless, I cannot help but think Dr. Vanhoozer is too much a South Sider. There is too little of the biological in his psychology, and too little of the psychological—the behavioral and cognitive regularities that constrain and shape us, whoever the assistant director and acting coach might be. Those constraining regularities are discovered, not by careful reflection on canonical scripture, theological history, and doctrine, but by scientific psychological investigation.

Science, as a method to understand human beings, draws on the five senses and its own particular logic to understand regularities in creation. As scientists, psychologists are not acting coaches, but producers of knowledge. And science, Carl Rogers (1955) asserted, is “a way of preventing me from deceiving myself in regard to my creatively formed hunches (p. 275).”

Psychologists who are scientists may ask different kinds of questions than do theologians, questions that, in important ways, can be answered only by what the five senses disclose. At times, Vanhoozer seems to assume more commonality across theology and psychology than actually exists. Few psychologists see their role as “interpreting God, world, and especially the self.” Rather, psychologists generally strive to understand what is true of people in general; interpreting God is beyond their purview. Psychologists may, for example, seek to determine the effectiveness of facilitated communication, a labor-intensive attempt to help nonverbal people (e.g., severely autistic children) communicate with others. Psychologists look to scientific studies, which indicate it does not work (e.g., Lilienfeld, 2007; Mostert, 2001).

Psychologists thus assert that they rely on empirical observation and hypothesis-testing to understand regularities in human behavior and cognition; they do not think doctrine is “the way we come to understand the drama and our role in it.” Canon sense cannot tell us, for example, whether positive or negative punishment is more effective, but, in the context of science, the five senses can.

There are, of course, good theological reasons to affirm science, when it is conducted with humility and within the boundaries proper to it. God's creation has order, which we can, to a considerable extent, discover through science. To glorify God and understand His creation, we engage in scientific investigation. Understood in that way, science properly plays a starring role in our theodrama.

Many faithful Christians support science, but want to keep intact a high, insurmountable wall between matters of faith (where theology appropriately speaks) and matters of science (where theological doctrine plays no valid role). Since psychology is a science, they assert, Vanhoozer's claim that “we need the guidance of doctrine” should be rejected. Psychology

should, that is, be a theology-free zone, liberated from doctrine.

As many authors have pointed out, however, scientists seem inevitably to draw on some (often implicit) understanding of what is real and how we know. They write dramas set in particular intellectual locales, and understand players in relationship to them. All psychologists make ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological assumptions (Browning & Cooper, 2004; Dueck & Reimer, 2009; Jones & Butman, 1991; O'Donohue, 1989; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Tjeltveit, 1999).

For example, some advocates of a very narrow, non-humble understanding of science assert that psychology should be based only on scientific findings. Baker, McFall, and Shoham (2008) argue, for example, that we need to set apart (sanctify?), accredit, only truly worthy psychology programs. Note the language—at once moral and evangelistic—they use in their call to action: “Those who *believe* in the *value* of science as the *surest* route to cumulative *progress* and who see the risks of continued reliance on prescientific values, training, and practice *should* give their enthusiastic support to ... reform efforts” (p. 89, emphasis added).

The message Baker et al. (2008) preach is neither a prerequisite for science nor a conclusion drawn from scientific research. Nor does “Science helps us answer *some* questions” logically entail “Science *alone* helps us answer *all* questions, including all psychological questions.” The moral vision that underlies the claims of Baker et al. may be that articulated by Taylor (1989): “One *ought* not to believe what one has insufficient evidence for” (p. 404), a view often held in conjunction with scientism, an epistemological claim “that the methods and procedures of natural science . . . suffice to establish all the truths we need to believe” (p. 404). The analysis Lacey (2005) provides is also helpful. As a philosopher of science articulating the proper role of values in science, Lacey notes that most scientists assume materialism to be true, and choose scientific strategies and approaches consistent with that metaphysical assumption and the moral value of control (to which it is often tied). Scientists’ materialist strategies “constrain the theories that are entertained . . . [and] . . . select empirical data that may bear on such theories” (Lacey, p. 21). Science does not, however, *require* those materialist assumptions or the moral value of control, Lacey contends. Scientists can, and probably should, also employ other assumptions and values, *if* they employ science’s cognitive values, are impartial and neutral (as he defines those terms), and properly defer to empirical findings.

Although Vanhoozer’s claim that “doctrine is the way we come to understand the drama and our role in it” is overstated and in need of qualification, he never-

theless points to an important truth: Our assumptions significantly shape our psychological understandings, including our scientific understandings. Assumptions inform the five senses.

How do we best address these extra-scientific assumptions in psychology? Some contend that we should eliminate all such assumptions from psychology, or reduce their impact. Others, recognizing that such assumptions are inevitable, contend that we should at least be explicit about them; Vanhoozer’s explicitness thus warrants praise. Some Christians who think theological understandings of human beings are important may nevertheless sharply distinguish Vanhoozer’s project from psychology. They thus hold two understandings of human beings, one theological and one scientific. Still others contend that moral and metaphysical assumptions may play a valid and important role in psychological science, but only if employed in particular ways.

Some philosophers of science have recently argued that values may play a more extensive legitimate role in science than previously acknowledged. In addition to scientific values such as honesty and accuracy (essential to science), values influencing choice of research topic, and values informing discussions of the implications and applications of scientific findings, Lacey (2005) suggests that values can play a valid role in selecting strategies and approaches to science, which have implications for “the kinds of phenomena and possibilities to be investigated” (p. 231). Once a scientific strategy and approach is selected, however, only scientific values and data play a valid role in accepting theories and making factual scientific claims. One cannot, of course, use one’s values to rearrange data so it is consistent with one’s values. Lacey demonstrates that science need not be based on materialist assumptions and the value of control by pointing to scientifically-legitimate, societally-useful research informed by values associated with feminism (see Anderson, 2004) and with grassroots third world movements. Far from being problematic, a diversity of values, Lacey suggests, may increase the impartiality of science. Different values, associated with different scientific approaches and strategies, may lead to new understandings of a topic.

Those new understandings may stem, in part, from moral perception, which has to do with “the ability to see, to perceive, to understand, the moral dimensions in a situation or domain, including the ethical issues that are present, and relevant questions about what is good or bad, right and/or wrong, and/or virtuous and/or vicious” (Tjeltveit, 2009, p. 11). It helps us differentiate, Fowers (2005) notes, “what is valuable, significant, or important from what is valueless, insignificant, or unimportant in the circumstances” (p. 118).

Although affirming a broader use of values in

science than has been customary, Lacey (2005) and Anderson (2004) emphasize that scientific investigations (and, I think, especially those informed by moral perception) need to be constrained by scientific values and empirical findings. "If a hypothesis is to be tested," Anderson notes, "the research design must leave open a fair possibility that evidence will disconfirm it" (p. 19). And so when Christian psychologists make empirical claims, they should test them, and be open to the possibility of surprise, of evidence from our (created) senses regarding the (created) world of psychological human beings that conflicts with our interpretations of Scripture and creative theological hunches.

When investigators function within those constraints, they can see through the eyes of Vanhoozer's theodramatic vision for psychology, since the five senses need some moral and spiritual vision, and Christians who want theirs to be theodramatic, will want canon sense. When so equipped, we can better explore scientifically topics central to Christian faith that Christian psychologists have neglected, like love of God and neighbor-as-self (Tjeltveit, 2006, 2008) and the implications of grace for psychology (McMinn, 2008; Tjeltveit, 2004).

When psychologists choose research topics, select measurement methods and research designs, think through the implications of research findings, and write theoretical articles, they will thus benefit from taking seriously Vanhoozer's suggestion that the "psychologist-theologian must not be content merely with stating truth but must take every imagination captive to Scripture so that we can see ourselves in proper context, as creaturely parties in a created whole, where everything has meaning thanks only to its relation to God."

As theodramatic vision opens up possibilities across a wide range of psychological topics concerning which interpretation is necessary and implicit ethical issues need to be addressed (Browning & Cooper, 2004; Richardson et al., 1999; Tjeltveit, 1999) and about which theology can make important contributions (Browning & Cooper; Dueck & Reimer, 2009; Johnson, 2007; Jones and Butman, 1991; Tjeltveit, 2007).

In conclusion, understanding many psychological dimensions of human beings requires contributions from both the humanities and the sciences. And so it is valid for Christian psychologists to see our role, in part, as "interpreting God, world, and especially the self," as argued by Vanhoozer, along with attending to scientific findings. We need both theodrama and empirical work, both canon sense and the five senses. Theology answers some questions that science cannot; the sciences answer certain questions theology cannot. And a theodramatic vision ("learning to see things in a new

way") can give us the moral and spiritual perception to see important psychological dimensions that other visions cannot. Moral and spiritual perception can then inform, in certain carefully delineated but valid ways, scientific investigations that contribute to comprehensive psychological understandings. In these ways, then, Christian psychologists can bridge C. P. Snow's two cultures and draw deeply and well on both science and theodrama.

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Behind the Mask

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There can be little doubt that the capacity for drama is a distinctively, perhaps even definitively, human trait. It is certainly integral to the very earliest concepts of human personhood. As Michael Welker (2000) notes, “[T]he Greek word *prosōpon* (face) and the Latin word *persona* refer to the *mask* through which an actor speaks. The expression can also signify the actor who wears the mask, and the role played by the actor” (p. 96). Vanhoozer’s dramatic analogy, then, which portrays the Bible as script, doctrine as “theatrical direction,” and human identity in terms of the particular parts or roles that individual persons play, resonates deeply with the history of our collective self-understanding. But it also raises questions about how to conceptualise the relationships both between the actor (the person) and the roles they are assigned to play and the roles themselves. These are very much live issues in contemporary psychology, and the answers to such questions will have significant implications for how we understand both the vocation of the Christian psychologist, or pastoral theologian, and the self-transformation of those who are instructed.

Vanhoozer himself does not explicitly tackle the ontological question of what is behind the masks that individual people present to the world, yet it is clear that he believes personhood to be both individual and relational. The dramatic metaphor, grounded in Christian theology and scriptural exegesis, and bolstered by his sympathetic citation of Erving Goffman’s work, serves both to emphasise the embodied relationality of human being, and to dissociate individual performances from the performing individuals. Masks are things people wear; they are not people in their own right. Actors may play roles, but these roles, and the tangled webs of relationships they represent, are not exhaustive of personhood. They may, in fact, be nothing more than superficial attempts to manage their immediate social environment; they may be utterly devoid of “reality and truth.”

For Vanhoozer, each actor is at least capable of constructing and performing an identity that corresponds with what we are each called to be by God, and it is the task of the Christian psychologist as “acting coach,” drawing freely upon Christian doctrine as *the* source of authentic direction, to help each of us realize what we can of our potential. There is a sense, then, in which each coaching course would ideally conclude with the actor’s renunciation of his occupation, since, according to Vanhoozer, “Doctrine does more than confer a role on us; it describes our deepest self, our truest identity.” Although few actors (in the traditional sense) would

take too kindly to such professionally ruinous advice, Vanhoozer is clear that the Christian psychologist's goal must be to effect profound personal transformation to the extent that people abandon their masks so that they might present, what he describes as, "real faces" to one another.

Precisely what is meant by "deepest self" is a matter of considerable importance for any Christian psychology that wishes to remain as firmly grounded in psychology as it is in Christian theology. Given Vanhoozer's concern with the relationality inherent to the dramatic metaphor, the deepest self cannot be the autonomous entity that has plagued modern philosophy. If people are formed in and through their dramatic (which is to say, social) performances, there can be no core self that just is properly oriented towards God, and which can be brought to the surface through adequate coaching. Nor does it seem that he is referring to a self that is somehow psychologically fundamental – something like the "deep self" that Alistair McFadyen (1990) has described in his book *The Call to Personhood*, which, although it too is a social construct, is distilled from our most important social interactions, and is consequently much less whimsical than some of the beliefs we each hold about ourselves. After all, Vanhoozer is concerned with how the self might be transformed in a radical sense by doctrine, not merely with how its most recalcitrant features might be exposed or reinforced. Rather, it appears that the deepest self is simply that which corresponds most closely with the ideal described by Christian doctrine. In other words, it represents at once both an aspiration and a learned disposition towards interpreting and interacting with the world. This new role – this new self – is singular, truthful, and supersedes all previous roles in the production of authentic Christian identity.

Despite Vanhoozer's claim that theologians and psychologists are similarly engaged in the interpretation of God, world, and self, most secular psychologists will have little to say about the truthfulness of the identity project that is grounded in Christian doctrine. However, many would question the very idea that a person's many roles or selves might be replaced by a single superordinate role or self, regardless of its claims to authenticity. Erving Goffman (1959) may have preserved the singularity of the private self in his classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, despite recognising the plurality of the roles individual people play, but as a sociologist first and foremost, he was notoriously vague about the psychological mechanics of the social processes he described. Christian *psychology*, however, needs to take such mechanics seriously. There is now a broad consensus amongst psychologists of all kinds, from psychoanalysts to cognitive psychologists, that the self must be understood at some level as a mul-

tiplicity (e.g. Markus & Nurius 1987; Gergen 1991; Wyer & Srull 1989; Shafranske 1992, Rowan & Cooper 1999). For these theorists, the masks we wear are often enduring public expressions of the plurality of self-representations, self-schemata, sub-personalities, or personas that we construct in normal life, even if some or all of them are founded upon delusions, misunderstandings, or willful denial of the "truth." In the words of psychologist Mick Cooper (1999), people necessarily encounter their world "through a variety of different modes," representing "tendencies towards particular constellations of behavioural, affective, and cognitive acts-in-the-world" (p. 66). The precise terms in which the plurality of self is described varies greatly between theorists (as Rowan [1999] makes clear), as does the extent to which different subselves are granted autonomy from one another, but most are united in their rejection of a singular, essentially unified self.

What is most significant about this body of psychological theory for Vanhoozer's concept of personhood is the way it queries the very possibility that people can overcome such multiplicity. Is it possible, or even appropriate to behave and to experience oneself in the same way before policemen, one's pre-school children, one's wife or husband, one's boss, and even one's counsellor or priest? Secular psychologists will mostly give negative answers to both questions. The human tendency to assume different personas and adapt behaviour accordingly is widely seen as an *inevitable* consequence of the interaction between the exceedingly complex human cognitive system and an equally complex social world. Furthermore, such adaptability is commonly supposed to be an essential feature of healthy psychological functioning (see, for example, Gergen 1972; Hermans & Kempen 1993; McAdams 1997). Those who lack either the will or the ability to conform their behaviour to what is deemed acceptable in any particular situation are usually deemed psychologically, socially, or even morally deficient in some way. On the other hand, the ability to adapt seamlessly to any given environment, however extreme, is usually considered an extraordinarily valuable skill. Whether or not this is just, the psychological consensus is that the complexity of the self system cannot be reduced to the performance of a single continuous role, irrespective of the quantity and quality of coaching that a person might receive. It is even frequently suggested that the pluralisation of self is set to intensify as globalising communicative technologies and the concomitant disintegration of sociocultural traditions and local communities vastly expand the numbers and types of relationship and worldviews we are each exposed to.

What broader implications might this have for Vanhoozer's theodramatic metaphor, which repeatedly describes the new authentic role, rather than roles, of

the reformed indoctrinated person? If we must alter our psychological understanding of the nature of role-playing to accommodate the notion that individual people are irreducibly plural (even if some of our characters have larger parts to play than others), then perhaps the terms of the acting coach's contract also need to be renegotiated. Possibly, the pastoral theologian's place is not to prepare the actor for a single career-defining role, but to ensure that each of the actor's present and future roles are faithfully performed according to what Christian doctrine suggests is appropriate for the scenes in which they appear. If Christian psychology is to remain harmonious with psychology more generally, this would appear to be a necessary step. But it is only a first step. To remain true to Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama, the medium of which is *persons* in dialogical relation, then the coaching of particular roles for particular scenes cannot adequately describe the pastoral theologian's duties. Individual roles cannot be treated as persons in their own right, as this would conflict with Vanhoozer's own implicit understanding of what lies behind the actor's masks.

In this, Vanhoozer is in line with the vast majority of Christian theological accounts of personhood. Unlike secular psychology, which offers no *a priori* metaphysical or ethical justification for why there should be any overall cohesion to the roles of the individual actor, the theodramatic model makes our existence as continuous persons essential, inasmuch as we must take responsibility for our many roles and the thoughts and deeds they encompass. For the Christian psychologist, a person's roles must be intimately related to one another, even if they are somehow simultaneously distinct from one another. How can these ideas be reconciled? Happily, a number of recent secular psychological accounts of personhood have sought to perform just such a balancing act through understanding identity in terms of narrative (e.g. Sarbin 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; McAdams 1997; Crossley 2000). These accounts seem especially well suited to the expansion of Vanhoozer's own model since they explicitly embrace the principles of the dramatic metaphor, whereby selves are conceptualised in terms of the parts they play within temporal plots. Here, the coherence of the individual actor – the person – corresponds to the psychological achievement of integrating concepts of who we are now, who we have been at various historical junctures, and who we will be in the future, into a singular continuous narrative, the never-ending construction of which gives a sense of personal identity through time. This sense of continuity too is usually deemed to be an essential feature of normal psychological functioning (see Harré 1998). As psychologists Hardcastle and Flanagan (1999) argue, when people are unable to perform this sort of integration, perhaps as a result of confu-

sion between fantasies, delusions and better established memories, "the strands of their stories are jumbled and disjointed" (p.650), and the result is the pathological fragmentation of self into multiple and completely autonomous parts.

The narrating process necessarily follows a set of rules. These "rules of storytelling" are laid down by the same sociocultural traditions and conditions that constrain all aspects of our psychological development. They guide the construction of a "self-model which aims to capture the world-organizing and action-guiding features of our identities through time" (Hardcastle & Flanagan 1999, p. 649). They do not just dictate the terms in which we come to understand ourselves and our actions historically, but also our understanding of how it is appropriate to act in the future. The similarity between the narrative psychologists' rules of storytelling and the role that Vanhoozer reserves for Christian doctrine in theodrama is striking. For Vanhoozer, doctrine furnishes the Christian psychologist with a unique sort of directorial guidance; it alone provides the proper resources for comprehending the most fundamental themes of the drama as a whole, and the contributions that each actor has to make. Doctrine, then, might do more than simply permit a particular understanding of our various roles in particular scenes; it may also imbue a unity of purpose to those roles that transcends each and every individual performance. In short, it has the capacity to provide the context within which the person as a whole is formed and acts.

It appears that the analogy between Christian psychologists and acting coaches remains shrewd and no less appropriate for the multiplication of the actors' roles. Clearly, the language of actors, masks, and role-playing has been employed by a great many psychologists who have warmly embraced the pluralisation of the self (e.g. Gergen 1972, 1991; McAdams 1997), so it should come as no surprise that Vanhoozer's model deals quite easily with this area of contemporary thought. However, in the interests of continuing consistency with secular psychology, our understanding of the Christian psychologist's role and the nature of the self-transformation that is to be effected in any prospective pupils could be subtly refined. As well as preparing the actor for a range of specific roles, the coach must attend to the relationships that subsist between those roles and between them and the other actors in the play. The acquisition of "canon sense" – "the ability to locate oneself in relation to the overall creation-fall-redemption-consummation story-line of the great theodrama" – depends upon the narrative coherence of the actor, and the recognition of a transcendent unity of purpose behind their roles. As actors, people must be encouraged to take responsibility for all their parts, and as Christians, they must ensure that their own nar-

ratives correspond as closely as possible to those they encounter in scripture. Perhaps, then, the Christian psychologist's role should be expanded to include the teaching of better story-telling, as well as acting, technique, even if the stories that people come to tell are not entirely their own work.

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Continuing the Dialogue: A Theological Offering

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Introduction: Gathering round the conference table

Why do the disciplines rage? In an era of increasing academic specialization where few scholars have time to notice what is happening in fields other than their own, I am delighted to respond to this invitation to write, as a theologian, in a journal intended for Christian psychologists. I do not take my seat at the conference table for granted. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to enter into dialogue with other Christian thinkers. My interlocutors have been gracious and hospitable, welcoming me into the ongoing discussion and, for the most part, politely overlooking the obvious faux pas and occasional missteps of one not accustomed to conversing in psychological society.

Understanding others is time consuming, and hard work. Who has time to master somebody else's jargon or familiarize oneself with the problems and positions of another field of study when one can barely keep up with the literature in one's own field? Not me: I apologize for my finitude on a regular basis.

There is a second, more sobering explanation for not paying attention to those who speak from other disciplinary standpoints: it can be threatening. We might learn something that would call our own carefully won theoretical victories into question. The status anxiety of which I speak in my article pervades society and academy alike. The risk of appearing foolish (or ignorant, as I am, of things that others in the Society know, like Internal Family Systems Therapy) increases exponentially when one crosses disciplines. This academic anxiety often goes hand in hand, oddly enough, with the conviction that one is already seeing things correctly. Here we need to speak not only of finitude, but fallenness, and of the temptation to think that we can know like God, absolutely. Reductionism – the convenient illusion that our discipline and theory yields the best, and perhaps the only, correct insight into the reality we are studying – is perhaps the besetting weakness of the scholar.

These two reasons why interdisciplinary dialogue is relatively rare require a supplementary explanation where theology is concerned. Some Christian scholars in the arts and sciences are reluctant to give a seat at the table to the biblical scholar or theologian for fear that the seat will become a bully pulpit from which

conversation stopping *ex cathedra* pronouncements (the Protestant equivalent thereof being “the Bible says”) will be issued – call it the problem of exegetical sovereignty and academic freedom.

I understand the concern. Yet Christian psychologists are part of the priesthood of all believers too, with all the rights and responsibilities of biblical interpretation appertaining thereunto. I do not want to be the kind of theologian who lords it over the other disciplines; I have rather come to serve, to minister understanding. I have sought to do this not by telling Christian psychologists how to go about their business, but rather by casting a vision and offering an interpretive theological framework within which to locate their work and ministry.

Chuck DeGroat

DeGroat rightly identifies anthropology as a, perhaps the, key issue in the discussion between theologians and psychologists. As Calvin says, “Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God” (and vice versa). Both disciplines therefore have a vested interest in coming to understand the self, and not for academic purposes only. For both disciplines have what is ultimately a pastoral aim: to nurse and nurture hurting selves to health.

DeGroat worries that I espouse a reduced anthropology, according to which it suffices to have the right beliefs to cure souls. He is not the only respondent to point out a certain naiveté in the idea that all we need to do with struggling people is to get them to think the right thoughts. He does not blame me as much as my discipline: “Vanhoozer’s proposal . . . seems to be reductionistic, as dogmatic theology can often be, privileging the life of the mind at the expense of human affection and embodiment.” The irony, of course, is that I typically receive the opposite criticism in the context of academic theology, where the worry is that I focus on embodied personal relationships, the stuff of drama, instead of propositional truth.

The point of choosing drama rather than philosophy as handmaid to my queen was precisely to avoid reductionism. Doctrine is for the head, heart, and hand alike. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a textbook of right belief but a drama that, in displaying God's

self-giving love for the world, captures our minds and enraptures our hearts. Hence doctrine is not simply information that we need to know to go to heaven, but direction for right feeling and behavior now to the glory of God.

It is true that I did not have time to elaborate on what DeGroat calls “the heart and imagination’s change process.” I am certainly open to practical suggestions on this score. As to DeGroat’s own appropriation of Schwartz’s idea that our “core self” coaches the problematic parts that have lost their way, I have my doubts. The idea that one person not only plays but also *consists* of many actors, each doing its own thing, raises significant identity problems. If different parts of our psyche are acting out their respective dramatic roles, then I want to ask, whose narrative is it anyway? Is there a single agent in this self? (I shall return to these questions in my response to Turner).

Steve Greggo

I have little to say by way of response to my friend and former colleague Steve Greggo for the simple reason that *he gets it*. Not that it was easy. I admire Steve’s determination to wrestle charitably with my work (especially *The Drama of Doctrine*) until he gets a blessing, and that the encounter did not put his nose out of joint (cf. Gen. 32:35). I also appreciate his highlighting the importance for my theology of wisdom, which is *not* simply a matter of the intellect, but also of right thinking, feeling, and doing. Finally, I am grateful for his introducing the term “mental health professional” and the notion of normal functioning into the discussion, because it enables me to make the following gloss. To be concerned with the soul’s *salus* (health) is to want to help people to achieve not merely “normal” but *normative* (i.e., “proper”) functioning – a matter of realizing one’s “design plan” or, in Christian terms, the purpose for which humans were created (Plantinga, 1993).

Charles Hackney

Hackney too accepts my little offering and runs with it. He rightly observes that my approach aligns better with the purposes of positive rather than abnormal psychology, namely, to foster habits and practices of living well. Doctrine is good for many things, but not for healing physical or mental diseases. What interests me about Hackney’s appropriation of positive psychology is what we might call the virtues of discipleship. Cultivating such virtues should be a significant part of the Christian mental health practitioner’s mandate, especially when one is working not with those who are suffering from serious mental disorders but with those (probably the majority of the people one sees) who are merely suffering from a bad case of the twenty-first

century.

In *The Drama of Doctrine* (Vanhoozer, 2005), I compare doctrine to a diet whose aim is to help disciples become spiritually fit (pp. 374-379). Like its physical counterpart, the diet of doctrine involves knowing both what to eat/do and what not to eat/do and forming good habits. Doctrine directs us to adopt not only the right theological positions but, just as important, the right *dispositions* (so Charry, 1997). Disciples follow the dominical diet: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34). This “doing” is a matter of participating rightly in the drama of redemption, and we can only do that if we understand, and accept, our roles. Doctrine does not only inform us but forms us, precisely by cultivating habits of mind, imagination, and heart alike: enduring dispositions both to desire and to do the will of God. In particular, doctrine encourages us to see, think, and *feel* our everyday lives in relation to the coming kingdom of the triune God.

Like several other respondents, Hackney too thinks that I overemphasize the cognitive virtues. He calls attention to recent Christian treatments of the virtues that give pride of place to *kenosis* rather than *phronesis*. He is right to remind us that Christians consider love the supreme theodramatic habit (“the greatest of these is love”). I have three comments in response. First, the *phronesis* that I commend is not some generic wisdom but the (kenotic) wisdom of the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-24). Second, wisdom is not merely cognitive; it is rather a matter of lived knowledge, of insight plus practice. Third, in positing wisdom as the supreme virtue I am not giving pride of place to the intellect, but acknowledging the regulative role of wisdom as the virtue that knows when to draw upon, say, boldness rather than humility (or vice versa).

Nicolene Joubert

Joubert is cautiously appreciative of my proposal, but asks important questions about the hierarchy implied by speaking of some people as “directors” and others as “actors.” How do some people come to be directors? Does it imply that they know more about God than others? Can what counts as directorial wisdom in one culture work in another? She also wonders about levels of involvement in a drama where there are both human and divine, as well as demonic, actors. Her overall concern, I think, is to ensure that the dramatic model not be applied simplistically.

I share her concern. That is why I chose not to sit the theologian in the director’s chair. The theologian is more like the humble dramaturge, the behind-the-scenes helper who researches the play and its earlier performances (or in this case, biblical studies and

church history respectively). And of course, all of us are actors in the play of life: no one gets to opt out of the action.

Who forms the acting coaches and who assesses the actor's performances (i.e., the outcome)? These are interesting questions, and not for my proposal only. Let me just say that neither theologians nor pastors are on a "higher level" than the other performers. As the apostle Paul says, "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). The Bible exhorts us to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (Heb. 13:17), but also remind us that "not many of you should become teachers . . . for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

Michael Pakaluk

Pakaluk is inclined to reject my dramatic offering; he is struck more by the differences than the similarities between Christianity and the theater. I appreciate his forthright challenge as it allows me to clear up some possible misunderstandings.

First, Pakaluk rejects my claim that Christianity is more like a drama than a philosophy on the grounds that it relies on a false contrast. He wants me to distinguish between the "mode" of something and its "object." Philosophy, novels, religions and, yes, even the theater, can all be modes that take or intend the object "God." To say that Christianity is not a philosophy is to claim something about its modal status, not its object. Let me say straightaway that I accept the distinction, not least because it helps to clarify my original claim: Christianity is about the "object" God *in the mode* of drama, by which I mean speech, action, and embodied personal relationships. Why drama? Because first and foremost, Christianity is about what God has done in Word and act. God's speech and God's action are the essence of Christianity, though not in such a way as to eliminate, but rather to solicit, human speech and acts in response. It is a drama with entrances and exits of give and take, grace and gratitude.

There is another objection, however: drama requires representation, something to be "acted out," and Pakaluk is at a loss to know what this could be. Children can pretend to be mommies and daddies, but surely the Creator God is not pretending to be a heavenly Father! Saying that God *acts* is not equivalent to saying that God is an *actor*.

We may be working with different concepts of drama. According to some accounts, there is drama whenever one person "presents" herself to another (Beckerman, 1970, p. 8). This is precisely how theology starts: with God's self-revelation. But what, however, does the theodrama – God the actor acting – rep-

resent? I answer: *himself*. Recall the opening verses of Hebrews: in the past God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has presented himself to us by his Son, who is "the exact *representation* of his being" (Heb. 1:3; my emphasis). In theological terms: the way God speaks and acts in history as Father, Son, and Spirit (the so-called *economic* Trinity) corresponds to or *represents* the way God is in eternity (the "immanent" Trinity). What does God represent/reveal if not himself?

Pakaluk is right to associate this with Balthasar but wrong in thinking that I as an evangelical Reformed Protestant cannot go there. Why should Roman Catholics get all the good theological tunes? So: the way God is in redemptive history corresponds to the way God is in his eternal, triune self. Doctrines are, therefore, statements about divine realities (e.g., who God is; what God has done) and it is precisely as such that they provide direction to the church by better helping us to understand the significance of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

As to the Bible, it is the church's holy script: a text to be interpreted, followed, enacted, and performed. Strictly speaking, however, it is perhaps best seen as "transcript" and "prescript" (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 167): an authorized record of what God has said and done and an equally authoritative instruction for the church's response.

Finally, Pakaluk wonders if there is any biblical basis for the claim that Christianity is analogous to a drama. Well, if drama involves the presentation of the self to others, then in one sense everything we say and do with our bodies before others is dramatic, and never more than when we are presenting our bodies as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). If creation is the "theater of God's glory" (Calvin), how much more is the church: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle (*theatrizon*) to the world, to angels and to mortals" (1 Cor. 4:9). The task of the community of well-formed, spiritually fit disciples is to represent (there is that term again) God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 5:10).

Theresa Clement Tisdale

Tisdale wonders whether I have taken a poll to back up my claim that doctrinal theology has come to occupy only a marginal place in many contemporary churches. I have not, but others have, and I draw from the most important of these (Wolfe, 2003). She also wonders what leads me to ask whether Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has become the implicit theology behind much would-be Christian psychology. My intent in raising this question was to call for honest self-reflection, not to accuse.

Tisdale worries about the perceived “mechanistic, non-relational tone” of my article, though she acknowledges that it takes “a decidedly more relational turn” when I begin to discuss drama as “living persons in dialogical interaction and covenantal relation.” She worries that I am insufficiently relational; I worry about her making “lived experience with God” theologically normative. Of course, she is right to insist that we follow Christ, a person, not a book. However, as Calvin rightly observed, the only Christ we have – that is, the only authorized account of his identity – is the Christ of the Scriptures. No one is served by drawing too firm a line between Jesus Christ and the words of the Bible. Scripture is the means by which the triune God relates to us: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 5:2) – and, I would add, that we trust his promises, sing his songs, heed his warnings, follow his instruction, and learn his wisdom.

Is my proposal for forming the performers too intellectual, too rationalistic? Tisdale is not the only respondent to think so, although she expresses her critique more forcefully than the others. It is an important concern. The irony, again, is that in the context of academic theology the criticism is often the opposite: that theodrama trades the analytic precision of propositional truth for the much messier notion of *doing* the truth. Contra Tisdale, fitting participation in the theodrama is not a matter of a one-dimensional reliance on reason alone, but rather on right imagining. Experience – the dynamic interaction of one actor with others – is the stuff of drama. The role of doctrine, however, is to help us frame our experience rightly, so that we are thinking God’s thoughts (and feeling God’s feelings) after him.

I do not want to exaggerate the difference between being and doing: “from the heart flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). I am under no illusion that mental health is simply a matter of knowing the right doctrine. The problem of sin is not only noetic but cardiac: our deepest desires do not align with God’s will, and only the Holy Spirit can perform the required corrective cardiac surgery. Nevertheless, the vocation of theologians and psychologists is to provide direction and encouragement, the verbal and relational means that the Spirit uses to work transformation.

We here come to the nub of the issue: can doctrine form and transform the performers? I never say “right thinking automatically yields right living.” On the contrary, I acknowledge that it is not enough to “know the right answers.” We need rather to become the kind of people who display right judgments, and this involves having a right heart, right desires, and a right imagination. It is the latter that is the primary focus of my article. Understanding is not a function of

the intellect alone but also the imagination, the ability to have the eyes of one’s heart—including mind, soul, and strength—enraptured by the story of what the Father is doing in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

Tisdale claims that a person’s capacity to internalize the reality of who we are in Christ “is *relationally mediated*, not cognitively mediated.” The whole point of my dramatic approach is to overcome such contrastive thinking: doctrine is the doable knowable, direction for the whole body of Christ. Tisdale’s call for sound doctrine that is “embodied and dynamically expressed by a community of believers” is precisely what a dramatic model enjoins. The priority, however, must lie with doctrinal direction, for how else would we know what “right relatedness” resembles? Tisdale is entirely right to insist on the role of the Holy Spirit in effecting transformation. Yet I am mystified as to how we are to introduce broken people to the triune God without doctrinal direction – without identifying the protagonist of the drama of redemption or explaining its plot. Experience without doctrine is blind, just as doctrine without experience is empty. Finally, I think it highly significant that the apostle Paul associates transformation with the “renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:2) rather than the dynamics of relational mediation.

Alan Tjeltveit

As one for whom living in two cultures is a daily experience (my wife is French), I appreciate Tjeltveit’s eloquent plea to situate psychology between the humanities and sciences (though perhaps, with a nod to divinity, we ought to speak of “the three cultures”). I also understand the tremendous pressure to make psychology academically respectable – not merely “positive” but *positivist* – by bringing its method into line with that of the “hard” sciences. Having taught theology for several years at Edinburgh University, I am no stranger to the charge that theology is not a “real” science. I know all too well how Christian doctrine is despised and rejected by modern university men (and women). What is the wisdom gleaned from canon sense compared to the hard won knowledge of everything from space flight to neurosurgery by the five senses?

Tjeltveit himself is on the side of the angels: he resists scientism, knowing that our scientific procedures are not entirely value free. As he rightly observes: “Our assumptions significantly shape our psychological understanding.” Indeed. In the field of biblical studies, Rudolf Bultmann famously argued that exegesis without presuppositions is not possible. Something similar holds when what is being examined is not biblical texts but human beings. Simply to rely on empirical observation, however, does not take us far enough: human

exegesis without certain metaphysical and ethical assumptions is not possible, even for hardened materialists.

Tjelveit's response raises issues concerning the relationship of theology to science that are too large to do justice here. Are we thus doomed to live in different universes, with some – we will call them “scientists” – counting as knowledge only what the five senses deliver while others – “theologians” – content themselves with canon sense? I am uncomfortable at the prospect of strictly patrolled borders between scientific northerners and hermeneutic southerners. Reality, I contend, is complex but ultimately unified: there is only one real world. However, because it is complex, there are many aspects to its unified reality, and some theories (and academic disciplines) are better than others at perceiving this or that aspect.

We need both psychology and theology, and other disciplines besides, if we are to come to a full-orbed, multi-level knowledge of human reality. I follow Arthur Peacocke's suggestions that (1) science and theology engage different aspects or levels of reality and (2) no one level of reality (e.g., physical, biological, psychological, social) is more real than another. Rather, there is a stratified hierarchy of disciplines that correspond to the “hierarchy of being,” and the higher levels, though they depend on the lower levels, cannot be reduced to the lower levels (Peacocke, 1993, p. 217). So, yes, to do justice to mental health we must include an examination of one's brain chemistry, though it would be misleading to say that psychology pertains to *nothing but* brain chemistry, for persons are more but not less than biological organisms.

Theology contributes to this academic ministry of reality (so to speak) by attending to a particular aspect of level of human being, namely, *behavior in relation to God*. For example, observing human behavior with the five senses alone does not disclose the reality of human sin: evil, perhaps, but not sin (i.e., opposition to God and the created order). Theology too, therefore, works with concepts and categories without which certain aspects of human reality would not come to light. It is not a matter of rejecting empirical data, then, but of interpreting it in a different light. At its best, theology too is a ministry of reality, a means of offering thick descriptions of persons and things in relation to God. I hope Tjelveit would agree.

Léon Turner

Turner poses a postmodern variation of the ancient question of the one and the many: is there a stable identity – a oneness that in some sense remains the same over time – behind the mask, behind the many roles that the one person plays? He observes that many today question the notion that there is a single authen-

tic self that underlies the many social roles we play: there is a “broad consensus” among contemporary psychologists that “the self must be understood at some level as a multiplicity.” I take his word on this, though I recognize neither social conventions nor broad consensus as normative for Christian theology.

The operative phrase about the multiplicity of the self is “at some level.” Of course people wear masks: the hypocrite you shall always have with you. My dramatic proposal, however, highlights the importance of achieving our true faces. While I relate to different people and different situations in different ways, it is still me playing these multiple roles. Yes, a certain degree of adaptability is a vital feature of healthy psychological function, and for that matter, pastoral ministry: “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

Is it not equally essential to psychological health, however, that we can provide a unified narrative of our lives? It is difficult for me to conceive how a person could be held responsible for what he or she says and does if that person lacked the capacity for self-attestation, where attestation is the “assurance of being oneself acting and suffering” (Ricoeur, 1992). I was therefore encouraged by Turner's mention of secular psychological accounts of personhood that make use of the notion of narrative identity. The apostle Paul, for example, is able to give a coherent account of his life (Phil. 3:3-11), even though it involved the radical discontinuity of conversion (Acts 9).

Turner is right to inquire into my understanding of the ontology of personhood. Elsewhere I have argued that persons are communicative agents in covenantal relations (Vanhoozer, 2010, pp. 230-40). Here, too, theology has a voice to add to the thick description of what it is to be human provided by biologists, psychologists, and sociologists. No other discipline employs the category “image of God” in describing what it is to be human, yet this too is a description of reality (even if it is not evident to the five senses).

The arc in the story of our lives ultimately concerns whether or not we have lived up to the vocation for whose sake we exist, namely, to image God by glorifying him and enjoying him forever. Turner is therefore right to suggest that doctrine gives to our fragmented sense of self a unity of purpose that goes deeper than social role-playing. Paul, again, was there ahead of us: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).

Is there an integral self beneath the many roles people play? There is, but it is not the vaunted knowing subject of modernity. It is rather the self known by God (Gal. 4:9). Surely the task of Christian psychology has something to do with helping people to peer

beneath their masks to see their true faces: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Conclusion: Interdisciplinary table-fellowship.

The dramatic model I have here proposed conceives of doctrine as a helpful ingredient for training in godliness (1 Tim 4:7) and humanness alike. It is not simply a matter of information and the intellect, but of formation and transformation – of cultivating an enduring desire to live a godly life and the understanding of how to do so.

It has been a pleasure and privilege to sit at the conference table. Yet Christian scholars and counselors share another, more important, table that has for its purpose not integration but communion. Believers are united in Christ, and thus charged with proclaiming the significance of his life and death until he comes again. May we all, psychologists and theologians, embody this role too in our respective vocational callings, to the glory of God.

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“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God:” Biblical Theology’s Role within Christian Counseling

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The use of Scripture within Christian counseling would be significantly enriched by an understanding of biblical theology’s intermediate role between biblical interpretation and systematic theology. As a better alternative to a “proof-texting” approach to the Bible, biblical theology can help us (1) to find our own place within the biblical story, (2) to avoid confusing ourselves with the biblical characters, (3) to read texts holistically: chapters, sections, and entire books, (4) to learn from the biblical authors themselves how to apply the Scriptures, and (5) to follow the longitudinal development of biblical themes. An examination of the interpretation and application of Psalm 51 illustrates these five areas of biblical theology’s potential contribution to counseling practice.

In his farewell message to the leaders of the young Ephesian church, Paul summarizes his three-year ministry among them by making a striking claim: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole *purpose* of God” (Acts 20:27, NASB). Precisely what content Paul is referring to here is somewhat unclear, although the parallel formulation in verse 20 may help: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.” The same word translated “purpose” here (Gk: *boule*) appears four times earlier in Acts to describe, variously, King David’s divinely appointed role within Israel’s united monarchy; the betrayal, death and resurrection of Jesus; and the explosive growth of the early Church in Jerusalem (2:23; 4:28; 5:38; 13:36). More interestingly, this word also occurs in Heb 6:17 to refer to the Abrahamic covenant and in Eph 1:11 to describe God’s purposes for his new people, the Church.

What the Christian counselor could take from this verse, then, is that God has unique purposes for individual and corporate believers that counseling may help them to realize more fully, while pastors-teachers should acknowledge their responsibility (cf. Acts 20:28), not only to proclaim the unadulterated Gospel, but also to give their congregation a comprehensive understanding of the whole breadth and depth of God’s redemptive purposes in the world, in short, of *biblical theology*. What is probably *not* meant today by “declaring the whole purpose of God” is mining the entire Bible to discover random verses to address every human failure, foible, or phobia, in order to give the client, parishioner, or lay Christian ‘God’s perspective’ on a given issue.

The Nature and Function of Biblical Theology

So what is biblical theology? And what is it good for?

A Definition. “Biblical theology” basically refers to the theological content that can be derived inductively from the Bible and described using categories found in the text itself. A more detailed definition reveals some of the methodological challenges facing anyone who engages in this synthetic task:

Biblical theology offers a presentation of the most important theological statements and implications of all the OT and NT books in their canonical final form and order, which, despite revelational and salvation-historical differences and genre- and author-related diversity in forms of expression, contain a unified and authoritative message for the Church today.

Biblical Theology (BT) is thus usually distinguished from systematic theology, which organizes biblical content in dialogue with historical, philosophical, cultural, and ecclesial concerns and processes, usually employing categories that are external to the biblical text. While it is helpful to define BT in contrast to other scholarly disciplines, not only to systematic theology but also to history of religion approaches, to the non-theological analysis of the Bible, and even to the theological analysis of one or more sections of the biblical canon, if BT is to make a substantive contribution to Christian ministry, including counseling, it must involve more than mere historical description or simply the results of any thorough-going exegesis of individual texts. A robust and constructive BT should (1) begin from the starting point of the whole bibli-

cal canon, (2) focus on the nature, will, and plan of God as well as his relationship with humanity, (3) be sensitive to historical-cultural factors, (4) work inductively from the biblical text, (5) note inter-textual links between the OT and NT and read each testament in light of the other, (6) seek theological unity without steamrolling theological diversity, (7) be both descriptive and prescriptive, and (8) be pursued within community.

Locating BT within the Theological Disciplines. Prior to the 18th century, BT was essentially *integrated* with church dogma. According to the “analogy of Scripture,” biblical assertions were viewed as basically unified from Genesis to Revelation, so that the teachings of the Church and the teachings of the Bible were essentially equated (Scobie, 2003, p. 12). This viewpoint is still promoted in many churches today. In the 18th and 19th centuries, BT developed into an independent discipline that pursued its historical-descriptive task largely in splendid isolation from dogmatic theologians. Recently, however, Charles Scobie (2003) has suggested that BT should take on an *intermediate* role, that is, “as a bridge discipline, situated between the historical (or historical-critical) study of Scripture on the one hand and its use by the church in its faith and life on the other” (p. 46). In his view, BT thus “lies somewhere between what the Bible ‘meant’ and what it ‘means’” (p. 47) and will enlist the assistance of dogmatic theology during the final stage of the journey from the text to the interpreter, helping to correlate the biblical material with the needs of the church.

Practical Implications of Rethinking BT’s Role within Biblical Studies. What implications would adopting Scobie’s approach have for the interpreter of Scripture? It simply means that biblical interpretation is not complete when one has done a thorough analysis of a text’s context, structure, wording, and flow of thought and decided among interpretive options. One must move beyond the analysis of individual texts to the identification and synthesis of their theological themes in their broader development within the biblical canon. In effect, every exegetical effort must be explicitly “theological” in its goal and prepared to move beyond the historical contingencies of individual texts to their abiding message and applications for the church. Each biblical text has an explicit theological content that builds on and contributes to various theological themes. We interpret individual texts in light of what we understand about BT, and that interpretive work leads to expanding our understanding of BT.

It also would imply that the Christian counselor who seeks to draw appropriately upon Scripture will turn, instinctively, not to familiar verses, but to the work of the biblical theologian. Whether in the pulpit,

the home Bible study, or the Christian clinic, our challenge is to follow Paul’s example—to declare to God’s people the whole counsel of God. Accordingly, we should evaluate psychological theories not on the basis of individual verses, but on the basis of the “whole counsel of God,” as exemplified in biblical-theological syntheses of key themes. New Testament scholar Brian Rosner (2000) explains our task more simply:

all Christians have an intensely personal interest, or more accurately, stake, in the subject of biblical theology, i.e. what the Bible teaches about God and his dealings with the human race. And biblical theology of one sort or another, whether acknowledged as such or not, is usually what is going on when the Bible is preached effectively, studied rigorously or read intently by Christian believers (p. 3).

Christian Counseling and the Bible

Accordingly, the goal of this essay is not to encourage Christian psychologists to make a radically different use of Scripture, but rather to advocate and illustrate what a more fulsome, biblically-theologically enriched use of Scripture might look like, especially within the context of Christian counseling.

It is likely that divergent conceptions and practices of Christian counseling are represented by the readers of this journal, who, in turn, make varying uses of Scripture. Some cite specific verses that they view as offering an accurate description of the human condition, the cause of relational problems and emotional wounds, and their spiritually-based resolution. Others look to Scripture for general support for particular approaches to therapy. Still others simply ground their work in a biblically-informed Christian worldview. Each of these approaches could benefit from a greater focus on biblical theology.

Unfortunately, the best-selling “self-help” books authored by well-known Christian psychologists offer a foggy window into current counseling practice, but, at the very least, they reveal the hermeneutical practices of *some* long-term counselors. In an essay published in the *Care for the Soul* volume, I catalogued a variety of ways in which such books often misuse the Bible, ignoring crucial contextual, generic, and semantic features of the cited texts (Schultz, 2001). Rather than repeating those criticisms here, I will simply note several problems inherent in such a proof-text approach to Scripture use:

1. Such an approach may lead us to rely on a single verse, which may be mistranslated or misunderstood. A book by a Christian counselor on building self-worth, which has sold more than a million copies, promotes be-

havior modification by changing “our beliefs about who we are,” since our behavior “is usually consistent with what we think to be true about ourselves” (McGee, 1998, p. 23). In support of this claim, the author cites Prov 23:7. Presumably, he has the NKJV translation of this verse in mind: “For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he” (similarly, the NASB). But compare the NIV: “for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost.” And then there is the NRSV: “for like a hair in the throat, so are they.” In any case, this verse is not about low self-worth, but about hypocrisy. Note how the verse continues: “‘Eat and drink,’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you” (NIV). In sum, Prov 23:7 lends no biblical support to his claim, whether or not it is true.

2. Such an approach to Scripture models poor interpretive practice, which others may employ due to our influence and draw harmful conclusions, considering them to be “biblical.”
3. Such an approach wrongly suggests that a particular psychological theory, psychiatric explanation, or counseling tool is more valid, biblical, and acceptable just because we can yoke it with a divinely-inspired “chapter and verse.” On the one hand, such a claim requires more substantial proof of its validity. On the other hand, such support may be unnecessary, for a theory or technique need not be demonstrably “biblical” as long as it is not obviously contrary to Scripture in its understanding of God, humans, sin, and salvation. After all, a universally recognized or experimentally verified human need is such, whether or not it is described as such in the Bible.

What are needed, therefore, are Christian counselors who possess a foundational biblical-theological competency. It would be of great benefit if every student enrolled in training programs for Christian counselors or clinical psychologists would take basic courses in both biblical interpretation and biblical theology, in which they would not only learn *about* these disciplines, but also learn *how to* practice them themselves.

Biblical Theology’s Potential Contribution

What might embracing a biblical-theological approach to Scripture look like for a Christian counselor? In the remainder of this essay, I will describe five ways in which biblical theology can contribute to Christian counseling, using the familiar Psalm 51 to illustrate my points. (Accordingly, it would be helpful at this

point to read this psalm in any contemporary translation before proceeding.)

Finding Your Own Place within the Biblical Story. First of all, a BT-focus can help you as counselor as well as your client to find your place within the biblical story. A number of largely independent influences during the past few decades—the postliberal narrative theology originating at Yale University among students of Hans Frei, literary approaches to biblical narrative inspired by Robert Alter, newer emphases on the storyline of Scripture promoted in Reformed circles, postmodern interests in story-telling, the Ancient-Future Church movement led by the late Robert Webber (note the title of his last book published in 2008, *Who Gets To Narrate the World? Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals*), and the narrative explorations of faith, Scripture, and history emphasized in some emerging churches—have converged to focus greater attention on the biblical (i.e., historical) narratives. Such efforts intend much more than helping us to find our way amidst the confusing profusion of persons, empires, places, and events related in the biblical text.

Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen (2004) recently co-authored *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. (Note also a similar work by M.C. Pate, et al. [2004], *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology*.) The purpose of their monograph is three-fold. First, they seek to demonstrate that the Bible, from start to finish, narrates one unified story and to convince the reader that this is God’s story (p. 11). Taking up Tom Wright’s (1992) metaphor of the Bible as “drama” (pp. 139-143), they divide this story into six acts (p. 27). Secondly, on the basis of this story, they want their readers to develop a thoroughly biblical worldview, which incorporates the foundational categories of creation, sin, and judgment. Ultimately, their goal is to get Christians “to make it their story, to find their place in it, and to *indwell* it as the true story of our world” (p. 12). This involves more than accepting it as inspired and historically reliable; it involves understanding that we currently are living in Act 5 (“Spreading the News of the King: The Mission of the Church”), while awaiting the dawning of Act 6 (“The Return of the King: Redemption Completed”). Much like a Shakespearean play, we are now invited to join the other actors as the drama continues to unfold.

Such an approach to biblical theology (see their website, www.biblicaltheology.ca) has important implications for Christian counseling practice. After critiquing other approaches to Scripture, they seek to raise the reader’s awareness and conviction that we as individuals are participants in a larger, grander, more comprehensive story of which God is the author that “gives shape and direction to human life” (p. 196). It

also helps us as believers to keep from getting sucked up in the idolatry of the dominant story of western civilization. We are not on this earth to pursue the American dream, but rather to build the kingdom of God, which involves “recovering and restoring his good creation,” actively joining in what God is doing in the world today, while buoyed by the hope of the consummation to be brought about in Act 6 (p. 198). And in this grand drama, no role that we are called to play is insignificant.

To illustrate this point, let us turn briefly to Psalm 51. Its ascription to David in verse 1 assigns it to Bartholomew and Goheen’s (2004) Act 3, Scene 2 (“The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated, A Land for His People”). David plays a unique role as the recipient of an eternal covenant when God elects human kingship to serve as a covenantal institution, thereby laying the groundwork for the eternal kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. Since we are living in a different “act” of the redemptive-historical drama, David’s situation is not completely analogous to ours and thus we must take that redemptive-historical distance into account as we seek to apply this prayer to our own lives. This will caution us against immediately turning his petitions into an everyman’s prayer, even though our heart resonates with his longing for redemption and renewal.

Not Confusing Yourself with the Biblical Characters.

Continuing this thought, a BT-approach to the Scriptures will keep us from confusing ourselves with the biblical characters by focusing on redemptive-historical eras. One common approach to biblical, especially OT, narratives is to moralize on them, deriving Aesop-like lessons from each story, rather than considering the import of narrative details. Another approach is to spiritualize them, a not too distant cousin of the allegorizing approach of the early church. Lepers announcing the sudden departure of the Aramean army that is besieging Samaria are transformed into evangelists (2 Kgs 7), while Joshua’s conquest of Jericho (Josh 6) becomes a picture of spiritual victory in our everyday life. A third approach is to turn the biblical characters into spiritual heroes to emulate or spiritual failures whose mistakes we should avoid, rather than focusing on God and his involvement in history. A fourth approach is to ascribe to a textual detail great significance, as did a speaker on a radio broadcast that I heard several years ago when he argued that the “angel of the LORD” in Judges 13 imposed a “Nazirite vow” on Manoah’s previously infertile wife for the duration of her abruptly announced pregnancy because he knew of the physical damage that alcohol can do, that is, to prevent Samson from suffering from “fetal alcohol syndrome.” The speaker did not explain why no other Hebrew mother received a similar warning

or why Samson was called to live by the Nazirite vow for his entire life. What all of these approaches have in common is the tendency to *equate* too readily our world and our faith struggles with theirs. Instead, we should note ways in which these accounts give us a framework for viewing our lives as also part of God’s plan and illustrate the nature of faith and obedience that are *comparable* to our challenges and experiences.

Admittedly, NT texts such as 1 Cor 10:6-13 and Rom 15:4 give us a biblical warrant for applying OT texts to our lives as Christians. However, a redemptive-historical approach offers a necessary corrective to an unqualified equation between the various NT and OT eras and their specific covenantal demands. This approach to the Bible has been favored by Reformed biblical scholars, best exemplified in the *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* of Geerhardus Vos (1948) and Willem VanGemeren’s (1988) *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem*. Vos distinguishes two major epochs, the Mosaic and the Prophetic, while VanGemeren divides salvation history into twelve periods.

A salvation-historical approach keeps one from viewing the Bible simply as a collection of inspired and inspiring religious ideas to be drawn on randomly by the Christian practitioner. Texts are to be understood first in light of their “location” within salvation history—that is, within a sacred, not secular, history—before being applied to our contemporary situation. This approach also affirms revelation as progressive and goal-oriented. And it will caution us against reading back into OT texts NT understandings of salvation through the sacrificial death of Jesus, sanctification and empowerment through the work of the Spirit, and eschatological hope through the Father’s sovereign plan and promise. The lives of Abraham, King Saul, and the Apostle Paul are not intended to supply us with three vivid examples of the difficulties, drawbacks, and dynamics of a mid-life job change, even though they may illustrate God’s surprising leading in one’s life. Furthermore, it is important to note that each of these individuals also ushered in a new stage in God’s redemptive plan for humanity. Nor should interpreters assume that all that the Bible *describes*, it also *prescribes*. Some biblical events and individual actions in the course of redemptive history should be treated as unique rather than normative, including Genesis 1-3 and the book of Acts. WWJD—What would Jesus do? or What would Jabez do?—is not always an appropriate question to ask.

Returning to Psalm 51, in using a salvation-historical approach, one will realize that David’s prayer in verse 11 (“Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me,” NASB) probably reflects David’s first-hand observation of how

the Spirit, which initially equipped Saul for royal leadership, was removed from him due to his disobedience and how Saul was also alienated from God. It may be that David fears that the same punishment may await him due to his grievous sins of adultery and murder (1 Sam 16:14; cf. 15:34-35; 28:6), for which, according to the Mosaic legislation, no atoning sacrifice can be offered (cf. v. 16: "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it," NASB). He also acknowledges that his public sins as king have negatively affected the capital city (v. 18). Accordingly, David's prayer in this psalm contains some specific details which, from a salvation-historical perspective, no Christian could include in prayer today. Nevertheless, David's complete honesty before God, his remorse, and his deep longing for spiritual renewal and constancy certainly can guide us in our prayers of confession.

Reading Texts Holistically: Chapters, Sections, and Entire Books. As noted above, the popular employment of the Bible often involves slinging Bible slogans rather than drawing upon a careful study of larger chunks of God's Word. Since the synthetic work of BT presupposes the careful exegesis and theological analysis of each biblical book, a person with a BT-focus will avoid the selective use of textual snippets. A Christian response to legalism that is based on a careful study of the entire Galatian letter, enriched by an examination of Romans 6 and 1 Corinthians 9, will have a different contour and nuance than one that simply quotes Rom 6:14b: "you are not under the law, but under grace" (TNIV). And, in developing a viable strategy for coping with the challenges, setbacks, and inequities of everyday life "under the sun," one should draw on the entire book of Ecclesiastes, not simply on a verse like 9:11: "I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (TNIV), which might make one conclude that due diligence in pursuing excellence is not worthwhile.

I have claimed elsewhere (Schultz, 1999) that, just as biblical books have a *literary* structure and context that an interpreter should attend to when studying a specific text, so they also have a significant *theological* structure and context. Tracking how 1-2 Samuel intentionally juxtaposes and contrasts first Eli with Samuel and then Saul with David helps one to grasp better why David was praised in the end, despite his many shortcomings and failures, while Saul was condemned in the end, despite his initial successes. This will result in deriving more balanced and realistic lessons from David's life than simply urging men to be like David—"a man after his [i.e., God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14, TNIV). Although Proverbs offers very

straight-forward and practical counsel on a myriad of everyday subjects, including parenting, diligence, and financial stewardship, one needs to read its often secular-sounding sayings through the theological lens provided by the prologue, chapters 1-9. Isaiah offers profound lessons on fearlessly trusting God in the midst of personal and national crises, but these will only be fully grasped by the one who follows this theme through the entire book, rather than merely recommending Isa 26:3 ("You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you," TNIV) as promising relief to an anxious soul.

The co-authored books of Dan Allender and Tremper Longman offer powerful examples of how the careful exegesis of complete chapters and even entire books can provide a secure biblical basis for life-changing counsel. *Bold Love* (Allender & Longman, 1992) draws on Longman's biblical-theological study of the Divine Warrior in both testaments; *The Cry of the Soul* (Allender & Longman, 1994) focuses on select psalms; *Intimate Allies* (Allender & Longman, 1995) draws on a wide range of texts, including Song of Songs and Proverbs 31; *The Intimate Mystery* (Allender & Longman, 2005) expounds Gen 2:24-25; and *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart (= Bold Purpose)* (Allender & Longman, 2007) works through the entire book of Ecclesiastes. Their use of Scripture demonstrates that sometimes it will be necessary and appropriate to cite a single verse to make a point, but then one must be careful that one is interpreting it accurately within its historical-cultural, literary, and theological contexts. In most cases, simply consulting a good one-volume Bible commentary will help one to avoid hermeneutical malpractice.

Turning again to Psalm 51, a holistic approach to this text will seek to follow the theological argument and emotional development in the entire psalm, as the psalmist alternates between passionate petitions (vv. 1b-2, 7-12, 14a, 15a, 18), confession and theological explanation (vv. 3-6, 16-17), and promises and assurances (vv. 13, 14b, 15b, 19). The psalm describes both the objective (vv. 3-6, 9) and the subjective (vv. 8, 12) dimensions of guilt and expresses the author's earnest desire not simply for ritual cleansing (vv. 2, 7), but for profound inner transformation that sounds almost Pauline (vv. 10, 12b). Taken together, the psalm offers a thorough and balanced description of how to face one's guilt honestly, while relying wholly on divine grace.

Studying Biblical-Theological "Practitioners" in Action. In his programmatic monograph, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Brevard Childs (1970) recommends a way to recapture the biblical-theological dimension of biblical texts by focusing on the use of the OT in the NT, an issue that he systematically explored in his

commentary on *Exodus* (Childs, 1974). The use of the Old in the New, as well as the use of the Old in the Old, has been one of the most rapidly growing areas of biblical studies during the past two decades, climaxing in the publication of an 1,100-page *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, which analyzes every quotation of the OT in the NT (and countless allusions) and discusses what is going on hermeneutically and theologically (Beale & Carson, 2007). Although those studying these inter-textual links between OT and NT texts can get distracted by a variety of hermeneutical and text-critical issues, essentially what they are examining is how an ancient biblical author does biblical theology.

Greg Beale, a co-editor of that commentary, notes in his introduction (Beale & Carson, 2007, pp. xxvi-xxvii) how easily the NT writers apply texts that originally referred to the Israelites to the new covenant people of God, presenting Jesus as the eschatological goal of Hebrew history. Most of them read the OT with a "salvation-historical grid," which affirms God's providential direction of history. According to Beale, often "the NT writer is drawing out a teaching from the OT—i.e., basing the structure of his thought on the exegesis of the OT text—or appealing to an OT passage to confirm or justify what has in fact been established by the Christian's experience of Christ and his death and resurrection" (xxvii). This is not to be confused with a "proof-texting" approach. When puzzled by how to apply the Bible, especially the OT, to contemporary circumstances and needs, we can get some help by looking over the shoulders of some of the oldest biblical theologians of the Church, although, admittedly, some of their interpretive moves in reading and appropriating the OT can be puzzling as well. Especially with regard to Christian social ethics and ecclesial practices, Paul's frequent use of the OT is quite instructive. See, for example, his use of Zech 8:16 and Ps 4:4 in Eph 4:25-27 (both quotations following the early Greek translation = LXX).

Looking briefly to Psalm 51, one notes that verse 4 is quoted in Rom 3:4. There Paul uses the psalmist's unqualified confession of guilt before God as confirmation that all humans are "liars," i.e., hypocrites who are unable to live up to their claims of loyalty to God (even King David!). This confession, at the same time, confirms the truthfulness of God's assessment of the human condition, while the unbelief of some Jews does not call into question God's faithfulness to his covenantal commitments. Whereas the Hebrew text of Psalm 51 affirms that God is blameless if he judges sinful individuals, like David, the LXX, which is cited in Romans, claims that God actually triumphs over sin through judgment.

Following the Longitudinal Development of Themes. Probably the most significant contribution of BT for Christian counseling is in providing comprehensive syntheses of major biblical themes. Properly done, BT offers a balanced and accessible summary of the biblical teaching on a given topic that goes far beyond a mere compilation of concordance occurrences of a given word. BT seeks to draw on biblical texts from all literary genres and periods of biblical history. Based on the biblical data, it addresses various dimensions of the topic and reflects on whether the NT treatment of the topic parallels, supplements, goes significantly beyond, or is in obvious contrast to its OT treatment. Often BT also reflects on how this theme can be applied to contemporary concerns. In short, consulting BT reference works can help Christian counselors to grasp more fully "what God has to say" on a given subject, rather than focusing more narrowly on a few key passages.

Consider, for example, the range of practical subjects beginning with the letters A-H that are addressed in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (NDBT)*: Alexander & Rosner, 2000; listed in alphabetical order): adoption, adultery, anger, apostasy, childlessness, clothes, comfort, evil, family, fear, forgiveness and reconciliation, freedom, gentleness, grumbling, guilt, hatred, healing, hope, hospitality, humility/pride. Similarly, Scobie's (2003) massive 1000-page biblical theology organizes 20 chapters under the rubrics of God's order, God's servant, God's people, and God's way, in each chapter moving from OT proclamation to NT fulfillment and from OT promise to NT consummation, and concluding with theological reflections. Note the many subjects of interest to Christian counselors that are treated in chapter 19 "Love your neighbor" (pp. 946-47): reverence for life, murder and violence, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, the centrality of the family, sexuality, celibacy, marriage, divorce, family relationships, the elderly, economic and social justice, slavery, the status of women, race and culture, church and state, war and peace, international affairs.

Taking a brief look at the *NDBT*'s essay on "suffering," we note that it begins with a philosophical introduction to the problem posed by pain and suffering for those believing in an omnipotent deity, as well as the comment that the Bible does not treat it in any systematic way, even in the book of Job. "The two Testaments address the issue of suffering in different but related ways" (Cotterell, 2000, p. 802). The OT presents both corporate (*Exodus*) and individual suffering (*Ecclesiastes*, *Joseph*), while the NT focuses on the suffering of Christ and his church (with special attention to Phil 3:10). The corresponding entry in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Elwell, 1996) treats the issue topically, distinguishing suffer-

ing as the consequences of the flawed nature of (fallen) creation and as the consequences of sin (Smith, 1996, pp. 749-752). It discusses both collective and individual suffering (as eschatological, remedial, expiatory, and promoting dependence on God), giving special attention to the contributions of Job and Ecclesiastes. Reflecting on these summaries, which draw extensively on verses, chapters, and entire biblical books from both testaments, will enrich a Christian's own understanding of the causes and divine purposes in suffering, helping one to move well beyond quoting Rom 8:28 (a verse that was quoted to us when our infant daughter died) when counseling a person facing suffering of any kind.

In reading this and other dictionary entries, one is struck by the wide range of perspectives contained in Scripture on many topics. For one seeking "the" biblical viewpoint, this may initially be disconcerting rather than a case of "the more the merrier." In a monograph-length treatment of *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the OT*, John Goldingay (1987) notes that diversity can be found in the meaning of various concepts, themes, and institutions, in the messages brought by different books, and in the significance found in particular events and motifs. Such diversity can stem from differences in historical situation, audience, author, literary form, subject, tradition circle, and purpose. Therefore, this diversity usually is not actually contradictory, but rather complementary, deepening and adding nuance to one's understanding of an issue. As such, theological diversity within the Scriptures keeps one from offering simplistic answers to life's complex problems, while not preventing the biblical theologian from achieving a unifying synthesis of a theme without stifling any minority witnesses.

Rich treatments of troubling topics like suffering can be found in various monographs that exemplify a sound biblical-theological method, such as Scott Hafemann's (2001) *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible*. His chapters include "Why can we trust God, no matter what happens?," "Why does God wait so long to make things right?," "Why is there so much pain and evil in the world?," and "Why do God's people suffer?" In the last-mentioned chapter, he discusses suffering as a schoolmaster, taskmaster, "blind date" with God, and midwife for God's glory. The Christian counselor will not address the issue of suffering the same way again after reading Hafemann's provocative and reassuring treatment of suffering.

OT scholar Richard Averbeck (2006) addresses an important topic that I have not yet touched upon, describing the counseling task as applying divine wisdom to "bring anyone's personal life story into focus whether one knows the Lord or not" (p. 124). In dis-

cussing the nature of persons as *imago dei*, the corrupting effects of sin, and the restoration potential of redemption and sanctification, Averbeck constructs "a biblical theology 'umbrella' under which counseling can function well" (p. 113). He concludes: "Bringing the knowledge of God and people together in the wisdom of the redemption story is the only real and lasting way to bring us true 'rest' in the midst of the mess which we are and in which we live. This is what both the Bible and counseling are really all about to begin with" (pp. 125-126).

Turning to Psalm 51 one final time, one can note how David's petition is grounded in God's character (v. 1), as it is definitively revealed to Moses in Exod 34:5-6. Verse 5 seems to lend support to a doctrine of "original sin," even though the OT, unlike the NT, does not trace the pervasiveness of sin in the world back to Adam and Eve's initial act of rebellion. Verse 11 is almost unique in the OT in referring to God's Holy Spirit (elsewhere only in Isa 63:10-11), perhaps truly a divinely-revealed insight. The psalm's fulsome presentation of the nature of sin is complemented by its abundant use of anthropological terms, which are better understood with the help of books such as Hans Walter Wolff's (1974) classic study, *Anthropology of the OT*, supplemented by John W. Cooper's (2000) *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*. The psalm speaks of "the innermost being" and "the hidden part" in verse 6, the "heart" in verses 10, 17, and the "spirit" in verses 10, 12, 17, not in order to distinguish between various component parts of the human being, but in order to emphasize the need for comprehensive inner change through a unique divine work: "Create [Heb: *bara*], as in Gen 1:1] in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10, NIV).

Conclusion

Thus biblical theology, rightly conceived and carried out, provides an essential tool not only for summarizing Scriptural teachings, but also for accurately understanding and judiciously applying Scripture to our lives and those of others, while, at the same time, helping us to understand the nature of the counseling task itself. One final example from the previously mentioned book on "self-worth" will reinforce the need for Christian counselors to make ample use of biblical theology. In that book the author wrongly claims and recommends: "First Corinthians 13 describes God's unconditional love and acceptance of us. To personalize this passage, replace the word *love* with *my Father*. Then, memorize the following, and when fear comes to you, recall the love and kindness of God" (McGee, 1998, p. 85). First Corinthians 13, to the contrary, asserts that love for one's fellow believers is the essential

precondition for the proper use of spiritual gifts within the church. In contrast, Scott Hafemann (2001) clarifies the significance of the familiar concluding verse of 1 Corinthians 13—"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love" (v. 13a, NIV)—as follows: "confidence in God's promises (hope) because of a trust in his provisions (faith) expresses itself in obedience to his commands (love). God's commands thus map out the way in which we are to magnify his surpassing value, power, and love in our everyday lives" (p. 57).

Biblical theologian Graeme Goldsworthy (2002) refers to biblical theology as "the heartbeat of effective ministry" (p. 280) and thus views biblical theology as foundational to Christian education (pp. 282-284). I hope that I have been able to demonstrate in this essay that biblical theology also must be the foundation for accurate biblical interpretation and application as well as for effective Christian counseling. (The appendix lists some helpful resources for this task.)

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Appendix:

Resources in Biblical Theology for Christian Counseling

Biblical Theologies, including OT and NT Theologies (These one-author works synthesize the major theological themes of the Bible or of one testament or summarize the theological message of individual biblical books, also indicating how these theological themes are interrelated.)

- Childs, B. S. (1985). *Old Testament theology in a canonical context*. London: SCM.
- Childs, B. S. (1992). *Biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological reflection on the Christian Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Dumbrell, W. J. (2002). *The faith of Israel: A theological survey of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker.
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- House, P. R. (1998). *Old Testament theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
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Scobie, C. H. H. (2003). *The ways of our God: An approach to biblical theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Thielman, F. (2005). *Theology of the New Testament: A canonical and synthetic approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Biblical Theology Dictionaries (These multi-author reference works offer hundreds of brief entries summarizing central theological themes of the Bible as well as the theological message of the major subdivisions and individual books of the Bible.)

Alexander, T. D., & Rosner, B. S. (Eds.). (2000). *New dictionary of biblical theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Elwell, W. A. (Ed.). (1996). *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Vanhoozer, K. J., et al. (Eds.). (2005). *Dictionary for theological interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Biblical Theological Treatments of Individual Subjects and Themes (The essays in these academic journals emphasize biblical-theological topics.)

1. Theological Periodicals:
Interpretation (1946-).
Biblical theology bulletin (1971-).
Horizons in biblical theology (1979-).
2. Monograph Series (These series offer monograph-length treatments of major biblical-theological themes and topics.)
Studies in biblical theology (SCM, 1950-1963, 1967-1976).
Overtures to biblical theology (Fortress Press, 1977-).
Studies in Old Testament biblical theology (Zondervan, 1994-).
New studies in biblical theology (Eerdmans, 1996 -).

Scapegoating: An Experiential Approach to Christian Psychology

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Construction of a "Christian psychology" (Roberts, 2000; Johnson, 2007a) requires various methods and materials. Most of this work has been conceptual, sometimes with the purpose of counseling or clinical application in mind. This paper derives from a reversal of that method, in which the author's clinical experience in secular settings was later illuminated by Christian understanding. The group phenomena of scapegoating will be examined from the viewpoint of different disciplines, primarily group psychotherapy. It is highlighted as an example of human aggression that is seldom dealt with so directly in Christian settings, despite its explicitly Biblical origins. Consideration of this subject for Christian psychology will conclude with comments on the value of living and working in "the world" as part of the "divine conspiracy" (Willard, 1998).

Merriam-Webster (1999) defines scapegoat as "one that bears the blame for others" or "one that is the object of irrational hostility." The phenomenon of scapegoating can be observed in surveys of history, anthropology, and literature. As will be discussed, Girard (1986, 1987) even attributes the scapegoat mechanism as the source of all mythology and culture. Frazer (1959) documents classic cross-cultural examples of scapegoats through history. He details the "transference of evil" to inanimate objects, animals, and humans. Tokler (1972) notes that people often have blamed their sins and shortcomings on the devil, which sometimes takes the form of a goat. For our present purposes, we will begin with a discussion of how the scapegoat has been examined in the literature of social psychology, family studies, and group psychotherapy. After considering theories and potential interventions of the process, Judeo-Christian foundations will be discussed with the aim of finding Christian perspectives on this phenomenon.

Social Psychology

In the social psychology literature, scapegoating is offered as a theory of prejudice. Wrightsman (1977) cites Allport (1954), who lists the psychodynamic theory of scapegoating as one of six levels of approach to the study of causes of prejudice. From this perspective, an individual or group experiences great frustration, but the thwarting agent is either invisible or capable of severe punitive retaliation. Aggression is displaced onto a minority group. For example, Southern whites lagging behind the rest of the country economically in the decades following the Civil War vented frustrations on African-Americans to the point of violence, including

lynchings. Their own undesirable characteristics, e.g. potential for violence, were projected upon the victims and rationalization was used to justify their attitudes and actions, e.g. that the "Negro race" was savage and inferior. Such events underline the seriousness of this topic as well as the potential for continued tragic outcomes from stereotyping.

Family Studies

Family therapists, for example Whitaker (1982), are quite familiar with the scapegoating concept in which one family member is presented as the "identified patient" (Satir, 1983). Early family studies support this phenomenon. Vogel and Bell (1968) intensively studied nine "disturbed" families from three ethnic groups and nine matching "well" families from the same groups. They conclude that scapegoating achieves solidarity maintenance within families to relieve tension. But they note that worse tensions are created, especially from contact with outsiders. Bermann (1973), using an anthropological case method within the home, looking at American families for nine months at a time, describes how the "disturbed" behavior of the child patient is implicitly reinforced by the parents. He concludes that scapegoating is a favored mechanism within the middle class American family. Whether or not he is correct is not the point here. Rather, the issue of scapegoating has been important in family therapy and research.

Group Psychotherapy

It can be said that group psychotherapy is the professional discipline that has most extensively examined the scapegoat phenomenon (Cohen & Schermer,

2002; Malcus, 1995; Ormont, 1984; Rutan & Stone, 1993; Scheidlinger, 1982; Toker, 1972). Rutan and Stone (1993) define scapegoating in group therapy as “the focusing of hostile, sadistic, and hurtful attention on one particular individual” (p. 196). This is done to protect the group and is very often seen as an unconscious process on the part of the group members.

Following Hall and Porter’s (2004) description of referential integration, a true understanding of scapegoating involves combining conceptualizations with actual experience of the scapegoating process. Although we all may have been involved in such a process at one time or another, group therapy presents an arena where it regularly happens. The way in which it subtly emerges often brings a powerful impact on the participants. This highlights the meaningfulness of the phenomenon that cannot be captured by concepts alone. A brief example from my own practice illustrates this:

An adult group had been meeting for several weeks. The members had progressed beyond their initial anxiety and gradually were sharing their problems and expressing their sympathy and support for one another. I chose to let this unfold with little intervention on my part. One female member, however, grew increasingly silent. Group members inquired as to how she felt and made efforts to include her in their interactions. These efforts subsided for a few sessions as if the group was willing to tolerate a silent member. Finally, frustrations escalated and were expressed, first through sarcastic humor and then by more direct criticism of the silent member, with speculations as to that person’s problems and motives. As she remained entrenched in her silence and the tension in the air thickened, I finally intervened with some comments about the group process, including noting that the group was acting as if she were the only person abstinent in the discussion and that perhaps it was easier to attack her instead of directing strong feelings toward the leader. What ensued was a flood of admissions of anger toward me for my lack of guidance and nurturance. Relieved of this pent-up hostility, group members began to explore how they each had projected their issues onto the silent member, who soon gradually increased her self-disclosure. This became the first step of more honest interaction, which continued in the weeks ahead.

This example illustrates how a relatively new group, still in the “honeymoon” phase of group development, displaces its unexpressed anger from the leader to a safer target. Each member has his or her own

version of fear of their anger towards me, which would include the frightful prospect of my retaliation. So, instead, as Ormont (1984) aptly describes, they “alight on some easier prey—some poor soul whose masochistic tendencies attract aggression” (p. 561). As is the case in group interaction, everyone was enacting his or her interpersonal patterns that were in turn related to intrapsychic functioning constructed largely by past relationships, especially involving caregivers or others in authority. Thus, there are no innocent bystanders, including the scapegoat, who “volunteers for the job” (A. Alonso, personal communication, February, 1982). The beauty of group therapy is that it can offer a safe place to experience and learn from all such interactions.

Scapegoating can take different forms (Garland & Kolodny, 1973). The most common, illustrated above, is ostracism, in which the scapegoat is placed in the role of the different or troublesome one who threatens others’ defenses. It is frequently seen in patients with borderline personality disorder whose object hunger, demandingness, and reluctance or inability to share are overwhelming to other members. Without the leader’s intervention, such a person will have her sense of isolation confirmed and may well drop out of the group. Another form is the “encapsulated scapegoat” who is allowed only limited participation by others. For example, a member who is highly emotional in early sessions before the group is ready to contain such affect may be ignored or avoided by others as a means of punishment. Another type of scapegoating is “inclusion through introspection,” in which group members pursue the target with intrusive questions as if he or she were the only one with problems that need to be explored.

The concept most commonly used to explain scapegoating in group therapy is projective identification, derived from object relations theory. In this process, one’s internal objects are projected onto another. This would simply be projection if the process ended there. In projective identification, the receiving party introjects and experiences the projection. He or she then responds in ways that confirm the projection. Malcus (1995) highlights the primitive defense of splitting in which to protect the self and preserve the good object, the bad object is projected. The scapegoat becomes evil incarnate, a target for rage, hate, and aggression. The projecting party is relieved of owning such frightening feelings and impulses. Yet, he or she also can stay connected to them through relating to the scapegoat who contains these unwanted aspects of self. Cohen and Schermer (2002) note that scapegoats are both rejected and also unconsciously wanted or needed by the group. Thus, projective identification is both an intrapsychic and interpersonal event. It is a preverbal communication that allows one to control or manipu-

late another individual while keeping one's own negative experience at bay. It is largely an unconscious process. In the therapy group, it is also a group-as-a-whole process, involving everyone's participation.

Group therapists have often conceived the group as a maternal object (Scheidlinger, 1974). The group may be experienced as a "good mother" who is soothing, nurturing, and supportive. Or it may be like a "bad mother" who is overly demanding, intrusive, and unempathic. Malcus (1995) offers the concept of "indirect scapegoating" in which the projections are to the group-as-a-whole. Every group has the potential to foster regression, with hope for the love of the good mother and fear of the bad mother who may engulf, abandon, or annihilate the self. This perspective shows the power of the group situation and how the potential for scapegoating is so dangerous. The scapegoat takes in the negative projections meant for the bad mother, while the rest of the group is regarded as the good mother. In a perverse way, the scapegoat unifies the group against a common enemy—themselves.

It should be noted that projective identification is not a pathological process in itself. As Bion (1962) describes, it is a normal process of infant development, in which the mother introjects or contains the baby's rageful projections and returns them in a tolerable form. Bion suggests that this process forms the basis for development of both integrated object relations and the capacity to think.

Does scapegoating occur in all therapy groups? Toker (1972) cites Foulkes and Anthony (1965), who state that scapegoating occurs regularly in all therapeutic groups. This is an empirical question that lacks a researched answer. Cohen and Schermer (2002) observe that therapy group members are often scapegoats of their families or the larger culture. Thus, therapy groups are "places of exile" (p. 99). Also, one can infer that a therapy group cannot become truly therapeutic unless conditions allow for the expression of hostility required in scapegoating. A group that cannot enter and work through the conflict stage cannot be regarded as a true therapy group (Yalom, 2005).

In order to not overstate the problem, a distinction has to be made between scapegoating and healthy confrontation. In the former, the group's motive, usually unconscious, is to hurt, and the target can indeed get hurt. In a healthy confrontation, the group's motive is to help or teach, and the target is helped. Discernment of the difference is one of the challenges for the group therapist.

INTERVENTIONS

So what can be done when the forces of scapegoating arise? Group psychotherapists have a wealth of experience in these situations and have offered guidance for

their colleagues. The first thing that the leader has to do is discern that the process is occurring. This requires not only sympathy for all group members, but an intuitive sense that something is not right in the group interaction, usually when one member has become the focus of group interaction. The most telling signal is the therapist's inner feeling that the chosen patient "deserves it." This is an indication that the therapist is getting caught up in the projective identification. Experience cultivates this sensitivity. It helps to recall having personally been scapegoated or worse yet, having participated in the scapegoating of someone else. This means empathizing with victims and persecutors alike. It takes humility and self-understanding. One must internalize Jesus' admonitions of first removing the log from one's own eye or casting that first stone only if one has not sinned. Whenever possible, the observation of a mentor modeling how to detect and handle a scapegoating situation is invaluable.

A dilemma ensues as the therapist is concerned for the individual and the group. As Ormont (1984) states, the leader tries to relieve the pressure placed on a group scapegoat while still preserving the aggression that has emerged in the group. Toker (1972) agrees:

The therapist walks a tightrope in that the scapegoat has to be protected and supported and not sacrificed on the altar of displaced aggression, while at the same time hostility must be permitted to find some expression so that it can be understood. (p. 331)

So how does the therapist intervene? I have found various versions of the following comments and questions by the leader to be helpful:

- "Why is one member the object of so much rage?"
- "The group is acting as if only _____ feels this way."
- "The group is making _____ work very hard tonight."
- "_____ seems to be voicing a difficult feeling that others may feel."
- "I wonder if _____ is an easier target than some other source of frustration?"

As in the previous example, the group often is avoiding the true object of their anger, i.e. the leader. A good therapist will help redirect the resentment accordingly, which takes courage and confidence that this is the therapeutic thing to do. Ormont (1984), who sometimes deliberately stimulates the group's unspoken anger, vividly describes how difficult it is for a therapist to receive a group's aggression:

From the perspective of the members, their rage at me is exhilarating. I do not find it so. They are coming at me from all sides. If I am in touch with my feelings, I experience great

danger. (p. 566)

He goes on to say that studying the group's rage and trying to find the meaning behind it help him weather the storm. Also, the group has been prepared to handle strong emotional expression by clear norms of no physical action or verbal assault, with the guiding ethic of putting feelings into words. The therapist and the group-as-a-whole become a safe container of aggression. This is a vital aspect of the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965). Members can explore what has happened. Projections and splitting can be transformed into more mature object relations. The uncovering of the scapegoat process brings insight and more honest interactions. All this requires a leader who can guide the group to optimal frustration and stimulation for growth. Sometimes this includes the leader volunteering to be the "victim" by receiving the aggression to "save" the one who has apparently violated group norms. Is this not analogous to Benner's (1983) metaphor of the Incarnation for psychotherapy?

Implicit in this discussion is the importance of aggression and its recognition and expression. Ormont (1984) articulates this from a psychodynamic perspective:

Though patients may repress it or misdirect it, they need their aggression to function. Our job is to help them unlock it so they can infuse it into their everyday expression. We want to help them become truly loving and creative people. However, to do this, they must accept and understand their potential to be destructive and hating (pp. 553-554).

Perhaps this can be likened to realizing and confessing one's sinfulness before one can begin to love. But to what extent do Christian therapists actually stimulate and deal with open aggressiveness as is presented by secular group therapists?

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS

The Bible

Of all the concepts in modern psychotherapy, perhaps the one most literally derived from Scripture is the scapegoat. In the Bible, the Hebrew term *azazel* appears only in the description of the original Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Van Selms (1962) notes four possible definitions: (1) literally, the goat (*ez*) that goes away (*azal*); (2) to remove; (3) desolate region, and (4) the name of the demon haunting that region. In the ritual, the priest confesses the people's iniquity as he lays hands on the goat. Sin is symbolically removed from the Israelite society as the goat is sent into the wilderness, which is the region of death. This victim is costly, as animals were both practical in value and personally close to the people. Imagine giving up one's favorite pet.

The sending of the scapegoat is part of the "atonement," derived from the Anglo-Saxon, meaning "a making of one." Morris (1962) observes that it is one of the few theological terms derived from Anglo-Saxon and that "it points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity" (p. 107). Because of the universality of sin, its seriousness and people's inability to deal with sin, atonement is needed to bring humankind into right relationship to God.

The ultimate scapegoat is Jesus Christ. As the only one without sin—the unblemished Lamb of God—he took on the sins and iniquity of all. The crucifixion combines the scapegoat and the blood sacrifice of the Day of Atonement. A significant difference is that the crucifixion was voluntary and purposed by God. It also was the climactic act of the Bible and, from the Christian point of view, all of history.

Girard's Theory

René Girard, literary and cultural critic, has presented a theory of "mimesis" that declares the scapegoating mechanism to be the source of all mythology and culture (Girard, 1986, 1987). From this perspective, the powers-that-be of the ancient world disguised the truth of the original murders through the development of myth that makes the victim sacred. This victim mechanism is the result of basic mimetic desire in which a subject desires an object because it perceives that a model desires that object. Or, as Inchausti (2005) describes, "[H]uman beings have a basic feeling of existential lack that leads them to look to a model who seems to possess a greater fullness of being" (p.170). The subject imitates the model by desiring the perceived object of desire in an effort to obtain such a "fullness of being." In a group, mimetic rivalry reaches an intolerable crisis, relieved only by the selection and destruction of a scapegoat.

Girard carefully examines literature through history and concludes the pattern of the scapegoat murder underlies all culture, but that everything changes with the Gospels, which are told from the victim's point of view. This brings to light "things hidden since the foundation of the world" (Mt. 13:35). The Bible can be seen as a narrative describing how God invades the world to unmask the universal scapegoating mechanism. It is the story of truth and love overcoming the darkness. Following the murder of the only truly innocent human being, the resurrection sets humanity free to live in a new culture based on truth and love. The mythological lies of social solidarity, really based on murder, are replaced by God's commands to love Him and one another.

Since the Passion and resurrection of Christ, history has never been the same. There is an awareness of persecution and scapegoating that may not have ex-

isted in centuries past. In the ancient world, according to Girard, the reigning powers were universally justified. But now, sympathy is easily aroused for the plight of the downtrodden, from the Jews of the Holocaust to today's Palestinians or the people of Darfur. The universal values of equality and justice would never have existed without the Biblical story. It can be said that the concern by group therapists for scapegoating is possible because of the Gospels and their underlying influence on our culture.

Girard's ideas have begun to receive acclaim from various quarters. Inchausti (2005) assembles a survey of more modern "subversive" Christian authors, such as Blake, Dostoyevsky, Merton and Frye. His book culminates in macrohistorical criticism, highlighted by Girard's "philosophical anthropology of revelation" (p. 172), which Inchausti sees as a synthesis of sociology, theology, and cultural studies, resulting in an encompassing theory of human nature. Watson (2004) offers Girard's ideas as a metanarrative that supercedes the innumerable narratives of postmodernism. He cites Bailie (1995, p.4), who describes Girard's work as "the most sweeping and significant intellectual breakthrough of the modern age" and as "something like a unified field theory' of the humanities and social science" (Watson, 2004, p. 251). Earlier, Watson (1998) concludes that Girard's ideas assert that psychology must be founded in Christianity:

The Girardian hypothesis essentially suggests that a Christian concern for the scapegoat is at the heart of the postmodern analysis and critique of power. The situation now is no different from what it has always been. Violence is the issue. Desire is the problem. Christ is the answer. (p. 320)

TOWARD INTEGRATION AND A CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY OF SCAPEGOATING

It is clear that scapegoating is an important, if not profound, topic, something greater than just another process in group dynamics. One only has to consider everyday political discourse in which the leader of an opposing party is in effect demonized. People naturally find a focus for their animosities as a way of dealing with their frustrations and insecurities. Both secular sources and Christian sources illuminate the process. On the one hand, secular therapy has offered experiences and insights not generally seen in Christian settings. On the other hand, all modern psychotherapy is deeply indebted to Christian precursors and ethics. Group therapy, like other therapeutic modalities, emerged with little acknowledgement of its roots in the Judeo-Christian care of souls. I agree, ultimately, with Powlison (2000, 2007) that our understanding of the Word will provide us with sufficient knowledge for soul

care and cure - that is, "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ" (Col. 2:3). But the process that has furthered my understanding has included sources and methods deemed unnecessary by those from the Biblical Counseling perspective, which Powlison represents. In my life's journey, exposure to secular theory and practice has given me knowledge and skill that I would not have obtained otherwise.

Facing Aggression: A Problem for Christians

Ironically, aggression is a realm of human functioning that, in my experience, is not well tolerated or understood by many Christians. Aggression can be defined as "hostile, injurious, or destructive behavior or outlook, esp. when caused by frustration" (Merriam-Webster, 1999). Destructiveness, from a psychological perspective, can be directed both outwardly and inwardly. Yet, it is a quintessential human experience that pervades life in general and Scripture in particular. As Ormont (1984) states, "Humans are without a doubt the most destructive creatures on earth" (p. 553).

Scapegoating is an example of human aggression that has been more closely examined by secular practitioners and theorists than by Christian clinicians. I have found a blunt, refreshing honesty in the best practices of the mental health field. This has fueled my continued involvement with secular professionals and organizations. Psychodynamic insights have revealed that aggression involves energy that can be transformed into the most creative and productive activity. Yet aggression contains the potential for much evil, which is why so many Christians would relegate it to the problem of sin. When Paul states, "Be angry but do not sin," (Eph. 4:26, NIV), many of his readers seem to recall only the phrase, "do not sin." Perhaps many believers have not been in a place where they have enjoyed the safe expression and assimilation of their rage, making anger their "ally" (Warren, 1999). The consequent loosening of defenses can bring a freedom of functioning and increased capacity for loving.

Group Psychotherapy as Opportunity

Group therapy has provided an intensive case-method arena for examining scapegoating as a prime example of aggression. When it works well, each group member owns his or her own aggressive projections, i.e. sinfulness, which becomes redeemed into an increased love for other members, i.e. neighbors. In loving perseverance, the leader contains the aggression and survives. In what may seem like a resurrection, the group experiences a new way of living, with each member recognizing himself or herself in the previously scapegoated member.

The question arises: Is there such a thing as Christian group therapy or a Christian process of scapegoat-

ing? A definitive answer is beyond the current discussion, but some observations can be made toward that end. First, conducting a therapy group under church auspices presents serious potential problems. Maintenance of confidentiality would be essential but is often difficult when a group is a subset of a larger organization. Given the possible turmoil that can occur during the course of therapy, the therapist would require the trust and blessing of church leadership to conduct a group without church oversight.

In my experience, the encouragement of genuine conflict rarely occurs under church auspices. Christian small groups, e.g. fellowship groups, Bible studies, or other groups intended to foster intimacy and support between Christians, usually do not get beyond the early stages of development common to therapy groups (Siwy, 2003; Siwy & Smith, 1988). Therapy groups, led by paid professionals who are outside of the members' everyday lives, use interpersonal learning that emphasizes the interaction in the hear-and-now (Yalom, 2005), confront personal defenses, and allow negative transference. Non-psychotherapy groups, such as support or twelve-step groups, do not do this.

In a statement very relevant to the development of Christian psychology, Lewis (1952/2002) declared, regarding Christianity:

It was never intended to replace or supersede the ordinary human arts and sciences: it is rather a director which will set them all to the right jobs, and a source of energy which will give them all new life, if only they will put themselves at its disposal (p. 51).

Accordingly, a Christian therapy group would be less defined by techniques or process than by the reason for the group. It would seem that the process of scapegoating, for example, would be essentially the same, regardless of the faith perspective of the participants or observers. This should not be disappointing to believers, as the Christian aspect of the process may be seen as already "built in" because it is Christianity that has made us sensitive to the process and has taught us, as Girard declares, to regard it from the point of view of the victim. Group therapy offers a place where the profound scapegoating mechanism can be seen. A skilled therapist who leads the process can be an object who gives everyone a greater understanding of God. Secular groups of course would not frame it this way. A Christian group would have a basic goal of members becoming more Christlike. What takes place in the group could be framed in Christian terms, including the acceptance and confrontation of the members' sinfulness. Such a group would be a Christian witness and would enable the mature growth of members in their individual witness to the world.

Watson (2004) speaks of a metaperspective of love

that is derived from the New Testament. It is characterized as nonauthoritarian, critical, and integrative. Such a perspective underlies genuine psychotherapy and contains the qualities of a good therapist. The attainment of such ideal functioning can occur only by the work of the Holy Spirit, who desires the wellbeing of everyone. This therapeutic goal exists only in the light of the greatest commandment. Loving God and neighbor are not stated goals of typical therapy groups, but would be the *raison d'être* of a Christian group.

PERSONAL VOYAGE

Implicit in the foregoing discussion of scapegoating is an inductive process in the search for "Christian psychology." A more formal, deductive approach could have been to begin with the conception of the scapegoat as found in the Old Testament and then to develop conclusions regarding its theological and psychological implications. Extensive discussion could have carried the concept into small group functioning, with hypotheses as to how scapegoating might occur in groups.

Instead, I have begun with my experiences in psychotherapy groups, where I have witnessed the process firsthand, with all the thoughts and feelings generated in poignant interpersonal context. I was not primarily seeking a Christian method or solution, but rather learning how the special therapeutic intervention of a small group can bring healing and growth to individuals who suffer from an array of personal problems. As my experience grew, I sought a Christian understanding of what was happening (Siwy & Smith, 1988; Siwy, 2003). This was done in the spirit of "embodied integration" (Farnsworth, 1985). As a clinician, I care about ideas that are meaningful to "the least of these." Sometimes such ideas become comprehended only after they are experienced in an applied fashion, before conceptual attributes have been given. Practice can precede theory, which then informs subsequent practice.

I have regarded my journey as a Christian and licensed psychologist as a voyage over and through different waters. I hesitate to mention this here because I later discovered that Johnson (2007b) used a similar metaphor in this journal to describe, eloquently, the development of a Christian psychology as a new vessel that replaces the confining ship, "U.S.S. Secularity" (p. 45). My metaphor takes a different, more modest and personal perspective.

My journey in the mental health field was for many years a voyage primarily on the saltwater seas of secular institutions, i.e. hospitals and training programs. Although I teach part time at a Christian graduate school and have long interacted with fellow believers in the helping professions, I have chosen to remain in secular territory under state licensure as a psychologist, delib-

erately immersed in past and present currents of secular theory and practice. Biblically, this is the realm of “the world,” a dangerous, yet necessary, place to navigate. While there is life in it and it is part of God’s creation, ultimately its saltwater composition becomes a Dead Sea. Christian psychotherapists or counselors prefer to be nourished by the streams of living water and to lead their clients to fountains of life. Yet, in this present age, the seas are pervasive and must be contended with, as well as studied and harvested. In my practice and exploration of clinical psychology, I have found the secular sea partly useful for its composition, i.e. ideas and methods, but more so for the places it has taken me. It has brought me to lands where the freshwater routes apparently did not flow. By this, I refer to persons with severe psychopathology, the places (hospitals and clinics) where they frequent, the important problems that they have, and the often astute and loving clinicians who have taught me and cared for them.

My seafaring career has carried me to major ports of clinical psychology, where I found cultures and activities I had not seen in freshwater territories. One such destination, group psychotherapy, revealed the topic of aggression and the process of scapegoating in ways I had not seen elsewhere. As I continue my travels on both seas and fresher inland waters, the doldrums of cognitive dissonance, brought on by simultaneous consideration of secular and Christian perspectives, at times are relieved by fresh winds that point toward promising new territories.

Perhaps there is a continent of true Christian psychology or a land of “Unifies Process” (Hall & Porter, 2004; Eck, 1996) where there is a “unity of god’s created and revealed truths” (Eck, 1996, p. 109). Literally, we are promised, in the New Jerusalem, a time when there will no longer be any sea (Rev. 21:1). This may fit the present metaphor, but for now, there is rich life to be found where rivers meet the sea. The dialogues between the communities of the Kingdom and the world, or “postmodern integrative discourse” (Dueck & Parsons, 2004; Sorenson, 2004), have propelled the voyage.

My personal journey is buoyed by the reality of experiences such as group psychotherapy and the excitement of ideas such as Girard’s. I am glad to sail in a fleet that strives to be true to an “embodied integration” (Farnsworth, 1985) and part of God’s “divine conspiracy” as described by Willard (1998), from which a Christian psychology can be built. Willard’s metaphor encompasses all history, centered on God’s invasion of fallen creation to restore his true kingdom. Through the Incarnation, Jesus “established a beachhead of divine life in an ordinary human existence” (Willard, p. 15). As his followers we are called to join this invasion, employing our “effective will” in the ev-

eryday affairs of our lives. This includes all activities and occupations, including the practice of counseling or psychotherapy in any setting, secular or religious. No role is too humble, e.g. the “invasion” of the mental health field can begin at the grass roots level, even among the patients. The field of psychology is as fair game as anything else. Individual believers contribute and influence the profession, as a little bit of yeast works its way through the whole dough. The construction of a Christian Psychology can thus be seen as part of the wider “conspiracy.”

I look forward to the stories of fellow explorers and their tales of promised lands. Through faithful mindfulness of the Spirit, we can together bring the healing message of good news to the most unlikely territories.

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Christian Rationality and the Postmodern Context: The Example of Rational-Emotive Therapy within a Christian Ideological Surround

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Within the contemporary postmodern situation, Christian “rationality” seems as defensible as the “rationalities” of other communities. Christians nevertheless must confront the challenge of defending and developing their rationality within an increasingly relativistic cultural context. Procedures associated with the Ideological Surround Model of the relationship between psychology and religion may supply one useful approach to this problem. Illustration of that possibility appears in studies that have used empirical procedures to compare Christian rationality with the essentially Stoic rationality of Rational-Emotive Therapy. Such data suggest that the Ideological Surround Model could have a role to play in development of the “responsible fideism” advocated by the Christian philosopher C. Stephen Evans.

As psychologists committed to Christianity, what must we do today to help Christian psychologists of the next century? How can we help them, our unknown future friends, address their own colleagues and ask them what they, in turn, must do to help the Christian psychologists of their own next century? Or to say the same thing differently, what must Christian psychologists do today and in the future to help ensure that the circle goes unbroken? No one can know exactly how to answer these kinds of questions. Each generation will confront unique challenges requiring specific responses to the demands of a particular time. But, is it also possible that critical challenges will extend across time and will require insights and innovations that can be achieved only through common purpose across generations? History may eventually prove that this will not be necessary, but careful consideration of the possibility could be an essential and recurring responsibility. Efforts to at least consider hypotheses about temporally general challenges could encourage each generation of Christian psychologists to better understand what it should do to help future generations of Christian psychologists.

For the present and future generations, a plausible hypothesis is that Christian psychologists must work together to support a wider Christian effort to defend and develop Christian rationality. For some, this suggestion may make no sense at all. Such individuals will perhaps believe that there is and can only be a single rationality. Either something is rational, or it is not. And the very idea of a separate Christian rationality will seem ridiculous. But circumstances are changing. Belief in a single “rationality” now appears to be increas-

ingly “irrational.” Never-ending attempts to nurture the development of Christian rationality may become more and more essential as cultural conditions become more and more “postmodern.”

Modernism and Postmodernism

Most simplistically, postmodernism is the cultural form that follows modernism. Modernism itself arose out of the violence associated with the Reformation (Stout, 1988; Toulmin, 1990). Protestants and Catholics could not resolve their disputes by appealing to shared understandings of Christian belief. Widespread bloodshed resulted. Social harmony seemed to require development of “a vocabulary whose sense did not depend on prior agreement about the nature of God and the structures of cosmos and society ordained by him” (Stout, 1988, p. 161). Early modernists assumed that rationality would supply that “vocabulary” (e.g., Descartes, 1968/1637; Locke, 1982/1690). For them, rationality was a common human trait that could have indubitable foundations in the increasingly rigorous methods of philosophy and science. Such methods would produce knowledge uncontaminated by bias. Disputes could be resolved objectively. Peace could be restored. Humanity just needed to be more rational.

As the cultural form that comes next, postmodernism reflects “distrust toward the modern concept of universal reason and related claims to know objective truth” (Smith, 2005, p. 53). The history of that distrust is a complicated story that can be told in all kinds of ways. MacIntyre (1981), for example, implies that modernists could only resolve conflicts over how to organize social life through rational development of

a teleological scheme that contained three elements: (1.) a description of “humans-as-they-are-in-their-untutored-human-nature,” (2.) a description of “humans-as-they-should-be-if-they-realized-their-*telos*” or appropriate end; and (3.) the identification of processes for transforming “humans-as-they-are” into “humans-as-they-should-be” (MacIntyre, p. 52). A universally defensible definition of the human ideal would presumably eliminate social discord by uniting everyone in a common effort to achieve the same end.

The difficulty for modernists was that neither philosophical reason nor empirical science seemed capable of identifying a universally acceptable definition of humans-as-they-should-be. Already by the time of Rousseau (e.g., 1754/1975), philosophers used their rationality to defend fundamentally different visions of the human ideal. In *Emile*, for example, Rousseau (1762/1975) had his Savoyard priest reject the work of all philosophers: “I studied their books and examined their various opinions. I found them all to be proud, assertive, and dogmatic, even in their supposed skepticism. They know everything, prove nothing, and ridicule each other; only on this last point do I feel that all of them are right” (p. 235). The philosophical development of rationality, therefore, ultimately led to the postmodern conclusion that no purely objective rationality is possible, only different perspectives reflecting the “interests” of different “rationalities” (Nietzsche, 1887/1967).

For science, the problem was perhaps even more basic. Science rests upon analysis of empirical observations. Irresolvable philosophical conflicts over how to define humans-as-they-should-be essentially guaranteed that no non-controversial examples of the human ideal could ever be identified for study. And if no non-controversial examples could be studied, then it remains unclear how empirical observations could ever resolve the controversy. This is so because evidence in favor of any particular understanding of the human ideal would, from the outset, be undermined by arguments that the relevant investigations already reflected the influence of bias in the selection of the research exemplar. Here, the postmodern critique of science would apply (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Placher 1989). All observations turn out to be theory-laden. Any so-called “objectivity” of a supposedly “neutral” empiricism is and always will be impossible. Moreover, with regard to this particular question, all empirical models of humans-as-they-should-be become the easy social scientific target of innumerable skeptical assessments. Critics should have little difficulty in uncovering the inadequacies of any specific model, given the unavoidable limitations and imperfections (i.e., the “sins”) of each form of being human.

In short, the reason and science of modernism did

not and indeed could not succeed in defining a broadly acceptable teleological scheme for resolving the conflicts of humanity. Perhaps as much as anything else, reason and science appeared to promote a proliferation of such schemes. Twentieth Century history also offered compelling evidence that disputes could not be resolved nonviolently through the “objectivity” of modernism. Modernist rationality seemed far more successful in promoting technological efficiency in the killing. Peace was not restored. Humanity did not just need to be more “rational,” whatever that might turn out to mean (see e.g., Hart, 2009).

Christian Rationality and Christian Psychology

A skeptical rejection of all rationality and an embrace of radical relativism is how some postmodernists responded to the problems of a so-called universal and objective rationality, but more affirmative options are available to Christians (Rosenau, 1992). If no noncontroversial vision of the human ideal can be articulated, then the viability and maturation of the Christian community will require participation in controversies. Effective participation will rest upon the ability of Christians to articulate a broadly and rhetorically compelling rationality based upon their own community-specific visions of humanity-as-it-should-be. No longer can participation in such controversies be dominated by modernist assumptions that reason and science alone can methodically and inductively discover an objective description of the human ideal. Modernist methods will, nevertheless, have continuing potential to support useful forms of argumentation and evidence-gathering. Developments in philosophy and psychology have already suggested that Christians of the present and future generations can and should discover ways to use such methods more effectively.

With regard to Christian philosophy, Evans (1998) has attempted to define a “responsible fideism.” Fideism is the belief that religious knowledge must depend upon faith and revelation and can lead to a formal rejection of reason. To hold faith accountable to reason can, after all, seem to make rationality into “Lord” over God, an assumption that is offensive to faith. Evans, nevertheless, argues that Christian philosophy has arrived at a point in which it is possible to more clearly understand how faith and reason must work together. “Responsible fideism” is a form of “fideism” because it accepts revelation as primary; yet, it is “responsible” because it realizes that reason fulfills a crucial role in the service of faith.

Central to this argument is a belief that reason performs critical functions in efforts to promote understanding. Yet, reason is like every other human faculty in being tainted by sin. Evans (1998) suggests, however, that it “is possible ... for reason itself to rec-

ognize its own 'neediness,' if it is properly 'educated' by a transforming encounter with God's revelation" (p. 114). This assumption leads to an essentially post-modern Christian conclusion: "With respect to the really crucial religious questions such as the identity and significance of the life of Jesus, the fideist suspects that truly neutral scholarly inquiry is impossible" (p. 152). Neither a skeptical rejection of rationality nor a capitulation to radical relativism is the appropriate response. Rationality must itself be healed by a Christian vision of humanity-as-it-should-be. "From the fideistic perspective," Evans argues, "the faith that seeks understanding is also the faith that heals reason so as to make it possible to move toward understanding" (p. 153). From a Christian postmodern perspective, it is not reason that will allow us to discover humanity-as-it-should-be, rather it is a transforming encounter with the Christian vision of humanity-as-it-should-be that will allow us to really discover reason.

A parallel conclusion follows logically for the Christian psychologist. It is not empiricism that will allow us to discover humanity-as-it-should-be, but rather it is a transforming encounter with the Christian vision of humanity-as-it-should-be that will allow us to discover the full potentials of empiricism. A "responsible fideism," in other words, will need to have a "responsible rationalism" that is supplemented by a "responsible empiricism." How this might be possible has been illustrated in recent attempts to develop an Ideological Surround Model of the relationship between psychology and religion (Watson, 1993, 1994, 2006, 2008a, b).

Central to this model is an assumption that all social scientific research is unavoidably ideological. "Ideology" in this instance is defined by MacIntyre (1978) in terms of three interlocking elements. First, ideologies are based upon ultimately non-empirical assumptions, but find expression through empirical observations. Christians believe, for instance, that God created the universe. A thorough-going naturalist will reject this idea and will instead emphasize materialistic processes. Both Christians and naturalists will use their non-empirical assumptions as a foundation for interpreting a wide range of relevant empirical observations. Definitive empirical proof of one somewhat non-empirical foundation over another, nevertheless, seems to be wholly impossible. How can the Christian empirically prove the existence of God? How can the naturalist explain and supply supporting evidence for a theory of what happened at the time of the "Big Bang"?

A second feature of ideologies is that these somewhat non-empirical foundations will necessarily have normative implications. As emphasized by MacIntyre (1978), an ideology "does not merely tell us how the world is and how we are to act, but is concerned with the bearing of the one upon the other" (MacIntyre,

p. 6). Assumptions that God created the universe will lead to very specific understandings of humanity-as-it-should-be, and these normative visions will differ from ideals derived from the somewhat non-empirical foundations of a more naturalistic ideology. All ideologies will share this tendency to understand things-as-they-should-be based upon beliefs about things-as-they-are.

Finally, ideologies will have sociological implications because norms will necessarily identify those individuals who are and who are not members of a community. In offering a concrete example, MacIntyre (1978) points out, "There is a Christian account of why Christians are Christians and the heathens are not." And, of course, the community of naturalists will have at least implicit definitions of its own members and "heathens" as well.

In short, the Ideological Surround Model of the relationship between psychology and religion works from the assumption that all social scientific research is somewhat non-empirical, normative, and sociological. The postmodern inference is that a neutral and wholly objective empiricism represents a philosophical impossibility. In no way, however, does such a conclusion warrant a belief that empiricism should be abandoned. Within the context of Evans' (1998) responsible fideism, a responsible empiricism, like a responsible rationalism, will surely have an essential role in promoting the viability and maturation of the Christian community. For this to happen, research methods will need to respond appropriately to Christian understandings of humanity-as-it-should-be. Such methods should help the Christian community defend and develop its own form of rationality. Sometimes defense will be necessary in order to argue against the unjust accusations of critics from other communities. Sometimes development will be necessary as insights demonstrate that Christian rationality has work to do in articulating its own self-understanding. This possibility has perhaps been most obvious in attempts to offer a Christian response to a psychotherapeutic ideological perspective that explicitly makes "rationality" the central issue.

Rational-Emotive Therapy and Religion

In the Rational-Emotive Therapy of Albert Ellis (1962, 1994), psychological health depends upon the maintenance of rational and the elimination of irrational beliefs. Conceptual foundations for this therapy rest, at least in part, in Stoic philosophy (e.g., Ellis, 1962, 361-364). Ellis, for example, approvingly cites the assertion of the ancient Stoic philosopher Epictetus as a useful summary of his position: "People are disturbed not by things, but by the views they take of them" (Ellis, 1994, p. 64). Successful therapy must, therefore, change the "views" that people take of "things."

More formally, Ellis (1994) expresses this general

philosophical perspective in an A-B-C-D-E model of psychopathology and treatment. In the causal sequence underlying psychological problems, “A” involves the “Activating” life events that lead to “C,” “Consequences” that are emotionally disturbing. Problematic consequences, however, occur only through the mediation of “B,” or irrational “Beliefs.” Again, this is so because people are not actually disturbed by their experiences, but by how they interpret those experiences. Given this model of psychopathology, the task of the therapist becomes clear. The therapist must “D,” that is “Dispute,” the irrationalities producing psychopathology and replace them with health-inducing rationalities. In doing so, therapists will need to realize that rationalities and irrationalities do not operate in isolation. They reflect broader worldviews. Ultimately, the therapist must work with a client to achieve “E,” an “Effective” new philosophy.

To suggest that there can be “effective” philosophies means, of course, that there can also be “ineffective” philosophies. Throughout most of his career, Ellis essentially argued that religions operate as “ineffective” philosophies. His earliest views were clearest and most extreme. In 1962, for example, he claimed that the “concept of sin is the direct and indirect cause of virtually all neurotic disturbance” (Ellis, 1962, p. 146). Almost a decade later, he added that “if we confine our discussion to conventional or traditional religion..., then I as a psychotherapist find conventional religion to be quite pernicious. For virtually all of the commonly accepted goals of emotional health are antithetical to a truly religious viewpoint” (Ellis, 1971, p. 1).

Among those “commonly accepted goals of emotional health” is self-interest. According to Ellis (1983), however, “Masochistic self-sacrifice is an integral part of most major religions... Orthodox religions deliberately instill guilt ... in their adherents and then give these adherents guilt-soothing rituals to (temporarily) allay this kind of self-damning feelings” (Ellis, 1983, p. 2). Instead of pursuing the goal of self-direction, devoutly religious individuals supposedly “are almost necessarily dependent and other directed rather than self-sufficient” (Ellis, 1983, p. 2).

In addition, believers do not manifest a true social interest because “deity-inspired religionists tend to sacrifice human love for godly love ... and to withdraw into monastic and holy affairs at the expense of intimate personal relationships.” They lack tolerance as well. This is so because “tolerance is anathema to devout divinity-centered religionists, since they believe that their particular god ... is absolutely right and that all opposing deities and humans are positively and utterly false and wrong” (Ellis, 1983, p. 3). The consequences of this intolerance are presumed to be especially problematic. “Born of this kind of piety-inspired

intolerance of self and others come some of the most serious of emotional disorders – such as extreme anxiety, depression, self-hatred, and rage” (Ellis, 1983, p. 3). This list continues and includes the religious sabotage of such “rationalities” as acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty, flexibility, scientific thinking, sincere as opposed to obsessive-compulsive forms of commitment, risk-taking, and self-acceptance, to mention only a few.

The ultimate Rational-Emotive conclusion seems clear. Intense religiosity is “emotionally disturbed: usually neurotic but sometimes psychotic” (Ellis, 1983, p. 13). The traditionally religious “strongly and rigidly believe in the same kinds of profound irrationalities ... in which seriously disturbed people believe” (Ellis, 1983, p. 13). Ellis (1980) probably offered his most famous condemnation of religion in a detailed rejection of efforts to include “theistic” values in therapy (Bergin, 1980). Ellis responded to this effort by saying, “Religiosity ... is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance” (Ellis, 1980, p. 637). The response of psychologists should be obvious: “The elegant therapeutic solution to emotional problems is to be quite unreligious and have no degree of dogmatic faith that is unfounded or unfindable in fact” (Ellis, 1980, p. 637). In short, psychotherapists should be guided by a basic hypothesis about their clients: “The less religious they are, the more emotionally healthy they will be” (Ellis, 1980, p. 637).

Critical reactions to Ellis’ views on religion followed. Numerous commentators emphasized that a fundamental compatibility can exist between Rational-Emotive Therapy and Christianity (e.g., DiGiuseppe, Robin, & Dryden, 1990; Johnson, 1992; Johnson & Ridley, 1992). Empirical evidence also increasingly documented the physical and psychological benefits of religious belief (e.g., Pargament, 1997). Before his death, Ellis (2000), therefore, had to moderate his position, “Although I have, in the past, taken a negative attitude toward religion, and especially toward people who devoutly hold religious views, I now see that absolutistic religious views can sometimes lead to emotionally healthy behavior” (p. 31). He had to admit that common goals can exist between Rational-Emotive Therapy and religion, including “philosophies of self-control and change, unconditional self-acceptance, high frustration tolerance, unconditional acceptance of others, the desire rather than the dire need for achievement and approval, the acceptance of responsibility, the acceptance of self-direction,” and many more (Ellis, 2000, p. 31).

Though chastened, Ellis nevertheless maintained his basically antireligious perspective, “I think that God-oriented approaches require strong beliefs in superhuman entities and all-encompassing laws of the

universe that are unprovable and unfalsifiable” (Ellis, 2000, p. 31). A secularized Rational-Emotive Therapy may, therefore, be “a more pragmatic and more realistic way of thinking and behaving than is any form of God-oriented religiosity” (Ellis, 2000, p. 31).

Rational-Emotive Rationality within a Christian Ideological Surround

Rational-Emotive Therapy and other forms of therapeutic rationality will necessarily reflect somewhat non-empirical, normative, and sociological assumptions that can challenge Christian psychological research. On the one hand, Christians must surely display less than ideal psychological characteristics that can reflect a need not only to defend, but also to further develop a rationality based upon their own normative conceptualizations of humanity-as-it-should-be. Rational-Emotive insights could be useful in accomplishing that purpose. On the other hand, Christian beliefs evaluated within the Rational-Emotive ideological surround could be condemned unfairly through the perhaps subtle influence of an antireligious bias. In such instances, defense rather than development of Christian rationality would seem to be essential. The obvious challenge for a “responsible empiricism” is to determine when defense or further development of Christian rationality is the appropriate response.

Central to the Ideological Surround Model is the claim that empirical research methods must be devised for assessing the impact of ideologically-based assumptions on psychological knowledge. The postmodern context makes it clear that all efforts to construct so-called objective knowledge are values-laden from the outset. A greater, if not absolute, “objectivity” might, nevertheless, be possible if the normative or values dimension of the research process itself became an explicit part of a more responsible empiricism. An array of methodologies has been created for accomplishing precisely this purpose. Indeed, one of those methodologies emerged in direct response to the earlier and more extreme criticisms of Ellis (1971, 1980, 1983) against religion. This procedure can be described as a comparative empirical analysis of rationalities, or more simply as comparative rationality analysis.

Psychological scales that operationalize what Ellis (e.g., 1962) presumed to be irrationalities have been especially useful in exploring the implications of Rational-Emotive assumptions about religion and rationality. These scales have been the target of numerous critiques, but the associated controversies, though important, can be set aside for the purposes of illustrating comparative rationality analysis. The point to emphasize here is that researchers have examined the descriptions of irrationality offered by Ellis and have devised what they deemed to be valid measures of irrationality.

These instruments have included the Irrational Beliefs Test (Jones, 1968), the Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire (Newmark, Frerking, Cook, & Newmark, 1973), and the Survey of Personal Beliefs (Demaria, Kassino, & Dill, 1989). Each of these instruments contains a sequence of beliefs to which individuals can agree or disagree along a five-point Likert scale. Responses are scored according to the normative assumptions of Rational-Emotive Therapy. In other words, estimates of irrationality reflect reactions to statements of presumed “irrationality” added to reverse-scored assessments of “rationality.”

Hypotheses about the “irrationality” of religion (e.g., Ellis, 1980, 1983) can be tested by simply correlating measures of irrational belief with indices of religious commitment. The problem, however, is that the normative assumptions of Rational-Emotive Therapy are already built into these irrationality questionnaires. Data obtained with these scales could indeed identify the irrational liabilities of religious commitment, but then again, they could merely reflect the influence of an anti-religious ideological bias built into scoring of these scales.

Comparative Rationality Procedures

Comparative rationality analysis attempts to address this problem. These procedures involve six basic steps:

First, an irrational belief test is administered using standard instructions and is scored in terms of the normative Rational-Emotive assumptions. This step supplies the essential foundation of including the Rational-Emotive construction of irrationality in the empirical analysis.

Second, other mental health measures are presented as well, along with scales that record religious commitment. Inclusion of religious commitment variables is obviously necessary in order to test Ellis’ assumption that religion predicts irrationality. Mental health measures make it possible to assess the adjustment implications of both irrational beliefs and religious commitment using measures that are relatively “neutral” in that they do not explicitly reflect either Rational-Emotive or religious ideological assumptions. The obvious Rational-Emotive claim is that both irrational beliefs and religious commitment should display negative correlations with mental health.

Third, the initial irrational beliefs scale is administered once again, but this time with different instructions. Respondents use five-point response options to indicate if each belief is very inconsistent, inconsistent, neutral, consistent, or very consistent with personal religious beliefs. These instructions state, “If you are an orthodox Christian, you would answer according to the values you feel go along with being an orthodox Christian. If you are an atheist or agnostic, you would

respond according to how your beliefs about religion affect your understanding of life.” This step makes it possible to empirically assess beliefs relative not to the Rational-Emotive assumptions of Ellis, but rather to the religiously relevant ideologies of the sample.

Fourth, religious evaluations of all beliefs are then

and vice versa.

As Table 1 indicates, each item in the clarifying analyses is identified as ideologically antireligious or proreligious based upon the pattern of observed outcomes. As interpreted by the original scale, some statements are positively (+) scored as expressions of

Table 1

Ideological Meanings of Positively and Negatively Scored Expressions of Psychopathology as a Function of the Pattern of Outcomes Obtained in Clarifying Analyses*

Inconsistency (I) Outcome	Consistency (C) Outcome		
	C > Other	C = Other	C < Other
I > Other	Impossible	+Item: Proreligious - Item: Antireligious	+Item: Proreligious - Item: Antireligious
I = Other	+Item: Antireligious - Item: Proreligious	Polarized	+Item: Proreligious - Item: Antireligious
I < Other	+Item: Antireligious - Item: Proreligious	+Item: Antireligious - Item: Proreligious	Neutral

*Understandings of an item could be compatible with religious commitments and therefore ideologically “proreligious” or incompatible and thus “antireligious.” Relative to the assumptions of Ellis (1994), for example, positively scored items represented “irrationalities” whereas negative scored items were rational-emotive “rationalities.” Two separate Chi-square tests analyzed possible extremes in the consistency and inconsistency interpretations of each item (based on Watson et al., 1993)

analyzed in order to understand the initial irrational beliefs scale in terms of the normative religious assumptions of the sample. Samples in the research program using these procedures were at least 90% Christian. Ultimately, therefore, this step helped construct a Christian redefinition of irrationality that could be compared with the initial Rational-Emotive definition.

In more specific terms, analysis of the religious evaluations of each belief begins with a statistical test in which the frequencies of inconsistent, neutral, and consistent ratings are examined. In this procedure, frequencies for the very inconsistent and inconsistent evaluations are combined together, as are the consistent and the very consistent ratings. A statistically significant result indicates a possible ideological influence on the religious meaning of an item and serves as warrant for additional clarifying analyses. In clarifying analyses, the patterns of responses are again analyzed by using statistical tests to compare the inconsistent ratings with all other frequencies and the consistent frequencies with all other ratings. Table 1 summarizes the interpretative possibilities for all putative measures of psychopathology (e.g., Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1993). Measures of mental health (e.g., self-actualization) rather than psychopathology (e.g., irrational beliefs) can be analyzed using the same procedures. In these instances, however, all interpretations would be reversed. Antireligious evaluations would become proreligious

Rational-Emotive “irrationalities.” Others are reverse or negatively (-) scored as Rational-Emotive “rationalities.” Irrationalities (+ items) interpreted as inconsistent and/or as largely not consistent with religious commitments are interpreted as unacceptable within both Rational-Emotive and Christian frameworks and are thus ideologically proreligious. Rationalities (- items) interpreted in the same way are antireligious because beliefs acceptable within a Rational-Emotive ideological surround are significantly inconsistent and/or not consistent with Christian commitments. Similarly, so-called irrationalities (+ items) interpreted as consistent and/or not inconsistent with religious beliefs are antireligious because Rational-Emotive assumptions reject what Christian frameworks do not. Putative rationalities (- items) interpreted in the same way are proreligious because Rational-Emotive and Christian interpretations agree in embracing an interpretation of this statement as rational. Other possible patterns are statistically impossible or represent either ideologically polarized or neutral outcomes.

Analysis of dependency as a putative irrationality supplies a useful illustration of these procedures (Watson et al., 1993). Again, Ellis (1983) argued that instead of pursuing the goal of self-direction, devoutly religious individuals “are almost necessarily dependent and other directed rather than self-sufficient” (Ellis, 1983, p. 2). The 10-item Dependency subscale of the

Irrational Beliefs Test (Jones, 1968) operationalizes this assumption. Two out of 10 statements from this measure proved to be ideologically proreligious. An overwhelming Christian sample, for example, found it to be largely consistent and largely not inconsistent with their religious beliefs to concur with the Rational-Emotive statement of rationality that "I like to stand on my own two feet." Seven statements, however, were anti-religious. Unsurprisingly, for instance, it was largely consistent and not inconsistent with religious beliefs for theistic Christians to embrace the putative irrationality that "people need a source of strength outside of themselves." One statement was statistically neutral.

Fifth, empirically determined assessments of items as proreligious and antireligious now make it possible to rescore the original scale taken under standard instructions in terms of religious rather than Rational-Emotive ideological assumptions. Proreligious items are scored in the same way, but anti-religious items are scored oppositely. In other words, with statements evaluated as anti-religious, Rational-Emotive "rationalities" are rescored as Christian "irrationalities" and vice versa. Ultimately, therefore, the responding of each participant to an irrational beliefs scale is scored in two different ways. The very same data set yields both Rational-Emotive and Christian interpretations of irrationality.

Finally, Christian and Rational-Emotive rationalities are directly compared in relationships with other constructs. Ellis' most negative understandings of religion would receive strongest support if the Rational-Emotive measures of irrationality correlated positively with religious commitment and negatively with mental health, thus demonstrating that Christians embrace an apparently maladjusted irrationality. In addition, Christian measures of irrationality would display an opposite pattern of relationships, thereby suggesting that Christians advocate an understanding of irrationality that promotes their own psychological dysfunction. In addition, religious commitment would correlate negatively with mental health. This overall pattern of outcomes would suggest that religious commitments have clear liabilities and that Christian rationality may require further development.

Conversely, Christian ideological frameworks would receive strongest support if Christian measures of irrationality correlated negatively with both religious commitment and mental health, and if religious commitment and mental health also correlated positively with each other. Such results would suggest that mentally healthy Christians appropriately reject (self-defined) irrationalities that, in fact, seem to contribute to maladjustment. At the same time, a Rational-Emotive interpretation of irrationality could correlate positively with both religious commitment and mental

health, suggesting that the Rational-Emotive framework views mental health to be irrational (instead of rational as should be the case) and that the tendency of this particular measure to depict religious commitment as "irrational" is, therefore, ideologically suspect. Overall, this pattern of results would suggest that Christian commitments support a superior definition of a particular irrationality and that Christian understanding of this irrationality should be defended against any indictments based upon a Rational-Emotive ideological surround. Between these extreme patterns of results, more ambiguous results could, of course, suggest a need for both Rational-Emotive and Christian ideologies to develop deeper understandings of their own "rationalities."

Again, once the religious ideological meanings of all items within a measure are determined, the original scale can be rescored in terms of alternative religious normative assumptions. This procedure ignores neutral and polarized statements and includes only antireligious and proreligious assertions in an empirically derived, ideological redefinition of an instrument. Rational-Emotive and Christian rationalities can then be compared directly in relationships with other measures. Table 2 illustrates such data. In these multiple regressions, the religious redefinition of Dependency was combined with reinterpretations of three other irrationalities, including the Demand for Approval, Frustration Reactive, and Helplessness for Change subscales from the Irrational Beliefs Test (Jones, 1968). The two systems of irrationality were then used to predict responding on Social Responsibility (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968), Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), Anxiety and Depression (Costello & Comrey, 1967), and a Communal Orientation (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1967) scales.

Perhaps most importantly, these data revealed that the Rational-Emotive interpretation of Dependency was questionable, since it identified the mental health of Self-Esteem and Social Responsibility as "irrational" and the maladjustment of Depression as "rational." Religious Irrationality measures offered a generally more valid and conceptually clearer assessment of supposedly pathogenic irrationalities. Most obviously, "irrationality" as defined in terms of religious beliefs about Dependency displayed associations that were positive with Depression and negative with Social Responsibility, Self-Esteem, and a Communal Orientation. As would be expected, therefore, the Christian ideological framework identified psychological disturbance as "irrational" and psychosocial adjustment as "rational." The only possible interpretative problem for the religious system of rationality involved a tendency for a religiously defined Demand for Approval to relate positively rather than negatively with a presumably more

Table 2

Multiple Regressions Comparing Rational-Emotive and Sample-Specific Religious Rationalities*

Variable Predicted	Rational-Emotive Irrationality		Religious Irrationality	
	Multiple r	Beta Weight	Multiple r	Beta Weight
Social Responsibility	.33***	-.22***: HC .22***: DE	.41***	-.32***: DE -.20***: HC
Self-Esteem	.40***	-.24***: FR -.16** : HC -.15** : DA .19***: DE	.37***	-.25***: DE -.21***: DA
Anxiety	.46***	.29***: FR .27***: HC	.24***	.20***: DA
Depression	.47***	.27***: HC .22***: FR -.25***: DE	.44***	.34***: DE .15***: HC .15***: DA
Communal Orientation	.48***	-.12* : HC .14***: FR .24***: DA	.54***	-.47***: DE -.16***: HC .23***: DA
Intrinsic Religion	.27***	.27***: DE	.22***	-.20***: DE
Extrinsic Religion	.29***	.22***: HC -.14***: FR	.33***	.23***: HC .14***: DE

*p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Irrationalities included Dependency (DE), Demand for Approval (DA), Frustration Reactive (FR), and Helplessness for Change (HC). Table is based on Watson et al. (1993).

prosocial Communal Orientation. Factor analysis, nevertheless, suggested that this outcome was largely attributable to one of four factors from the Communal Orientation Scale that had problematic mental health implications.

Religious meanings of the two systems of irrationality were examined as well by administering the Allport and Ross (1967) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scales. As originally conceptualized, the Intrinsic Scale sought to record a sincere religious motivation that was presumed to have beneficial psychosocial consequences. The Extrinsic Scale sought to measure a more maladjusted use of religion for sometimes selfish ends. Research has generally upheld this characterization of the Intrinsic Orientation as adaptive and the Extrinsic Orientation as maladaptive (Donahue, 1985); although, critics sometimes complain that the Intrinsic Scale too strongly records a narrow-minded Christian orthodoxy (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993). The Intrinsic Scale, in other words,

seems to measure precisely the kind of “religiosity” that Ellis (1980, 1983) condemned.

As Table 2 also demonstrates, the religious system of irrationality seemed to offer a more valid assessment of these two religious motivations than did measures based upon Rational-Emotive interpretations. This was true, in part, because the Intrinsic Scale in this sample correlated positively with Self-Esteem, Social Responsibility, and a Communal Orientation and negatively with Depression, whereas opposite relationships appeared for the Extrinsic Scale. In other words, the Intrinsic Scale predicted mental health, and the Extrinsic Scale was associated with psychological dysfunction. The religious system of rationality, therefore, seemed superior because it identified a healthier intrinsic religious motivation as “rational” and an unhealthier extrinsic orientation as “irrational.” The Rational-Emotive subscales instead identified the healthier intrinsic orientation as “irrational” and the unhealthier Extrinsic Scale as both “rational” and “irrational.” These Intrinsic

sic Scale data presumably reflected an antireligious bias built into the Rational-Emotive ideological surround.

Finally, comparative rationality procedures were employed in a series of studies until a total of 161 supposed irrationalities were evaluated in terms of religious normative assumptions. Results of these investigations are summarized in Table 3 (Watson, Milliron, Morris, & Hood, 1994). For full samples, proreligious evaluations were more common than antireligious interpretations, although polarized and neutral evaluations occurred most frequently. If Ellis were correct in his assertion that Rational-Emotive and religious perspectives were largely antithetical, then the expectation would presumably be that anti-religious rather than proreligious interpretations would be more common.

Table 3

Number of Items from Scales Operationalizing Rational-Emotive Irrationalities that were Evaluated as Proreligious, Antireligious, or Other by Full Samples and by Each Religious Orientation Type*

Group	Religious Interpretation		
	Proreligious	Antireligious	Other
Full Sample	57	37	67
Intrinsics	83	50	28
Extrinsics	40	40	81
Indiscriminately Proreligious	41	29	91
Indiscriminately Antireligious	34	30	97

A total of 161 items were examined from the Irrational Beliefs Test (Jones, 1968), the Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire (Newmark et al., 1973), and the Survey of Personal Beliefs (Demaria et al., 1989). Table is based upon Watson et al. (1994).

Data were also examined in terms of four religious orientation types. Allport and Ross (1967) unexpectedly found some respondents who scored high on both the Intrinsic and the Extrinsic Religious Orientations, appearing paradoxically to be adjusted and maladjusted in their religious commitments at the same time. Such individuals, they suggested, represented an indiscriminately proreligious type that blindly affirmed all forms of faith, in contrast to an indiscriminately antireligious type that instead tended to broadly reject all religion. The Extrinsic type scored high only on the Extrinsic Scale and was deemed to be more purely maladjusted. Intrinsics displayed high scores only on the Intrinsic Scale, were identified as more purely adaptive, and presumably maintained the most ideologically sincere form of orthodox belief.

Two aspects of the data presented in Table 3 are most noteworthy. Again, Ellis (1980) said about people, "The less religious they are, the more emotionally healthy they will be" (p. 637). If this were true, the indiscriminately antireligious might exhibit the greatest degree of agreement with Rational-Emotive interpretations of irrational beliefs. In other words, relative to their own ideologically skeptical interpretations of religion, the term "proreligious," therefore, may essentially have meant "pro-skeptical-about-religion" and hence more "pro-Rational-Emotive." However, the indiscriminately antireligious displayed the fewest number of "proreligious" (i.e., "pro-Rational-Emotive") evaluations; although, the exact meaning of such outcomes is admittedly unclear, given the ambiguity of asking anti-religious individuals to interpret beliefs based upon their apparently anti-religious understandings of religion.

Much more importantly, however, the Intrinsics were a defensible empirical model of the most orthodox form of ideological commitment. These research participants should have offered the most anti-religious interpretations of so-called "irrationality" if Ellis (1980) were correct in seeing a basic incompatibility between religiosity and rationality. This clearly was not the case. Intrinsics had, by far, the greatest number of "proreligious" agreements with the Rational-Emotive interpretations built into these various psychological scales. The Rational-Emotive interpretation of "religiosity" was, therefore, suspect even relative to operationalizations of its own ideological system of rationality.

Conclusion

So again, as psychologists committed to Christianity, what must we do today to help Christian psychologists of the next century? What goals must we pursue in unity with our future colleagues to ensure that the circle goes unbroken? Within a postmodern context, an increasingly plausible hypothesis is that we need to join with present and future generations of psychologists to defend and develop Christian rationality. No longer does it seem possible to realize the modernist dream of using an indubitable rationality and a wholly objective empiricism in order to discover a unifying vision of humanity-as-it-should-be.

To question modernism does not mean that cultural circumstances require the greater irrationality of an acidic, postmodern skepticism (Rosenau, 1992), nor an attempt to obtain even less evidence that can meet defensible standards of reliability and validity. Indeed, the opposite is likely to be true. Christian psychologists may need to understand that the viability and maturation of their community will require the continuous development of a rationality and empiricism that is ever more explicitly tied to their own vision

of humanity-as-it-should-be. They will believe that this vision is capable of resolving the difficulties of rationality and empiricism. Moreover, they will understand that the difficulties of modernist (and postmodernist) thought are not merely philosophical. A look at almost any news broadcast will yield compelling testimony of the often profoundly disturbing difficulties of modernism (and postmodernism) --- wars, economic collapse, environmental degradation, violent crime, alienations, and apparent “irrationalities” of all kinds. The problems of “rationality” are not abstract, esoteric academic concerns. Efforts to redeem “rationality” seem critical to the well-being and sometimes even the survival of daily life.

Methods associated with the Ideological Surround Model attempt to meet the challenges of this postmodern context. The goal is to promote psychological research programs that bring the somewhat non-empirical, normative, and sociological beliefs of the Christian community into dialogue with relevant beliefs of other communities. Comparative rationality analysis represents only one methodology for accomplishing that purpose. Data examining the antireligious presumptions of Rational-Emotive Therapy hopefully suggest the potential of such methods. They demonstrate that ideological surround procedures can defend Christian rationality against the sometimes subtle biases of ideology, but these methodologies also seem sufficiently open to the insights of other communities to encourage a deeper development of that very same rationality. The model, in other words, seeks to reach the correct balance of defending and further developing Christian rationality.

Probably not too much should be made about any specific research method. Meeting the challenges of the present and future cannot be reduced to reliance upon mere methods. To overestimate the potential of specific methods might too much betray an allegiance to modernist presuppositions. The more important postmodern task may, instead, require efforts to figure out how to reliably and validly introduce ideological assumptions into a more, though not absolutely, objective form of research. Constant innovation may be essential. In the broadest of terms, the present and future of Christian psychology may require a responsible fideism (Evans, 1998). That task will presumably demand as much creativity as possible. A responsible empiricism will need to supplement a responsible rationalism.

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Interview with Kevin J. Vanhoozer: What Does it Mean to be Biblical? What Should Biblical Authority Look Like in the 21st Century?

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*As noted previously in discussion article that appears at the front of this issue, Kevin J. Vanhoozer (KJV) is Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College and Graduate School in Wheaton, Illinois. He is the author of six books, including *The Drama of Doctrine*. Here, he is interviewed by Eric L. Johnson (ELJ), who is Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Please address all correspondence to Kevin.Vanhoozer@gmail.com.*

ELJ: Who have been some of the more influential authors or teachers on your thought and what about them impacted you the most?

KJV: In high school, my French teacher Stanley Woodworth exemplified his own philosophy of education: “The joy of teaching lies not in one’s own enthusiasm for the students or even for the subject matter, but for the privilege of introducing the one to the other.” How much more is this the case when the subject matter is not verb conjugations or existentialist novels but the triune conjugation of God and the literature of the Bible.

In college, Robert Gundry lifted my appreciation for how to be serious about the biblical text to an entirely new level. I wanted to be a New Testament scholar like him when I grew up. To his credit, he correctly saw that my gifts suited me more for systematic theology. In seminary, I learned from John Frame how one could be both rooted in tradition (in his case, Reformed theology) and yet apply it creatively to new problems. At Cambridge, my doctoral supervisor Nicholas Lash taught me that the imagination was “the intellect in quest of appropriate precision” and that theology was more, but not less, than word-craft.

ELJ: What do you think are some of the most pressing issues in our culture today that Christians ought to be focusing on?

KJV: The most relevant issues of culture today or at any time are often the perennial issues: the big ques-

tions of metaphysics (what is the nature of reality?), epistemology (what can I/we know?), and ethics (what ought I/we do?). Each Christian generation has to be able to account for the hope that is in us. In that regard, I am concerned that these issues, part and parcel of the question of life’s meaning, are being sidelined in higher education today due to a concern to train students for jobs. While this is not an evil in and of itself, the risk is that the veneer of career will eclipse the significance of our even more basic vocation to know and love God and others as ourselves.

Perhaps the most pressing issue in culture today is culture itself. The church must not let cultural agendas and ideals supplant the mission of the church, which is to bear witness to the coming kingdom of God in our midst. Christians need to be aware of the ways in which culture conditions us, including the ways we read the Bible. What culture ultimately cultivates is a way of being human. Everything that we watch or listen to or participate in is part and parcel of culture’s spirit-forming influence. The church needs to be sure that Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures, is our template rather than some image of the good life derived from elsewhere.

The single issue to which I have devoted the most time and thought is easier stated than answered: what does it mean to be biblical? What should biblical authority look like in the 21st century? For in this as in every century, the church’s task is to preserve the integrity of its gospel witness. We have been given a holy mandate: to nurture the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ.

ELJ: You reject the labels of liberal and conservative for yourself (though you are on the “conservative” side of the theological spectrum). Do you identify yourself with any labels? If so, what do you call yourself and why? If not, why not?

KJV: Labels are initially useful in helping students or newcomers to get the lay of the ideological land. The reality is often more complex than labels indicate, however. And too often people are content to apply labels rather than make the effort required to have a true grasp of the matter. At their worst, labels are intellectual short cuts that short-circuit rational conversation, identity badges that people display to feel complacent about themselves or to disparage others.

At the same time, labels are inevitable, especially if one wants to identify with a group or tradition. I accept the label “evangelical” when it refers to “that which corresponds to the gospel of Jesus Christ,” where “gospel” refers both to the content and the form of the Christian Scriptures. As such, the label designates the ambition, or aspiration, that orients my life. As I understand the term, “evangelicals” refer to those who share this fundamental orientation.

Because no one people group owns the gospel, I also accept the label “catholic,” meaning the “whole” church. “Evangelical” designates a determinate message, “catholic” the scope of its reception. Finally, I accept the label “Reformed” because I think this branch of the Protestant Reformation represents a particularly helpful expression of the way to be a catholic evangelical. I am thus a Reformed catholic evangelical.

ELJ: You have been deeply informed by postmodern thought, yet you clearly distinguish yourself from postmodernism. What do you value about postmodernism and what do you have concerns about?

KJV: My concern with postmodernism, or indeed with any *ism*, is that it is an ideology: a set of ideas that serve some political interest, for which power rather than truth is the ultimate aim.

As the name indicates, postmodernity is a reactionary movement. What I most value about it is how it serves as a check on modernity’s pride. Various postmoderns have reminded us that humans are *situated* knowers: not brains on sticks but embodied and gendered, socially and historically located subjects. I appreciate postmodernity’s prophetic critique of ideologies that claim some kind of God-like absoluteness. Postmodernity may be the Assyria to modernity’s Israel (2 Ki. 17:7-23).

On the other hand, postmodernity is not the solution. Theologians should be wary of going post-

modern lest they resemble the person who casts out one demon only to have it return with seven more (Lk. 11:24-26). There is no merit in simply changing philosophical masters. If modernity tended to foster pride in human knowing, postmodernity tends to encourage sloth to the extent that it suggests that no one is really in a position to know anything.

Many postmoderns seem to be stuck in an intellectual and spiritual condition of irony or parody: they can debunk truth claims, but they cannot embark on their own voyages of discovery. They can expose the weakness in various belief systems, but they are unable to muster enough conviction to believe in anything. I am afraid that too often postmoderns offer the intellectual and spiritual equivalent of junk food, hardly a nourishing diet for would-be disciples.

ELJ: Many Christian counselors believe that theology over the last hundred years became increasingly intellectualistic and irrelevant to the needs of God’s people. Is that a valid critique? What are you doing about it?

KJV: Well, knowing is very much part of who we are. That we will flourish by acquiring habits of right thinking is the presupposition behind much cognitive therapy, is it not? Having said that, I must acknowledge that our theology textbooks could do a better job at relating doctrine to everyday life. We have to be able to answer the “*so what?*” question.

My own view is that theology (i.e., faith seeking understanding) is ultimately a ministry of reality. Theology literally serves up reality to the extent that it brings about understanding of God and his word. The understanding that theology makes possible helps us to see what we are here to do and how what we say and do fits in with what God is saying and doing to make all things new in Jesus Christ. There’s nothing more practical in the long-term than that!

Probably the most important thing I am doing to foster theology’s ministry to the church is educating theologians: pastors, scholars, and laypeople who have a vision for embodying Christian wisdom, which is a matter not merely of writing textbooks but of demonstrating practical understanding in the everyday ways in which we live as witnesses to Christ and his kingdom.

ELJ: The metaphor of drama has been a dominant theme in your understanding of the Christian faith in recent years. Briefly give us some of the reasons why you think that it is practical for Christians to view the faith with a dramatic lens.

KJV: The gospel is first and foremost something that

God has done: there is good news because God has acted for our salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And of course we would not have this good news, or know it as reliable, unless God had told us what he was up to in Christ. To my mind, it follows that the gospel is intrinsically dramatic: at the core of Christian faith lie the words and acts of God.

Christianity is not a philosophy or a system of morality. It is rather about the personal relationship we have with God, and with one another, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. What is the nature of this relationship? It is interactive! Again, like drama, the Christian life consists of the triune God saying and doing things, not least in and through Scripture, and of the church saying and doing things in grateful, joyful response.

As member of Christ's church, each of us has been clothed (costumed) with Christ's righteousness and been given some spiritual gift (a divine prop). The great privilege and responsibility of being a Christian is that God has given us the dignity of participating in the action. God reconciles the world in Christ but, with Paul, we have a share in this ministry of reconciliation. This dramatic focus has nothing to do with encouraging a mentality of works righteousness, but it has everything to do with encouraging Christians to say and do things in all situations that reflect the mind of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit.

Doctrine on this view is an aid to understanding the play – what God has done and is doing in the world – and thus our part in the ongoing action. In my book, *The Drama of Doctrine*, I suggest that doctrine provides a kind of theatrical direction for participating fittingly in what the Father is doing in the Son through the Spirit to renew creation. It is not enough to sit in the pew once a week; we have to take up our cross and play the part of the disciple on a daily basis.

ELJ: In order to become licensed or to teach today, Christian counselors and psychologists become well informed about modern psychology, but often do not have much time and opportunity to get as well informed about the Christian faith and its relevance to counseling and psychology. What would you recommend we do about it? Do you have any recommended reading?

KJV: I think I read somewhere (Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*) that assembling a body of Christian psychology literature is a communal project! The problem of having to meet professional requirements and not having time to think theologically about what one is doing is a real one, and it is not limited to psychology. I daresay I have heard bib-

lical scholars say something similar: after all the time needed to study the various languages of the Bible, the historical context, and the secondary literature in one's own field, who has time for theology?

This is yet another symptom of the cultural temptation I mentioned above, namely, that of pursuing a career at the expense of one's vocation to be a Christian witness. I am as finite as the next person, but I purposely make a point to read outside my own discipline and to be part of interdisciplinary conversations. I also admire Christian colleges that require all new faculty members to participate in faith-learning seminars that bring biblical wisdom and Christian doctrine to bear on their respective disciplines.

I think one can hold to the principle of *sola scriptura* without necessarily becoming an intellectual obscurantist. It is not a question of ignoring the data turned up in one's discipline so much as putting it in the right interpretive framework. To give the final word to Scripture means letting Scripture interrogate, perchance to correct, the basic presuppositions of one's field of study. To the extent that psychology involves an "exegesis" of human behavior and the psyche, Christians would do well to examine their "hermeneutical" (i.e., interpretive, explanatory) principles.

ELJ: You have recently finished a book on the doctrine of God. What are you doing in that book that is distinctive?

KJV: *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) asks what we must conclude about God's being in the light of his entering into dialogue with his human creatures. I examine the Bible's depictions of God as a speech agent in order to let God's own self-presentation, rather than the idea of perfect being, guide our thinking about God's nature and character. The notion of God's suffering, rejected by the church fathers and Reformers but now the darling of contemporary theologians, serves as my primary case study. In particular, I ask whether what humans say or do changes God's mind or hurts God's feelings. What must we conclude about God's eternal being from the fact that he is in genuine dialogue with time-bound human creatures?

The challenge is to avoid both a mythologizing that thinks of God as existing on the same level as other creatures and a demythologizing that refuses the idea that God speaks and acts in the world. In contrast, what I call "remythologizing" accepts the Bible's depiction of God as a communicative agent and attempts to think about the "what" (i.e., the nature) of the divine "who." In short, remythologizing

means thinking about God according to the grain of the biblical texts, moving from biblical plot (*mythos*) to conceptual elaboration (*logos*).

The book sets forth a “communicative” or “dialogical” variation on classical theism. With classical theists, I affirm God’s sovereignty; like open theists, I affirm God’s relationality, though I am guided in understanding this by the biblical accounts rather than by human insights into loving relationships. I argue that God is an authorial agent who efficaciously interacts with human beings primarily through interpersonal communication rather than by impersonal causation.

ELJ: If you were ever to write a systematic theology, what would be some of its distinctive features? Do you plan to ever write one? If not, why not?

KJV: I am a late bloomer. It has taken me some time to put my methodological house in order, or rather, to realize that the best way to approach methodological questions is by chewing on the subject matter of Christian doctrine. All my work on hermeneutics has always and only been oriented to rightly handling the word of God in order to mine the truth, goodness, and beauty therein.

So yes, God willing, I plan to turn my hand from the hermeneutical plough that tills the textual ground to the scythe of systematics in order to reap a doctrinal harvest. At the moment, the table of contents is no more than a twinkle in the eye, but I am planning on orienting the project towards wisdom and on making clear that I am not writing about religion, but about reality. I will also want to make good on the labels I mentioned above: the main course will be catholic and evangelical, with Reformed spices.

EJW: What do you do to draw closer to God?

KJV: I do not have any secret techniques. It is a bit like dieting. Though there are hundreds of how-to books promising sure-fire success, the truth is that to lose weight one has to restrict one’s calorie intake and exercise more. It is a physical discipline that includes the resolve of the emotions and will. We get our word “diet” from the Greek *diaita* (“way of life”). To draw closer to God, to the way of life of Jesus Christ that the Spirit of God is trying to cultivate in me, I need to adopt the diet of the disciple: I need to hold fast to the word and pray. To be holy is to be set apart, and while I can pray anywhere, I sometimes have to set apart time and mental energy for that purpose. This means withdrawing, as did our Lord, from the crowds – and the media noise of contemporary society.

When I do pray the Scriptures, I enter into a more conscious communicative relationship with God. I am reminded who I am and who God is. I do not form the idea of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived; rather, I remember that the God who is holy other is also the one who draws near to us, and to me, in Jesus Christ.

The disciple’s diet is nothing less than a feeding on what is most real: the word of God. To draw close to God, I immerse myself in God’s law and promises, consolations and commands, stories and histories. These minister reality by reminding me what God is doing in the world, and so help me to get my head, and heart, back into the game. We are never more engaged in reality than when we are focused on and participating in the work of the triune God, witnessing to the renewal of all things in and through Jesus Christ.

Review of Roberts (2007)

Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues

Philip D. Jamieson, *Edification* Book Review Editor, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA

Invitation: Readers of *Edification* are invited to submit reviews of books that they have found stimulating and that fit into the discussion of Christian Psychology. Please contact the book review editor to explore this possibility. The new book review editor of *Edification* is Phil Jamieson, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. His email address is pjamieso@dbq.edu.

Featured Review

Roberts, Robert C. (2007). *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Pp. 207, \$18.00.

Reviewed by **Matthew Richard Schlimm**, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA. He can be contacted at mschlimm@dbq.edu.

In this volume, readers find a collection of essays by Robert Roberts. This work is similar to the author's 1982 *Spirituality and Human Emotion*. It includes some of the same essays (albeit revised), and many of the conclusions are similar. However, this new book interacts with many of the innovative developments that have taken place in recent studies of emotion. Furthermore, it reflects the maturity and understandings of an outstanding scholar writing in his prime.

This book is clearly aimed at a popular audience that would include pastors, psychologists, and educated lay people. It thus avoids some of the technicalities of Roberts' *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. It is replete with narrative illustrations, and it keeps footnotes to a minimum, preferring instead the occasional parenthetical reference.

While Roberts speaks to a broader audience, he does not oversimplify the complexities of human emotion. Readers may not agree with all his conclusions, but he clearly addresses the manifold perplexities of this complicated subject. Furthermore, it is clear that Roberts knows his field well. He interacts with key thinkers of both recent times (e.g., Martha Nussbaum and Robert Solomon) and times past (e.g., Leo Tolstoy, Søren Kierkegaard, and Sigmund

Freud). He also draws upon biblical texts at several important junctures. Thus, the command of Philipians 4:4 to rejoice always figures prominently in key places of Roberts' arguments.

Roberts builds the case that emotions are fundamental to the life of faith. Growing more deeply spiritually, he argues, can be facilitated by a better understanding of what emotions are, how they work, and their interrelatedness with Christian virtues.

Roberts defines emotions as "concerned-based construals" (p. 31). In doing so, he comes close to Martha Nussbaum's understanding of emotions as "judgments." However, he understands emotions to operate more passively, involving less assent than the term "judgment" might imply.

Roberts is driven by the conviction that Christians are given a distinctive way of construing their world. As a result, their experience in Christ can facilitate a distinctive emotional life, one marked by greater gratitude and hope (to name just two of the emotions on which Roberts focuses).

This work is perhaps the most brilliant when it concretely shows how Christian emotion-virtues are developed by sound Christian teaching. Thus, he demonstrates how humility is cultivated not only by learning that others are brothers and sisters in Christ, but also by understanding oneself as so loved by God that the selfish quest to exalt oneself can be abandoned, replaced by a humble spirit (pp. 78-93).

Another great strength of this work is its ongoing concern to integrate a Christian conception of the emotions with an understanding of Christian worship. The nature of emotions in worship pro-

vides an intriguing vignette by which Roberts opens his book (pp. 1-4), as well as a locus to which his arguments return repeatedly. Thus, in discussing the emotion of contrition, he carefully reflects on different prayers of confession, showing what aligns best with a Christian understanding of sin (pp. 108-111).

Readers of this work may find themselves wanting to know more about Roberts' understanding of what is "spiritual," a concept mentioned both in the book's title and throughout its arguments. Clearly, when he speaks of *spiritual* emotions, he has in mind some of the fruits of the Holy *Spirit*, such as joy, peace, and compassion (p. 11). However, readers may want to know more about how the Holy Spirit concretely works amidst our emotional experiences.

More could also be said about the distinctively

Christian notion of the spiritual realm, which is not some distant sphere utterly detached from all things physical, but rather is fully fused with the physical world, such that Christians see the sacramental significance of ordinary things, like bread, wine, water, and arguably even the physiological symptoms that can come with emotions. A more developed pneumatology that speaks clearly about the emotions would offer a great supplement to the present volume.

This work includes a useful index and a brief bibliography.

[Editor's note: for an interview with Bob Roberts concerning spiritual emotions, see *Edification*, 2008, 2(2), 74-77.]