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# EDIFICATION

THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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# CONTENTS

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2011

## Dialogue on Christian Psychology

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### Discussion Article

*Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups*.....4  
Stephen P. Greggo

### Commentaries

*Binding Up the Broken Hearted: Christian Soul-Care Groups for the Deeply Wounded*.....13  
Christine M. Browning

*Integration and Attachment Theory: A Response to Greggo*.....16  
Heather Davediuk Gingrich and Fred Gingrich

*Secure Attachments and Virtuous Hearts: Further Distinctions and Connections*.....20  
M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall

*Communicating and Communion Face-to-Face and through Writing/Reading*.....22  
Eric L. Johnson

*The Ambiguity of Translation Work: A Response to Greggo*.....24  
Philip G. Monroe

*Translating Psychology Christianly: A Challenge for Heart and Mind*.....26  
James M. Siwy

*Considering Internal Working Models in Relational Context: Less “Heart” and More “Heart-to-Heart”*.....28  
Stephen P. Stratton

### Author’s Response

*From “Lost in Translation” to Creative Heart Care: Expanding Content and Consolidating Process*.....32  
Stephen P. Greggo

### Articles

*Eyes to See: Christian Aesthetics and Perfectionist Seeing*.....37  
Taylor Worley

*The Soul as the Person Who Experiences the Brain’s Psychological Functioning*.....45  
Dennis D. Morgan

*Discovering the True Self: Thomas Merton and Contemplation*.....54  
Matthew Brett Vaden

*Interview with Ellen T. Charry: Towards a Christian Positive Psychology*.....61  
Ellen T. Charry and Eric L. Johnson

**Book Reviews**.....69

**Errata**.....79

**Conference Announcement**.....80

# Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups

Stephen P. Greggo

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*The internal working model (IWM) as stable, flexible, affective-cognitive schema is increasingly recognized as a construct offering theoretical validity, research reliability, and clinical utility. There is a need to explore the underlying construct of IWM from a Christian worldview in order to tie the therapeutic process to uniquely Christian approaches. This paper will link the psychological construct of IWM to the biblical term heart. It will further equate corrective processes with carditive internalization (Johnson, 2007). Corrective emotional relationship (CER) refers to a redemptive interpersonal experience that reflects a range of curative and nurturing connections indicative of the relational provisions offered by Jesus Christ himself. The IWM can be pictured as the relational lens through which we read and experience a text as well as those who communicate a text to us. Group work conducted in a Christian context can align the group phenomenon and its restorative potential with the work of the Holy Spirit to promote effective ways of relating to God and others. A rationale for why those invested in the development of Christian Psychology should seriously consider group helping methods as uniquely consistent with our evangelical heritage is offered.*

Vanhoozer's (2005) contention that theology is the "ministry of reality" sets the stage for his introduction of gospel as theodrama (Vanhoozer, 2005). In the midst of the dramatic action of what God has done, is doing, and will do, living persons engage in dialogical interaction and covenantal relations. Human beings as embodied personal relations live within the reality of a divine comedy that is moving toward an eschatological climax. Counselors serve as acting coaches to enable those in the cast to assume their missional roles with vitality and authenticity.

Relevant to this perspective, the present article considers a single construct: heart. Insight and understanding into the metaphors that identify this construct could assist helpers to reduce distortions in communication and increase the felt security of interpersonal and transpersonal relations. This is an effort in translation. "Translation" is the preferred Christian Psychology (CP) term for intentional effort to interface modern psychological material with an orthodox Christian, biblical worldview.

Johnson (2007) defined steps for this procedure: comprehension, evaluation, translation proper, transposition, and finally composition (see Table 1). "Enrichment" is the desired outcome of any translation exercise. The goal will be to apply the enriching benefit of the discourse to the methodology of small care groups. My assertion is that those who raise a banner for CP would do well to expand the use of guided community as soul care. Redemptive small group experiences fit our shared Christian values, soul care traditions, and kingdom priorities (Greggo, 2008). Let us enter the 'heart' of the matter.

## Scripture Saturation

The prerequisite for translation is soaking in Scripture (Johnson, 2007). Several biblical pillars will serve our purposes well. Jesus Christ promised his followers that he will be Light (Jn. 1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5), Living Water (Jn. 4:10; 7:37), Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35; 48), Gate (Jn. 10:7), Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11), and True Vine (Jn. 15:1, 5). For the children of God, Jesus Christ is our provision of safety,

**Table 1**

*Steps for Translating Psychological Texts for Christian Soul Care\**

Step	Name	Defining Question
1	Comprehension	What is the best possible description of the construct in context?
2	Evaluation	What connotations and assumptions accompany the construct?
3	Translation	How will Christian discourse alter, add or subtract from the construct?
4	Transposition	How can a construct from the lower biological and psychosocial orders contribute to higher ethical and spiritual domains?
5	Composition	What is the best expression of the construct in Christian dialect and what enrichment is achieved?

\* Based on Johnson (2007, pp. 231-233)

security, and sustenance (Greggo, 2007). This same Jesus unapologetically avowed:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. Matt. 22:37-40 (New International Version)

Love God passionately; love others sacrificially.

In these imperative instructions, Jesus references the book of the law. An emphasis on interpretation would encourage location of this divine speech-act. Therefore, recall where this commandment was initially grounded. Moses relates the Decalogue, then prays that hearers will have the heart to fear God and intentionally obey His commands (Deut. 5:29). Moses immediately goes on to declare:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deut. 6:1-9 (emphasis added)

People behold! Fear God. Serve him. Recall him continuously. Honor him. Do right for Him. Keep your heart, the hub of your relational being, connected to Him and circulate His love. The message of Moses, our Lord, and Scripture itself is consistent, transparent and the indisputable will of God.

My basic definition of the soul care process is solace for sojourners (Greggo, 2008). Christian ministers of soul care strive to encourage, uplift, soothe, relieve, console, and make glad those who journey heavenward with Jesus Christ. Guided by the biblical texts cited, Christian soul care must promote both heart health and healing. Soul care seeks to increase the flow of the Creator’s love through a Christian’s heart out to others and back to Him.

## Translation Potential of the Internal Working Model

These biblical passages support this premise. The psychological construct that I suggest has potential for translation is internal working model (IWM) from the psychological framework of attachment theory. The CP link will hang on a term granted favor in Johnson’s (2007) *Foundations for Soul Care*: carditive internalization. Moving from these concepts to soul care practice requires the cultivation of Christian communities where achieving heart health is a priority.

The attachment paradigm stipulates that human beings form through early experience an IWM composed of inner mental representations of reliable others who protect, nourish, and affirm. IWM as stable, flexible, affective-cognitive schema is increasingly recognized as a construct offering theoretical validity, research reliability and clinical utility (Beck, 2006; Goldberg, 2000; Collins, 1996). Noting the popularity of cognitive-behavioral and interpersonal therapeutic models, the notion of an IWM may now hold a position of esteem amongst therapists that rivals the former supremacy of id, ego, and super-ego (McMinn, 2007). Advocates of therapeutic attachment approaches use inter-subjectivity to develop fluidity within clients seeking to regulate the automatic, non-verbal responses of the IWM. Christian soul care providers are participating in this trend. Translation is critical. Vanhoozer (1997) suggests that to reflect on theological anthropology, Christ’s followers must think through how the human story unfolds through Genesis, the Gospels, and the Apocalypse along with how it is lived out before, with, and by God. Non-theological anthropologies can be critically appropriated as “provisional versions of human reality that need to be deepened, or perhaps disciplined, by explicitly Christian beliefs” (Vanhoozer, 1997, p. 160).

In the early attachment literature, John Bowlby considered how inadequate or inappropriate material care had an adverse influence on personality development (Bowlby, 1979; Berman & Sperling, 1994). Bowlby’s perspective was initially rejected by the psychoanalytic establishment. The dynamically-oriented clinical guild remained loyal to drive theory and the dictatorship of the unconscious. In that psychological model, resolution of internal conflict served as the central motivator for affect and behavior. The human self is individually constructed on an inner battlefield where conscious and unconscious forces fuel imagination and determine action. Such internal negotiations can be divorced from reality.

In stark contrast, the attachment proposal, influenced by ethology, postulated that a biologically-rooted behavioral system guides infant-caregiver interactions. Its intended purpose is to foster the experience of safety in the physical, psychological and, eventually, social spheres. This epigenetic process achieves fulfillment in actual, relational experience. The attachment orientation views self as shaped in

a real-world relational context. Actual experience stimulates cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that are gradually encoded in actual neuro-pathways.

This is a fitting portrayal of human beings operating holistically. The dual entities of soul and body interact. In unison, body and soul draw from caring others the ingredients necessary to construct one's inner world and interpersonal style. Expressed in Johnson's (2007) language of hierarchical orders of meaning, the attachment framework reflects emergent personal agency pursuing maturation through exchanges and mirroring between the biological and psychosocial sphere.

[T]he grounding of the psychological sphere in the biological sphere involves a frankly mysterious, semiodiscursive "correlation," where the features of one order of discourse are mirrored by the features of another order. Put differently, information in one level's "language" corresponds isomorphically to information in the other level's "language." Psychosocial structures like mental images or emotions appear to be represented by neural firing patterns that constitute the biological storing and processing of the psychosocial information and experience. (Johnson, 2007, p. 339)

This view is consistent with Vanhoozer's (1997) portrayal of a human creature as a communicating speech-agent. Human beings achieve a concrete identity in relation to others by engagement in a social, corporate communication process.

Extensive empirical research has expanded the attachment framework far from its early place as a sub-theoretical explanation for reciprocal process in parent-infant relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Developmental inclinations that guide attachment do not cease in infancy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Research demonstrates that parallel inter-subjective activity is triggered in subsequent security-oriented, asymmetrical relationships and eventually in mutual, intimate partnerships. Attachment bonds are formed and reformed across the lifespan from childhood friendships to marriage partners, from kinship connections to other intimate social ties (Simpson & Rholes, 1998; Ainsworth, 1989).

Central to the value of IWM is recognition of its twofold impact on outward behavior and internal affect. This is Bowlby's legacy. He viewed early attachment as establishing an internal grid for regulating degrees of intimacy for a lifetime. The IWM functions as the interpreter of persons, assessing promise or threat through instantaneous processing of each explicit speech-act in conjunction with implicit experience (Hall, 2007). The IWM does not function as a passive filter. Rather, the IWM performs as a sophisticated, multilevel, automatic, interactive security system with the remarkable capacity to instantly orchestrate preferences layered within the physical, affective, and cognitive domains into social movement. A reasonable definition of

IWM is a cognitive-affective-motivational schema built from an individual's experience that provides ongoing regulation of his or her interpersonal world (Berman & Sperling, 1994). The trend within the contemporary therapeutic scene is for counselors to recognize that these fundamental interior mental images enhance or extinguish the power of any helping relationship (Wallin, 2007).

Internal working models forged by early significant relational encounters produce predictable, enduring patterns. Nonetheless, these are not forever fixed. One's IWM can be steadily refined and reconfigured as novel meaningful relationships are experienced. Revision is never rapid or instantaneous. Remember that the IWM actually initiates affect and behavior, thereby eliciting from others the very interpersonal maneuvers it has grown to anticipate. Therefore, inter-subjective experience can be perpetually replayed. An infant who experiences a responsive, reliable, and nurturing caregiver thus weaves an internal model of a dependable, secure figure who is both resource and motivator. Assorted descriptions are applied to less than secure relationships. IWM's emerging from experiences that do not reach the threshold of "good-enough" result in emotional/behavioral cycles that inhibit the achievement of relational trust, and thereby hinder subsequent development.

The long-term stability of an IWM relational style has been demonstrated in research (Scharfe, 2006). Still, there are exceptions where alterations occur. For example, the literature references the category of earned-secure attachment (Roisman, Padron, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002). This description identifies those with IWM liabilities stemming from less than ideal early experiences. Later reliable relational encounters challenge the limiting expectations and responses emerging from the existing IWM. These interpersonal resources likely provide "a secure base (i.e., a base from which to explore) and a safe haven (i.e., a place to return to for comfort and support)" (Scharfe, 2006, p. 80). The beneficial impact of such subsequent experiences may even be multiplied through volitionally-governed interpersonal exploration. The result is demonstration of a revised IWM exhibited in adaptable interpersonal behaviors accompanied by reduced internal anxiety. The discovery of such desirable outcomes has therapists striving to foster conditions favorable to this type of repair and growth. No one dare suggest the possibility of short-term, specific, or guaranteed results. There is no stepwise formula for favorable revision of the robust IWM. In addition, there is indeed the genuine risk that trauma may distort memories, alter expectations, and fuel distrust of self, others, and God. Nonetheless, the flexible, inter-subjective process that initially establishes the IWM as means to stabilize self in social relation does preserve a modicum of plasticity that allows for ongoing adaptability. Applying gospel language, earned-secure attachment might best be tagged as "redeemed-secure" or "grace-secure" in recognition that the accomplishment is not an

individual achievement.

Might there be a potential connection between the technical psychological construct of IWM as an internal intimacy regulator and the biblical concept of heart? As is common, a biblical metaphor is an intentionally subjective form of speech. Such linguistic forms communicate across centuries, cultures, and spiritual experience. Referenced over 1000 times in Scripture, the term heart only spotlights on rare occasion the central organ of the human body that functions as the center of physical vitality (e.g. I Sam. 25:37-39; Ps. 104:15; Acts 14:17). The Old Testament follows a common practice of antiquity (Hamilton, 1980). Organs of the body are adopted for metaphorical use. The liver quivers with expressions of joy, kidneys harbor emotions, and the abdomen's bowels fill with compassion. The heart serves the most comprehensive function by merging affections with the activity of mind. When bringing these figurative terms into contemporary English, heart affords an optimal fit. Heart (Hebrew *leb*; Greek *kardia*) in both the Septuagint and the New Testament consistently follows the Old Testament dominant pattern of referencing this organ as responsible for moral and spiritual life (Behm, 1964). Not only is this the dwelling place of feeling, emotion, passion, and desire, it is the focal entity of the entire inner life that directs all forces and functions of the soul. Thus, it is the place within human beings where God empowers awareness of his presence and purpose.

The overwhelming biblical usage of heart is as the center of thought, affect, reflection, resolve, and religious vitality (Elwell & Comfort, 2001). Scripture describes the psychological heart as source of emotionality, fervor, intellectual understanding, imagination, wisdom, moral action, and volition (i.e. Prov. 14:10; Jas. 3:14; I Cor. 4:5; Ez. 11:19; Lk. 6:45; Jn. 12:40). The spiritual heart is known completely by God, is the source of moral evil, by salvation grace is indwelt by Jesus Christ, and is the comprehensive core of our knowledge and love of God (i.e. Jer. 17:10; Deut. 4:29; 29:18-19; Ps. 73:26; Rom. 1:21; 10:9; Phil. 4:7; Heb. 10:22).

The modern psychological IWM is an appropriately narrow construct tied primarily to regulation of relational intimacy. The attachment framework poses IWM as an inner regulatory mechanism that automatically and simultaneously assesses threat and security, processes emotion, presses the direction of the will, pursues the maintenance of equilibrium, and selects who it will please. If this construct is deemed valid, a wealth of information regarding the operation of the IWM may provide insights for soul care gleaned from an extensive empirical research base. IWM may deepen our appreciation for the broader biblical metaphor of heart that is so prominent throughout Scripture.

### **Evaluation and Translation**

Secular-minded attachment perspective proponents openly embrace evolutionary psychology.

Essential relational bonds promote survival in infancy, reproductive advantages in adulthood, and attainment of adaptive interpersonal maturity. Fortunately, this type of reductionism within attachment theory has been addressed by Roberts (1997), a philosopher and pioneer in CP. Roberts insists that the disposition to attach can be cast as consistent with creatures created to eternally rest in relationship with a loving, personal God. The safety-regulating function remains plausible. However, the pervasiveness of meaningful attachment bonds over the lifespan as a repetitive pattern to exclusively promote individual well-being he rejects. Mutuality and reciprocal interpersonal process is fundamental to the character of God. Creatures made *imago Dei* are designed to remain relationally connected to the Creator and to dwell in loving community.

Roberts (1997) challenges a second trend in the application of attachment perspectives to God-relationships. Kirkpatrick (1999, 2005) outlined two alternative ways that internal working models shape, condition, or limit an individual's attachment to God. The correspondence hypothesis suggests that an IWM remains constant in other relationships, including deity-human relationships, whereas the compensation hypothesis holds that one's relationship to God is sought to compensate for deficiencies in the IWM. God becomes in essence the perfect, dependable security figure. Behaviors demonstrated by believers who face crisis or distress can be interpreted as attachment reflexes to reestablish proximity, return to a safe haven, and soothe the IWM.

Roberts (1997) critiqued Kirkpatrick's earlier work by arguing that a Christian psychology may appreciate the analogies, yet retain the differences between attachments to humans and to God. Both attachments are essential. Furthermore, each attachment must maintain its distinctive qualities. An attachment to God fulfills considerably more than a security dimension. Whereas a sound IWM reflects achievement of an adaptive or mature personality, spiritual wholeness requires *imago Dei* creatures to bond perpetually to the Creator. One never outgrows a grace-based, 'I-Thou' relationship. Nor does its asymmetry diminish in favor of equality and reciprocity. This type of spiritual attachment requires an extensive, biblically-informed explanation. A human-divine attachment may indeed foster stability and well-being in a manner similar to human bonds; but in contrast to human attachments, the inner security it produces inspires a divine dependence that results in love, humility, obedience, and reverence.

Recently, Miner (2007) pressed further the deficiencies of psychological theories that treat attachment to God as analogues of human ones. Her critique is not of those with secular or openly evolutionary perspectives. Instead, she addresses those seeking to appropriate this relationally-oriented psychology for Christian formation purposes (i.e. Hall, 2004). Her concern over the limitations of a purely mediated view—experience

of God conditioned by experience of caregiver—does assist in the evaluation required to complete this translation of the IWM. Three points bear mentioning. First, the establishment of a balanced, relational metapsychology requires an articulated theological framework. Miner proposes that a contemporary theology of the Trinity, such as that offered by Gunton (1997), would be an ideal start. God's being as three persons in loving relationship offers a secure foundation for a human psychology of relating. Second, the three distinct persons of the Trinity fulfill different attachment functions with the Spirit providing the means for direct experience with the Father and the Son. Finite human beings can and do commune with an infinite, eternal, and Holy God. As a person spiritually matures, security of attachment may continue to flow from God the Father, whereas a mutual type connection (i.e. friendship) may grow with the Jesus Christ the Son. Third, a divine-human attachment need not be wholly mediated via prior human experience. Under the ministry of the Spirit, a fully intersubjective attachment relationship with the Father and the Son is possible. Miner's conclusion is to consider both a mediated and direct IWM as operative for divine human attachment. The implication is that one can establish intimacy bonds where there are real circular and reciprocal relationships between the individual, parents, partners, the Christian community, and even the Trinity.

Thus, theology provokes an acknowledgment of a reality consistent with theodrama. Miner (2007) concludes that a combined direct and mediated model is theologically grounded. Furthermore, it supplies an opening to explore how "scriptural texts might be powerful means of religious change and development in conjunction with attuned caregivers from the Christian community" (p. 121). Johnson (2007) writes:

Humans are made in the *imago Dei*, so they are supposed to be communal signs of the triune God on earth, and human nature was evidently created by God to be shaped by those who resemble God....Consequently, images of God provide a unique kind of sign of the Word of God" (p. 507-508).

These points do encourage moving on to the remaining steps required for CP translation.

Based upon evaluation, these adjustments and modifications to the IWM construct are deemed necessary to bring it forth into a Christian framework. Applying Vanhoozer's counsel, this secular anthropology is here deepened and disciplined by the application of Christian theology. Creatures made in the *imago Dei* sense the necessity to attach to a personal, loving, invested Creator. Johnson (2007) enlists Calvin's description of the *sensus divinitatis* as a psychic, cognitive mechanism to explain how the complex human relational capacity along with the underlying neural architecture is "enabled to commune with and love God and experience God's

love" (p. 349).

Might Bowlby disapprove of these Christian psychology revisions? Perhaps. Still, it is worth noting that these alterations are consistent with Bowlby's position that the IWM is formed through the actual experience of mutuality and not the result of purely individually generated, internal, dynamic activity. An attachment perspective depicting spiritual longing as mediated in totality via an IWM shaped solely via human experience may retain a certain vestige from the psychoanalytic establishment. A mediated view could be described as projection. This fundamental ego defense mechanism covers perceived inner inadequacies and threats by the creation of a supreme protector. Our God is no projection of an ultimate attachment figure; Yahweh is. Bowlby might indeed raise an amused eyebrow at this assertion that genuine interaction with a transcendent being captures reality and thus counters the presumption of God as projected attachment figure.

### **Transposition and Composition**

Corrective emotional relationships (CER) refer to a redemptive interpersonal connection. These reflect a range of curative and nurturing experiences indicative of the relational provisions available through Jesus Christ himself (i.e. Word, Light, Bread, etc.; Greggo, 2007). CER is an attempt to depict the type of constructive relational encounter the Lord provides to maintain, heal, or refresh the IWM. Those familiar with the psychodynamic phrase corrective emotional experience (CEE) will recognize the alteration made for the sake of transposition. The traditional understanding of the essence of CEE is the liberation of inner affective turmoil stirred by past trauma and relational frustrations. The release of repressed emotion or catharsis has long been valued for its therapeutic effect. The alert reader will recognize that CEE derives its curative power as the unconscious erupts into consciousness while id, ego and super-ego arrive at a favorable resolution of a presumed internal conflict. Despite the widespread gravitation amongst therapists, including Christians, toward interpersonal approaches and an apparent consensus on recognition of the core relational contribution to the healing process, CEE persists in our psychological lingo.

Is not the corrective benefit of catharsis the result of interpersonal "safety" experienced in an established therapeutic alliance? The internal sensation of emotional relief may bring pleasure and release. CER occurs when there is comprehension of a dedicated, loving other. Growth is displayed by adjustments in interpersonal activity. Therefore, the recommendation is for an intentional shift in language from CEE to CER. This best expresses the relational essence of these healing, nurturing encounters. When a favorable interpersonal connection is made, it is facilitated by creation or redemptive grace. The result is novel input of relational intimacy passing through the IWM. While



no immediate effect may be visible, such a vibrant, emotional, person-to-person encounter induces change within the biological and psychosocial orders. CER can bring about the healing or maturation of character that will eventually be evidenced in the ethical or spiritual domains. The outcome evidence would be heightened effort in virtuous living and a brighter reflection of God's glory.

Christian psychology has a proposed language for depicting similar corrective change that is particularly well suited for assimilating the text of Scripture. Internalization has a cognitive psychological component to establish understanding and memory for recalling the nature of an object. Internalization is also a carditive psychological activity for it determines the worth of an object by affixing an approach/avoidance valence. Through the process of carditive internalization, the heart moves individuals toward or away from others and any associated interpersonal experience. For the Christian, increasing holiness and maturity involves the inner construction and activation of values consistent with God's directives, preferences, and determinations of worth. In this conceptualization, Johnson (2007) draws heavily from classic work by Jonathan Edwards (1746/1971) entitled *Religious Affections*. For Edwards, heart is the organ of the soul responsible for overseeing emotionally laden activity as well as for issuing volitional directives. Cognitive understanding is never separate or isolated from definitions and facts. Understanding does contribute to how inclinations are managed and directed within the heart. When one's heart is occupied by Jesus Christ by grace, behavioral practice in the form of good works and good fruit pours outward from the heart. Consider this description of the result:

Practice is the most proper evidence of trusting in Christ for salvation. The proper signification of the word trust both in common speech and in the Holy Scriptures, is the emboldening and encouragement of a person's mind to run some venture in practice, or in something that he does on the credit of another's sufficiency and faithfulness (Edwards, 1746/1971, p.192).

Christian practice proceeding from a heart occupied by Jesus Christ as Edwards' describes it portrays numerous similarities to the function of a secure IWM. The reliable internalized source inspires loving and intimate action toward others. Based upon these elementary descriptions of the critical functions, it appears feasible to link heart with IWM and carditive internalization with CER. The match in these terms is not identical and admittedly insufficiently developed. Still, it would be difficult to deny the obvious overlap in role, activity, and effect. The bias of the contemporary psychological terms is toward human relationality. The relational core of heart and carditive internalization is a more comprehensive and transpersonal. The biblical narrative for human beings created imago Dei reflects a Triune God. The

relational polarities extend beyond self and others to satisfy an inner spiritual urge to bond to a personal, yet transcendent Trinity. Further fine tuning of the nuances are not necessary for the applications to care groups that follow. Three outcomes demonstrate the benefit of this translation endeavor.

First, translation of IWM requires certain distinctions between human to human and human to divine attachments. One subtle but imperative feature of the biblical construct of heart and divine-human attachment is the absolute necessity of holy fear. Fear is not typically described in the psychological literature in reference to the healthy functioning of the IWM. Fear is characteristic of insecure attachment styles where anxiety and avoidance restrict and reduce relational activity. The healthy IWM relies on attachment figures to psychologically supply restoration through the provision of a safe haven, a resource to buffet suffering and reassurance of value. Are not attachment relationships internalized to produce courage? A secure attachment empowers persons to "take heart" and explore the social world despite latent risk. The secular literature would not be disposed to include the affective component of fear as a favorable feature.

Nonetheless, fear is an essential distinctive to a Christian depiction of a divine-human attachment (Deut. 5:29; 6:2). A Holy God who is eternally omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent stands in a striking contrast to sin-damaged, finite, human souls. Entering an intimate divine-human relationship never permits his love to negate the necessity for respect, awe, humility, and worship. Fear of the Lord in our hearts is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). This Christian contribution to a relational and spiritual metapsychology adds a fear dimension that must be considered in all formation activity aimed at enhancing faith, trust, and assurance. Our loving Triune God is forever an awesome God.

Second, the language associated with carditive internalization, heart, and Christian love is a beautiful faith-based language. It is wonderfully rich and well-suited for soul care efforts conducted in Christian settings. Many professional counselors who are Christian serve in settings where secular practice parameters are plainly in force. Practitioners require potent therapeutic constructs that accurately conceptualize problems, persons and psychotherapeutic process. The contemporary attachment literature has much to offer in this regard (i.e. Steele & Steele, 2008; Wallin, 2007; Johnson & Whiffen, 2006). As long as this translation is applied with intentionality, that relational anthropology may be used without hesitation by clinicians committed to a Christian worldview. It can be utilized with either Christian or non-believing clients.

Some clinicians with CP ideals may wish to abide solely in the richness of our Christian tradition and its language of "heart" and carditive internalization. Why yield to the clinical pressure to contextualize and interpret soul care efforts within

a scientific, medically controlled paradigm? For the sake of integrity, clinicians with a rigid Christian language and concept restrictions may need to seriously evaluate whether to post professional secular credentials or accept third-party funding. However, an enrichment outcome of this translation exercise is the liberty to incorporate attachment-oriented, empirically-supported approaches into professional-client relationships while retaining an ultimately Christian, soul care perspective. The doxological purpose remains central even as the curative process is described in language well known within the contemporary therapeutic community.

The third enriching benefit directs us to consider a treatment modality ideal for delivery of soul care. The IWM can be pictured as the relational lens through which we read the biblical text as well as those who communicate the text to us. The IWM construct combined with CER offers a soul care conceptualization that is congruent with heart healing, nourishment, and internalization. If the connection between the biblical portrait of heart and IWM has merit, it offers a means to move believers toward the desirable end of increasing our God oriented affections (i.e. Edwards, 1746/1971).

Johnson (2007) is fond of referencing Calvin's image of the Scripture as "spectacles." Scripture is the corrective lens that enables Christians to make sense of the world, non-biblical texts, and human beings as living texts who reflect the Creator. It is my contention that when the Scripture is experienced within an intimate, redeemed community, it is not simply a set of spectacles; it becomes a living, laser correction procedure. How can such a grand claim be supported? The Holy Spirit activates divine and human relational encounter to facilitate the appropriation of divine speech-acts (illocutions) into the heart "so that their divine perlocutionary intent is realized fittingly in the manifestation of one's life" (Johnson, 2007; p.499). Restated, scripture internalized via relationship (mediated and direct) changes one's heart. When the steady flow of divine and brotherly love is experienced to the point of motivating emotions, cognitions, and volition, the IWM is reshaped. One's relational hub, the governing grid that perpetually interprets people and texts, is faithfully sanctified and transformed to increasingly reflect God's perspective, values, and loves. When personal identity is defined as embodied personal relations, soul care as solace for sojourners is fundamentally a relational process. This summary is offered by Vanhoozer (1997):

From the perspective of Christian faith, there is no self-knowledge apart from the knowledge of God in Christ. To know oneself, as one whose individual and social being has been decisively shaped by Jesus Christ, is to accept gratefully one's vocation as a responsive and responsible communicative agent who exists in covenantal relation with oneself, with

others, and with God. (p. 184)

CER is redemptive encounter that recreates responsive and responsible communication with self, others, and God. Scripture, the Word of God, is internalized by love for the Father and the Son as the Holy Spirit heals the heart.

### Concluding Methodological Challenge

Johnson's (2007) *Foundations* has four chapters on inwardness where discussion of carditive internalization is prominent. There is minimal reference to the benefit of fellowship within small groups. This premium method for delivery of psychotherapy, counseling, and spiritual direction might be one that CP proponents may wish to address in earnest. Not only are small groups effective and efficient, but this method of furthering Christian formation has been a powerful method of pastoral care in both historical and contemporary evangelical ministries. I am convinced that the emerging CP proposal would find a compatible forum in small group care for carditive internalization (Pistole, 1997). Four propositions related to CER and carditive internalization are now offered to support this challenge.

First, convening a small group and engaging participants will by necessity activate interpersonal patterns and preferences. Relational communication or "process" is displayed as members function within this miniature social world. Features of the typically hidden interior of one's IWM are outwardly portrayed in visible, here-and-now interpersonal activity. The emotions and will of one's heart is exposed in verbal and non-verbal communication. Unlike private, individually-oriented modalities that rely exclusively on self-report and recollection regarding relational values or miscommunication mishaps, groups bring relational processes into immediate experience. As emotions rise, actions are evident and communication happens. Groups allow not only for the expression of cognitions regarding objective beliefs, but carditive worth is displayed in behavior, choices, empathy, and passion. There is no better forum to explore discrepancies between love intended, expressed, delivered, and received.

Second, in contrast to individualized, counselor-counsee helping arrangements, groups allow for natural social exchange where aid is offered and received. There is reciprocal give and take. Soul care models that are dyadic and hierarchical do not permit as much freedom for altruistic activity in therapeutic conversation. This critique applies even when a God-inclusive triangular interaction is invoked. The group modality rests in its entirety upon reciprocal interaction and mutual edification.

Third, there is recognition amongst those who conduct groups that opportunities routinely surface to explore the recapitulation of roles and patterns associated with family of origin expectations and rituals. When relational friction is felt or intense interpersonal frustrations play out, groups offer a

stage optimally suited to openly cultivate heart-to-heart connections. Forgiveness and blessing can be coached, realized, and comprehended. Failed attempts to communicate can be corrected while invested others facilitate skills and fortify courage.

Fourth, group interactions expose hidden aspects of the heart and sin-rooted patterns associated with limiting personality styles, dysfunctions, and disorders. There is no better setting to identify these patterns, begin remediation, and thereby prepare members of the family of God for fuller participation in the fellowship of the saints. Small groups stimulate the experience of communion. Embedded and inherent struggles that inhibit intimate connections are revealed. When addressed, there is increased capacity to participate in the body of Christ. Soul care in groups is a helping modality consistent with a deep appreciation for the beauty of the bride of Christ as healing community.

Evangelical traditions, both Wesleyan and Reformed, have contributed more to spiritual formation traditions than firmly upholding the Word and God, defending sound theology, and clear articulation of salvation by faith. Along with the importance of proclamation of the Gospel through preaching, the emphasis on personal piety, direct spiritual experience, and the priesthood of all believers is vitally noteworthy. Pietistic tradition has long made use of the intimacy, transparency, immediacy, and accountability found within small groups to promote holy living and the expression of love. Small groups are a distinctive of our Christian heritage. Why should these approaches be absent in the delivery of soul care? Furthermore, the contemporary church already has a vast collection of small group options for discipleship, pastoral care, overcoming addictions, and recovering from losses. These movements are an imperative and exciting aspect of ministry today (Greggo, 2008). These ministries exist despite a lack of leadership, ownership, nurture, or constructive direction offered by any current Christian counseling or formation perspective. The grassroots traditions of AA and the now passé encounter group movement may have done more to shape the soul care practices of the ministry groups observed today than biblical counselors and integrationists combined! The CP proposal would suggest that distinctive soul care methods from our evangelical past be refurbished and refreshed to serve Christians in the present. Why not own the group modality for the sake of furthering an authentic, applied ecclesiology of soul care that targets the heart?

In conclusion, recall that the attachment framework challenged the dominant psychoanalytic tradition. There is one further matter to address. Counseling and therapy as a private, professional, individually-focused activity had roots in a hierarchical, medical model. Historically, this was a paternalistic approach. Soul care professionals today may have moved their chairs from behind the couch, but have we yielded the authority associated

with therapist as expert healer, priest, and mediator of redemptive grace? I unapologetically endorse the beneficial components of the dyadic, therapist-client relationship for professional engagement. But I passionately envision another model taking hold in communal ministry settings. Believers can and do minister soul-to-soul and heart-to-heart. Redemptive corrective emotional relationships are not restricted to counselors, spiritual directors, or soul care professionals. Facilitation of carditive internalization does occur within Christian fellowship (*koinonia*), and believers are a holy priesthood. As advocates of a distinctive Christian psychology search out the secular and modernist assumptions infused in psychological theories and therapeutic techniques, why not evaluate the entrenched, nearly exclusive reliance on an individualistic methodology? An increase in well-crafted group approaches is a realistic option for the cultivation of hearts toward passionate religious affections. Communion with the Lord and others in secure fellowship where Jesus Christ is lifted up can fortify and produce a secure and humble IWM. Let us combine our helping methodology with a refined Christian psychology and a robust evangelical ecclesiology to promote heart health and healing.

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# Commentaries on Stephen P. Greggo's "Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups"

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 Stephen P. Greggo's "Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups." Dr. Greggo responds to these commentaries in the next article.

## Binding Up the Broken Hearted: Christian Soul-Care Groups for the Deeply Wounded

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Stephen P. Greggo presents a thorough and well thought out rationale for group work within the context of a Christian worldview. Having worked extensively to establish Christian care groups in my area of expertise and influence, I found Greggo's article hopeful and insightful for "counselors who serve as acting coaches," and who choose to walk the arduous journey toward healing alongside the deeply wounded. Greggo's use of attachment, in particular, rings true against the backdrop of my experience with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The push/pull attachment style set in motion by childhood trauma produces difficulty in almost every relationship experienced by the adult survivor whose early-in-life relational wounds have resulted in self-isolation, a lack of appropriate boundary setting, difficulty trusting others, and ultimately, difficulty trusting God. My response to Greggo's article will address topics related to my research and experience with the adult survivor's "relational lens," the arduous task of rebuilding, and the Christian care group's ability to facilitate "translation" and a deeper desire for intimacy with Christ.

### Relational Lens

*Attachment.* A child's instinct is to attach to its caregiver, but when caregiver is also abuser, the child feels a desperate urge to recoil. In order to ensure survival, the child overrides his or her urge to recoil, which results in an attachment born of the need to survive (van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 2006). "Attachment trauma occurs when the person to whom a child looks for comfort and safety becomes the direct source of his or her fear and distress," which creates a gaping relational, wound in the Internal Working Model (IWM: Sibcy, 2007, p. 25). This "attachment trauma" sets up an alteration in the limbic system of the traumatized child's brain by beginning to "wire itself for either safety or danger" (Sibcy, 2007, p. 25). Although it requires a commitment by the "coaches" and care group members, the aberrant attachment

that results from "core beliefs programmed into the brain through emotionally charged relationship experiences" can be altered, as suggested by Greggo, through the IWM. However, there is a formidable roadblock to healing via the IWM—ambivalence, the relational result of attachment trauma.

*Ambivalence.* Ambivalence in the adult survivor of childhood abuse is the feeling of being "torn in two...having two apparently contradictory feelings that are happening simultaneously" (Anderson, 2009). Survivors of childhood abuse often react to challenging, frustrating or intimidating situations from a base of anger—anger that has been stuffed, pushed down, and ignored for years, and which can result in attention-seeking, out-of-control emotions and aberrant behaviors (Allender, 1990; Open Hearts Ministry, 2006). Because the sexual abuse of a child is relational, every subsequent relationship the survivor experiences has the potential for the fallout of abuse. Behaviors born in an abuse victim's childhood to promote survival (e.g., dissociation, numbing, aggression) grow into a style of relating that is not necessary (or beneficial) in adulthood. These self-maintained behaviors can create distance and sometimes manifest abusive responses—emotional and/or physical—in some survivors of childhood abuse. The no longer beneficial behaviors of survival, in turn, only serve to continue the cycle of abuse (Open Hearts Ministry, 2006). The abused becomes the abuser. A Christian soul-care group can help the survivor recognize and refrain from these destructive behaviors by offering a safe place to look fully into the psychological and spiritual damage that has been done. As Greggo asserts, "the intentional effort to interface modern psychological material with an orthodox Christian, biblical worldview" can be expanded to include "guided community as soul care".

*Artificial Life.* Survivors typically guard the secret of their "attachment trauma" for 30, 40—even 50 years. This hiding sought to secure survival in childhood produces adults who continue to relate in the same soul-numbing, mechanical, and artificial fashion. Langberg (1999) explains:

Abuse destroys relationship. Instead of being known, we are hidden. Instead of

being loved, we are used. Instead of having a voice, we are silenced. Instead of having an impact on life and others, we do not matter. The lessons learned in such an environment are powerful. They are also full of lies. These lies are assumed to be truth. Relationships become painful, frightening, chaotic places. We either relentlessly pursue relationships because of the longings we cannot still, although we abhor ourselves for having them, or we fear and avoid relationships because of the danger they bring. (p. 121)

Reclaiming and reprogramming the altered limbic system cannot be effectively sustained without relational redemption of the adult survivor's traumatized attachment schemata – the IWM (Sibcy, 2007). Greggo beautifully describes the process of this relational redemption as soul-care, which “seeks to increase the flow of the Creator’s love through a Christian’s heart out to others and back to Him”. Relational circuits disconnected in childhood by “attachment trauma” can be reconnected internally (IWM) by the Spirit of God through a community of authentic, loving, Christ-centered, change-inducing, consistent relationship building soul-care groups, which seek to complete the circuit and restore relational life. This process has been successfully demonstrated in soul-care group ministries (e.g., Open Hearts, 2006) that adhere to a Christian, orthodox, biblical worldview for reaching and restoring the relationally wounded.

## Rebuilding

*Christian Context.* As Greggo asserts, facilitating healing to the deeply wounded through a Christian-based group experience can seldom be effectively accomplished unless group leaders (mental health professionals as well as lay leaders) invite and recognize the primary role of the Holy Spirit. Our Sovereign Lord came to bind up the broken hearted, to set free those who are held emotionally captive by their abusive past and caught in the tug-of-war of ambivalence (Isaiah 61:1-3). Adult survivors often have a malignant mistrust of Divine as well as human efforts to offer safety, solace, and an enriched life that consists of more than mere survival.

Greggo also points out that the task of rebuilding shattered lives requires a uniquely Christian psychological perspective. As modeled by the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the New Testament, the “restorative work of the Holy Spirit (*alone*)...promotes effective ways of relating to God and others” (italics mine). This is particularly true in adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Working with adults wounded as children through the abusive acts of caregivers, family members, clergy, and friends must be undertaken with the greatest care to ensure safety and prevent further wounding (Allender, 1990; Herman, 1992; van der Kolk et al., 2006). Nehemiah knew what it meant to serve as a “director” or “midwife of a text’s performance, the

mediator between the word written and the word enacted with and before others” (Vanhooser, 2010, p. 9). Consider Nehemiah’s directive role as it pertains to working with his countrymen to restore the ruined walls of Jerusalem (Open Hearts Ministry, 2006):

Nehemiah faced the reality of his own exile and the devastation of his nation and his people (Nehemiah 1:1-3). He allowed himself to feel the pain of the situation (1:4). His heart was broken. He called out to God for help (1:5-2:18). Not only did Nehemiah face the damage, he looked carefully at it; he spent three days walking around the walls of Jerusalem surveying the damage (2:11-20). Nehemiah gathered a group of individuals who would help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem by committing to work on the walls in front of their own homes first (3:1-32). During the arduous journey of rebuilding, Nehemiah anticipated opposition; he kept his eyes as well as the eyes of the people turned toward God (4:1-23; 6:1-19). He demonstrated dependence on God’s resources. Nehemiah cared for the people by confronting leaders who were taking advantage of the devastation and arduous task by enslaving the children of those working to rebuild before providing food for them (4:10, 5:1-13). Finally, Nehemiah demonstrated a desire for deeper intimacy with God. He led the people of Jerusalem to renew relationship with God and with one another.<sup>1</sup>

Nehemiah provided a beautiful picture of how to yield to the “primary direction” of the Holy Spirit in order to be used as a guide to the people of Jerusalem (Vanhooser, 2010, p. 9). Nehemiah modeled restoration. He did not just tell others how to work—he worked alongside others on a journey toward redemption.

*Community.* Every individual has a story. A pastor’s, group leader’s, counselor’s, or psychologist’s story may not be one of deep devastation such as is chronicled by an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse, but everyone’s story includes elements of longing, disappointment and loss. Wounds are universal. Counselors, who are genuine members of a Christian soul-care group, rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, work alongside fellow members and model behaviors of authenticity, empathy, repentance, and renewal; they lead with a clear picture of the ultimate goal—restoration and intimacy with the Wounded Healer, Christ.

Greggo explains:

When a favorable interpersonal connection is made, it is facilitated by creation or redemptive grace. The result is novel input of relational intimacy passing through the IWM. While no immediate effect may be visible, such a vibrant, emotional, person-to-person encounter induces change within

the biological and psychosocial orders. CER [*Corrective Emotional Relationships*] can bring about the healing or maturation of character that will eventually be evidenced in the ethical or spiritual domains. The outcome evidence would be heightened effort in virtuous living and a brighter reflection of God's glory. (*italics mine*)

## Renewal

*Equip.* The impact of healing via the IWM at the divine direction of the Holy Spirit within the context of a Christian soul-care group provides members with genuine relationships born of authentic attachment to the Holy Spirit. Fellow group members assist to usher in renewed longings for a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. Greggo describes the Spirit's impact on the IWM:

A human-divine attachment may indeed foster stability and well-being in a manner similar to human bonds; but in contrast to human attachments, the inner security it produces inspires a divine dependence that results in love, humility, obedience, and reverence...scripture internalized via relationship (mediated *and* direct) changes one's heart. When the steady flow of divine and brotherly love is experienced to the point of motivating emotions, cognitions, and volition, the IWM is reshaped.

God truly does what he promises to do; he "proclaims liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners"...He gives "the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:2-3, NASV).

*Encourage.* I have heard many, many adult survivors' stories; heartbreaking, life-altering stories of grief and brokenness that were offered to others but never validated. Gut twisting words choked out through tears that "helpers" tried to stuff into neat little boxes, tie up with colorful ribbons, label "fixed" and hand back to the writhing in pain, re-victimized survivor. It does not work. Life is not neat and clean. Abuse is messy, chaotic. It leaves stains that cannot be tidied up with the soap and water of man's solution or scrubbed clean with a concerted effort to make everything go away. Few Christians want to embrace the fact that "the Christian faith does not remove us from trauma, but gives us the strength to move through it" (Zonnebelt-Smeenge & Devries, 2007, p. 22). With the help and encouragement of others, one can get through the chaos. There is life beyond abuse.

You will need to understand your guilt, separate lies from truth, hear truth over and over again, study what God says, and then turn around and do it all over again. The task is difficult. It is not impossible... Healing is possible...because God longs

for you to live in the freedom that truth provides and will patiently repeat what you need to hear from him as long as it takes. (Langberg, 1999, p. 154)

The victim's lament, "No one understands. No one cares" (Putman, 2009, p. 80), is dispelled by the redemptive touch of fellow travelers who point them to the Wounded Healer. As helpers, we are called to follow and lead; to encourage and pray; to stand with and support. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). If Jesus will "patiently repeat what I need to hear from him as long as it takes" (Langberg, 1999, p. 154) then I am commanded to do the same. Genuine encouragement is a key component of Christian soul-care that is multiplied exponentially in the context of a group environment.

*Entrust to God.* The ultimate change is not up to any one group member, counselor, teacher, director, or coach. Change of "heart," reshaping the IWM, is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is part of the grand redemptive undertaking of sanctification—or salvation. Greggo highlights this truth as well, "CER [*corrective emotional relationship*] is redemptive encounter that recreates responsive and responsible communication with self, others, and God. Scripture, the Word of God, is internalized by love for the Father and the Son as the Holy Spirit heals the heart" (*italics mine*). The beautiful truth is that I am invited to cooperate with this grand redemptive work of God as a conduit of His love. What a marvelous calling!

## In Sum

Guided by the Divine Director (the Holy Spirit), Christian soul-care facilitators serve as midwives who witness "translation;" adult survivors of childhood abuse realign relational lenses, work alongside journey companions as they diligently rebuild and, in turn, help others rebuild broken lives. Christian soul-care group members experience transformation of "heart"—"corrected emotional relationships"—that radiate a more genuine and glorious reflection of Christ. Greggo's article encourages others to engage in this mode of soul-care delivery—this divine process—with clarity and a call to action.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>From *Leaders Journey Guide*, (pp. 24, 26), by Open Hearts Ministry (2006), United State of America, Author. Copyright (2000) by Open Hearts Ministry. Adapted with permission.

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## Integration and Attachment Theory: A Response to Greggo

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We greatly appreciate the opportunity to reflect on Greggo's well-reasoned, creative, and psychologically and theologically informed article. Greggo's effort to connect a significant psychological concept with a scriptural concept in accordance with Johnson's (2007) Christian Psychology (CP) method is to be applauded. Greggo provides a multi-level analysis in which he articulates several substantial contributions to CP and the Christian counseling world in general.

Perhaps our most salient observation is that, for us, as Christian therapists and educators, immersed in the integration literature of the past several decades, this article, published in the *Christian Psychology* journal, expresses an excellent example

of the integration of theology and psychology. As such, it points to the fundamental overlap, rather than dichotomy, of the integration movement of past decades and the relatively recent contributions of Christian Psychology as a unique focus in Christian counseling. We appreciate this convergence in contrast to the tendency in academic contexts to differentiate and polarize.

Several questions emerged for us that we will unpack below, followed by three topics which will expand on Greggo's contribution, recognizing that one article, even with Greggo's thoroughness, cannot address all implications and nuances of an issue adequately.

## Questions and Clarifications

Following Johnson's (2007) method of comprehension, evaluation, translation, transposition and composition, Greggo describes the psychological contributions of Bowlby and others regarding the IWM and links this to the biblical concept of heart, allowing the biblical concept to refine the psychological concept. Several questions come to mind: (a) what is the biblical concept of heart? (b) is it appropriate to link a variously understood biblical metaphor "heart" with the relatively precise psychological concept "IWM"? (c) is there a missing piece in the CP method being utilized? and (d) is the concept of attachment to God as different from attachment to people as Greggo suggests?

## Definition of Heart in Scripture

Greggo refers to the "heart" as a "construct." a "biblical metaphor." and a "concept." In addition, at other points, he reifies the word with the phrases "it is the *place* within human beings" and "one's heart is *occupied* by Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). What this indicates is that "heart" is not easily defined. Perhaps it is not even the intention of Scripture to define it or give us a thorough human anthropology. We are reminded of Beck and Demarest's (2005) caution: "Clearly, then, the principal anthropological terms in Scripture are not technically precise by modern standards; consequently, a full-orbed psychology cannot be constructed from them" (p. 136). In fact, in Scripture, heart is used interchangeably with soul, spirit, and even flesh (Beck & Demarest, 2005). The components of human personality are variable in Scripture as evidenced in Beck's (1999) reflection on the biblical concepts used in the versions of the greatest commandment (p. 142). It is our contention that the definition of heart used in Greggo's article overreaches regarding the biblical meaning of the concept.

## Linking the Concepts

Greggo defines the IWM as "a cognitive-affective-motivational schema built from an individual's experience that provides ongoing regulation of his or her interpersonal world." Therefore, the role of the IWM is very specific. It is like a template that has been



formed as a result of early relationships, which then becomes the lens through which other individuals are viewed and judged to be safe, or unsafe, worthy of investment or not. Another way of looking at it could be as an appraisal system which impacts behavioral relational responses. While the IWM could, therefore, be considered a very influential personality mechanism, it falls short of the rich complexity of the concept of heart in Scripture, which at least to some degree points to the core of the person. While Greggo is not equating the two concepts, his use of phrases such as “link” and “connected to” lends itself to this impression, as does the title of the article “Internal Working Model as Heart.”

Another way of expressing our concerns is to make a comparison between robots and persons. A robot can be programmed to respond to certain cues, and even adapt to new experiences, but it is not human. The IWM is not who we are, it is not our identity, though it certainly has an impact on how we think, feel, and, especially, relate. The biblical term heart is much closer to what we mean when we define personhood and personal identity.

The purposes of the two concepts also differ. The IWM is conceptualized in order to make sense of specific patterns of interpersonal experience and to provide a theoretical basis for clinical interventions. The preciseness and utility of the concept is quite focused in contrast to the biblical definition and purposes of the heart. Heart is, to quote Greggo, “the comprehensive core of our knowledge and love of God.” Therefore, rather than looking at the heart and the IWM as almost interchangeable concepts, we suggest that the IWM be viewed as one aspect of the heart, or as a mechanism used by the heart. This may be, in fact, what Greggo intended to communicate. Hopefully our comments might help to clarify this.

### **A Missing Piece in the CP Method**

Another question we have relates to the CP method of evaluation of non-biblical concepts. Greggo, citing Vanhoozer, suggests that psychological concepts of human reality need to be “deepened, or perhaps disciplined, by explicitly Christian beliefs.” What if the reverse might also be valuable? Perhaps there are times, due to the diversity and complexity of God’s creation, when a psychological concept like the IWM might broaden our understanding, though not be the equivalent of a biblical concept like heart? This suggests a more interactive, mutually-enriching method in which psychology can illustrate and expand theological/biblical concepts, and theology/Bible can deepen and correct psychological concepts.

### **Attachment to God Contrasted With Attachment to Humans**

While we acknowledge that attachment to God and attachment to humans will be different in some aspects, for example, no human attachment relationship involves an omnipotent, omniscient other, we are not convinced that as much dissimilarity

exists as Greggo argues and uses to support the “evaluation and translation” steps of the CP method. Greggo suggests that the uniqueness of the attachment relationship with God is an essential critique of attachment theory. For instance, Greggo refers to Roberts’ contention that one of the ways in which attachment to God differs from attachment to other people is that there is much more to our relationship to God than a sense of security. While this is certainly true, the same point can be made for any intimate relationship. The premise behind attachment theory is not that security is the *only* focus of relationships, rather, that a secure relational base is prerequisite to developing other aspects of relationship (emotional bonds, personality, communication, etc.; Bowlby, 1988).

Greggo also references Roberts with respect to the asymmetrical nature of the Divine-human relationship, making the point that this is a primary way in which relationship to God differs from human relationships. While it is true that friendships and romantic relationships are typically symmetrical, not all human relationships are symmetrical. For example, while there is intimacy in the relationship between parent and child, the relationship is asymmetrical in that there is a power differential between the child and the parent. Bowlby referred to the parent as the “stronger and wiser other,” a phrase which Kirkpatrick applied to an attachment relationship with God (1997, p. 131; cf. Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). From a Trinitarian theology perspective, God the Father, furthers the appropriateness of this analogy. Other examples of intimate, yet asymmetrical relationships are teacher-student, mentor-mentee, and counselor-counselee relationships. While these relationships can become more symmetrical over time, we agree with Miner’s (1997) observation that our relationship with God can also develop greater reciprocity over time. Miner suggests that initially an attachment relationship with God *the Father* is sought in order to provide a secure base, but with increased security, a more symmetrical relationship with the person of Christ may be experienced.

### **Expanding the Conversation Relationship to God: Mediated and Direct IWMs**

Greggo referred to Miner’s (2007) concepts of both “a *mediated* and *direct* IWM as operative for divine human attachment.” Similar to Hall, Fujikawa, Halcrow, Hill, and Delaney’s (2009) distinction between implicit and explicit spirituality, these concepts could help shed light on the conflicting results of research related to the correspondence and compensation hypotheses. For example, individuals whose IWMs have been negatively impacted through inadequate care by primary caregivers, but who have been able to establish a secure relationship with God, have made use of a direct IWM, offering support for the compensation hypothesis. As there is such a discrepancy between how these individuals relate to God and how they relate to other people, they

could potentially be viewed as having two separate IWM's; one that regulates relationships with other people, and the other that functions specifically in relationship to God. An IWM in which relationship with God is mediated through human relationships, could imply one IWM, fitting with the correspondence hypothesis. For these individuals, healthy relationships with primary caregivers would be a prerequisite for a healthy relationship to God.

We suspect that for many people the IWM has been formed through a combination of mediated and direct means with respect to relationship to God, an idea championed by Miner (2007). However, we feel that it would be a mistake to downplay the power of the IWM with respect to relationship to God as mediated by human relationships, particularly for those with insecure attachment styles. Perhaps it might be helpful to view mediated and direct IWMs as on a continuum, with individuals falling on different points.

### **Trauma and the Broken-Hearted**

The above discussion on attachment to God has particular clinical relevance to trauma survivors which Greggo mentions. The IWM's of these individuals are often negatively impacted because of the relational nature of their trauma (Lyons-Ruth, Dutra, Schuder, & Bianchi, 2006). However, even trauma survivors, who have developed an IWM based on their direct experience of God as an attachment relationship, can develop a healthy view of God and a beneficial relationship with him. Such clients, as Greggo suggests, could benefit from a therapeutic approach that relies on our "beautiful faith-based language," and specifically benefit from discussion of the biblical concept of heart and the process of "carditive internalization." Use of a CP-informed approach to counseling would make the most of their relational resources. The therapeutic relationship with the counselor, a relationship likely impacted by the client's damaged "human" IWM, could, therefore, be more in the background because God, and a direct relationship with him, would be viewed as the primary therapeutic relationship.

If, however, a trauma survivor more closely fits the correspondence hypothesis, where relationship with God has been mediated by a trauma-damaged IWM, a counseling approach which relies solely on biblical language could be counterproductive. Instead, using the developing therapeutic relationship, what Bowlby identified as the secure base from which exploration and positive adaptation of the IWM should occur (Bowlby, 1988), will result in healing. As the IWM becomes healthier, the potential for a positive relationship with God opens up. At this juncture a counseling model that uses more explicitly biblical language could be helpful. If attempted prior to this point in the healing process, the counselee may prematurely terminate, perhaps with the unfortunate result of their IWM being further damaged. As mentioned previously, few

individuals likely fit totally at one end or the other of our proposed direct/mediated continuum. However, even if a combination of direct and mediated IWM's are used by specific counselees, the most appropriate counseling approach could be chosen based on where they fall on the continuum.

### **Mission: The Heart of the Matter**

Research by Schmitt, et al. (2004) on 62 cultural regions throughout the world, suggested that attachment, including attachment styles, is a useful cross-cultural concept. Utilizing attachment theory may, therefore, be a helpful strategy in understanding and connecting to other cultures. This is an important contribution to how the Church can fulfill its mission to make Christ known throughout the world.

While we struggle with seeing how the overall thrust of CP is at its core missional (see Gingrich, 2008), Greggo's emphasis on corrective emotional relationships (CERs) and group process as beneficial for living out a biblical ecclesiology, is clearly consistent with a missiological emphasis. If our goal as Christians is to assist in building God's Kingdom by extending Christ's love to all people, then doing so through the mechanism of group life is an essential strategy for mission. Even in our individualistic Western culture, we see group experiences being used successfully for outreach and for building Christian community. How much more might groups be relevant for collectivist cultures in which relationships are central to a person's sense of identity? In fact, it may be that in many cultures outside of the West, IWMs are essentially developed and expressed solely in the context of relationship, family, peer groups, and communities, rather than in relation to one's self and in one-on-one relationships. Thus, to bring healing to an individual's IWM, the group may be essential. In biblical terms, the individual's heart then, is always a heart in relationship, defined by, and healed through, relationship with God and others. The possibilities for extending this type of thinking beyond the limits of Western conceptions of identity are absolutely essential.

One caution, however, is that in our contemporary endorsement of cultural reflection, and our critiques of Western psychological and relational concepts, we are at risk of furthering our Western imperialism when we assume that groups would be more helpful for all collectivist cultures. The goal should be to respect the fact that God is at work in all cultures, and our job is to collaboratively discover what is healing within a specific culture (Smith et al., 2010). For instance, the shame dynamic present in the culture may mitigate against the kind of self-disclosure that we assume is a core healing component of group experience. Thus, groups may not always be the best way to access and influence people's IWMs, even within group-oriented cultures. When we extend Western concepts, whether theological or psychological, the cultural applications are complex. Nevertheless, the role of groups, whether in formalized counseling,

or in more informal psychoeducational settings, should be considered as a powerful means for healing hearts and helping IWMs move toward more secure patterns of attachment.

### Conclusion: Taking it to Heart

We find attachment theory, in general, as well as many of the specific concepts within the theory, helpful both theoretically and clinically. Furthermore, we see many points of intersection between the theory and the biblical worldview. This is a wonderful example of how general and specific revelation coincide. While we resist the temptation to equate psychological and theological concepts, much can be gained by a collaborative exploration and expansion of concepts both in the direction of biblical to psychological and psychological to biblical.

For us, the significance of Greggo's article lies in the challenge for the church, the body of Christ, to take seriously its relational mandate. Why is it that the church has reluctantly embraced small group models of ministry, when many of the revival movements throughout church history have been rooted in relational experiences in small groups? In addition, Christian counseling has been reluctant to utilize the power of CERs in group contexts. As a result, it appears that the bulk of small group ministries in the church are lay initiated, lay led, and are grass-root movements rather than professionally sponsored. Greggo's article, as well as his other writings (2007, 2008), are challenges to build attachment to each other and attachment to God through the relational mechanisms God has provided. This is crucial for the survival of the church and the mission of God in a post-modern, post-Christian world.

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## Secure Attachments and Virtuous Hearts: Further Distinctions and Connections

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I was pleased to read Stephen Greggo's nuanced and thoughtful paper, relating the biblical concept of the heart with the psychological concept of the internal working model (IWM). Scholarly work that meaningfully brings together concepts from the Bible and from psychology is quite rare; it would appear that it is easier to talk about how theology and psychology relate than to actually relate them. My comments in this paper should be taken as generally supportive of the direction of Greggo's work, with one fairly substantial alternative conceptualization of the relationship between the heart and the IWM, and a disagreement with respect to the implications of his model for pastoral care.

### *How Are They Related?*

Greggo proposes that the heart and the IWM are equivalent concepts. I propose instead that their relationship is more complex. I tentatively suggest a model where the attachment-based IWM represents only part of the heart, with the IWM consisting of a set of foundational functions that are necessary but not sufficient for the full functioning of the heart. To clarify this distinction, let's begin by asking two questions: What is a "good" IWM? And what is a "good" heart? In other words, for each of these constructs, what do they look like when they are operating well?

Let's begin with the IWM. According to Greggo, "It establishes an internal grid for regulating degrees of intimacy for a lifetime by assessing promise or threat through instantaneous processing of each explicit speech-act in conjunction with implicit experience." Other authors add additional details, based on existing research in attachment theory. Rholes and Simpson (2004) call IWMs the psychological structure that underlies different attachment styles, and that orchestrates behavior, cognition, and affect in close relationships. Hazan, Gur-Yaish, and Campa (2004) further clarify that "the proximal function of attachment bonds, at any age, is to modulate individuals' emotional states and reactions in a manner that is conducive to effective coping and full exploratory engagement—that is, to reduce anxiety and induce felt security" (p. 77). And finally, secure attachments allow for the development of stable, somewhat autonomous, positive models of self that allow people to move confidently into the world (Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2004). So "good" IWMs, or, as they are known in attachment theory, secure IWMs, allow for realistic and intimate relationships, for effective coping with the ups and downs of life ("emotional modulation"), for stable and effective self-concepts, and consequently for full engagement and participation in life.

What does a "good heart" look like? Greggo

notes that the biblical notion of the heart represents "the center of thought, affection, reflection, resolve, and religious vitality . . . is the source of moral evil, is indwelt by Jesus Christ and is the comprehensive core of our knowledge and love of God." With the heart we not only feel, love and hate but also think, act, and remember (Proverbs 23;7-8); it represents who we truly are (Proverbs 27:19; Coe & Hall, 2010). Ultimately, the good heart must orient us toward accomplishing the most important commandment, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39 NLT). And Jesus furthermore makes it clear that the way we relate—the way we love—stems from our heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Coe & Hall, 2010).

One striking similarity between the IWM and the heart immediately stands out. The capacity for intimate relationships, grounded in a secure IWM, can be considered our capacity to love others well. When put that way, it suggests a strong link to the biblical notion of the heart, although the attachment-based love is still limited to mutuality in romantic and friendship relationships, and to the ability to momentarily put aside one's own needs in parental and other caregiving relationships. However, this attachment-based capacity falls short of the "agape" notion of love presented biblically as the kind of love modeled for us by God in Jesus Christ, and made possible by his indwelling spirit. In this model of love, not only must we love our spouses with mutuality and our children sacrificially, but we must love everyone in sacrificial ways, valuing others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3)—even our enemies (Luke 6:27). This calls for more than a secure attachment. A secure attachment is likely necessary but not sufficient for agape love.

What the IWM and the heart also share is their automaticity; they are both implicit and automatically influence our perceptions and our reactions to the world around us. To the degree that the IWM is insecure, and that the heart is dominated by what John Coe calls "vice-habits" (Coe & Hall, 2010), they will cause us to act in unloving and even hurtful ways. The literature on earned attachment tells us that corrective emotional experiences with attachment figures can lead to growth in the IWM. But vices require more interventions to be changed. In ways that parallel corrective emotional experiences, we must put them off in Christ and with others (Ephesians 4:22-24).

When we examine these two similarities between the IWM and the heart, the important differences between them also surface. Secure IWMs appear to be necessary for loving relationships and effective living, but something more than secure attachments appear to be necessary to lead to the kinds of virtuous lives to which we are called, which include sacrificial love and virtuous (rather than merely effective)

living (a point that is perhaps hinted at by Roberts, 1997). In other words, I question Greggo's assertion that "[corrective emotional relationships] can bring about the healing or maturation of character that will eventually be evidenced in the ethical or spiritual domains. The outcome evidence would be heightened effort in virtuous living and a brighter reflection of God's glory." This "more than" suggests that secure IWMs may be foundational to achieving a virtuous heart, and that this achievement may require not just secure attachments, but the indwelling Holy Spirit and specific types of growth experiences requiring Christ's empowering love and grace. The nature of these growth experiences remain to be explicated, although the answers are likely found in the current spiritual formation literature and in the long history of literature in Christian spirituality.

Another way of putting it is that depicting the relationship with God as solely an attachment relationship runs the risk of diminishing it. Certainly we need security, but Christian maturity from a number of perspectives suggests that ultimately our relationship with God should mean much more to us, so that we can go through Job-like experiences where our experience of security has been shattered, and still love God and be in relationship with him. Moving from relationship for our sake, for the benefits that we receive (including security), to relationship for God's sake, for who God is, must be the ultimate achievement of the virtuous heart. If the relationship with God remains merely an attachment relationship centered around our felt security, then it remains an immature relationship. This is a theme that has been developed by numerous authors, from both theological and psychological perspectives. To give just one example, Gordon Allport (1950), one of the earliest psychologists of religion, distinguished between immature and mature religion. He saw immature religion as motivated by impulsive self-gratification, serving either a wish-fulfilling or soporific function for self-centered interests. In contrast, mature religion is less of a servant, and more of a master in life. In other words, it is able to put aside self-interest, allowing the person to be what he or she considers of ultimate importance in consistent ways across all domains of life. It would appear that, while a secure attachment relationship with God establishes a foundation for other kinds of relating, it cannot remain only an attachment relationship in maturity. On the other hand, moving beyond a need-based secure attachment requires the foundation of a secure attachment. Only when we feel secure can we give to others without constantly needing to seek affirmation of our security; only when we have a secure self can we give our self away.

### **The Issue of Application**

In addition to this critique of the proposed relationships between the heart and the IWM, I disagree with Greggo's conclusion that the equivalence of the heart and the IWM points primarily to

applications in the context of group modalities. My objection does not have to do with the value of group therapy per se. Group therapy can be very effective, and interpersonal dynamics are often more easily detectable in this context than they are in individual treatment. It would appear that there are strong reasons for employing group therapy in Christian care settings. Rather, my critique has to do with the connection between the concept of attachment-based corrective emotional relationships, and the group application. In a nutshell, the research on attachment relationships suggests that not all relationships are attachment relationships; only intimate, ongoing, security-based relationships serve this function. Relationships among members of a therapy group are unlikely to be the kind of attachment relationships that might move an individual toward earned secure attachment. Nor are the majority of group therapy members likely to have secure attachments themselves. Many people are attracted to therapeutic settings precisely because they have some variant of insecure attachment. However, a secure attachment style is a necessary prerequisite to being a secure attachment figure to another. Furthermore, the group setting limits the intensity of the relationship any individual group member can have with the therapist, who in other contexts might become an attachment figure.

Instead, it would appear that individual psychotherapy relationships have greater potential to affect internal working models than do group relationships. Again, my point here is not to pit group therapy against individual psychotherapy. They both have value, and I agree with Greggo that greater use could be made of group interventions in pastoral settings. My point is simply that the argument set forth by Greggo is more consistent with the kinds of corrective emotional relationships that are available in individual psychotherapy.

In order to support his assertion that group therapy is superior to individual therapy in providing corrective emotional relationships, Greggo makes a number of contrasts between these modalities. I disagree with his portrayal of individual psychotherapy. He states, "Unlike private, individually-oriented modalities that rely exclusively on self-report and recollection regarding relational values or miscommunication mishaps, groups bring relational processes into immediate experience." But the relationship between client and therapist is precisely the point of exploration of relational processes in relational psychodynamic and attachment-based models. He also feels that individual therapy can be limiting because it is hierarchical, arguing, "The group modality rests in its entirety upon reciprocal interaction and mutual edification." This point is debatable, as many relational therapists no longer consider themselves the "expert"—although undoubtedly the therapist has considerable power in the relationship, wanted or unwanted. But it is unclear why this should be a limitation to the therapist's ability to be a corrective

emotional relationship. Attachment relationships are often asymmetrical relationships. Consider the prototype of the mother and infant. And isn't our relationship with God, arguably our most important attachment figure, fundamentally one-way? Attachment-based and relational psychodynamic approaches to individual treatment have the advantage of an intense one-on-one relationship with a therapist who offers him or herself as a corrective emotional relationship.

There is an additional problem with the application of Greggo's theory as spelled out in his paper: It does not make room for unmediated relationship with God. Although he is careful to include the non-reductionist perspective articulated by Miner (2007), in which the relationship with God is not merely a projection or generalization from parental attachments, but a real intersubjective relationship, this perspective is not reflected in his application section. What might the application of this theoretical notion look like? Perhaps it would take the form of facilitating relationship with God by providing a structure that would make the client/parishioner available for encounter to God. This could take a variety of forms. It might include intercession so that the Holy Spirit, who acts to make us cry "abba father" (Romans 8:15), would make God known to the person (as in Paul's prayer that the Ephesians would "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ," Ephesians 3:17-19, TNIV). It could be assisting the person to cultivate awareness of God's presence through *lectio divina* or prayer of silence (being still to know that He is God).

### Concluding Thoughts

The emerging recognition of the importance of attachment, and the variety of ways, still being explored, in which it affects our flourishing, suggest that it will continue to be one of the major theoretical paradigms in the field of psychology. As such, it offers important insights to Christians attempting to live life well. Greggo's paper is an important addition to the literature attempting to assimilate its insights from a biblical perspective (e.g., Coe & Hall, 2010; Miner, 2004; Roberts, 1997), and further work in this direction has the potential to greatly benefit those striving to bring healing and growth to the Body of Christ.

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### Communicating and Communion Face-to-Face and through Writing/Reading

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You chose a good psychological construct to translate. You use some "transliteration" and "paraphrasing," and much "translation with explanation" to articulate a Christian description of a construct that has been mostly articulated by late modern psychologists and that labels a phenomenon they have considered to be the result of merely natural selection.

Yet, as you suggest, it would seem clear to

Christian hearts that God designed humans with the capacity to form an Internal Working Model (IWM: a relatively enduring, emotionally-permeated mental representation of self and other), and he planned that it would be shaped by early childhood experiences (the phylogenetic means of which good Christians dispute). Why? He created images of God that would image his Trinitarian nature for the manifestation of his glory.

However, in his plan, this development into images of God is not usually easy. The most significant obstacle to God's glory-manifestation project is human sin, which has corrupted all created dynamic structures, so that even the IWM is compromised by sin. As a result, apart from redemption, all humans develop relationally into idolatrous autonomy. Moreover, the IWM can also be damaged by biological insults and exposure to harmful relational patterns that differentially characterize sinful caregivers. Consequently, God intended that individual relational capacities be differentially shaped, leading to very different forms of the image of God, and so to very different "conditions for glory." The various consequent relational capacities that adults have lead them to engage the world (and God) uniquely, so they provide an array of distinct and diverse ways for God's glory to be manifested through humans.

The healthiest among us picture best God's perfect relationality (though their fallenness means it is still compromised in an ultimate sense). The most damaged among us provide opportunities for a special kind of glory as they experience mediated, direct relational healing with God (and others) by means of the redemption found in Christ (as unique jars of clay, 2Co 4:7); and the majority in between can share in both kinds of glory. As a result, the IWM (and narrative) of all believers constitutes their own very personal context for participating in and manifesting God's glory, as they enter into the redemptive discourse of the triune God and experience him as their divine Father, brother, and indwelling helper, by means of which they gradually become transformed more or less into closer approximations of God's form and splendor in relation with others. It appears that it is God's design plan that believers in union with Christ established by the Father are to experience communion with God and other believers by means of their IWM, such as it is, while their narrative is being woven into the story of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension; and their IWM is being more or less healed, all of this for the glory of God.

Attachment research has focused on face-to-face, embodied interactions by means of which the IWM is fundamentally shaped. As you rightly argue, this is profoundly influential in human development, psychotherapy, and small groups. One's intersubjective experiences are laid down in one's brain, so that they provide the stored relational background for present experience that is ever being renegotiated and reshaped, though with greater rigidity in adulthood than in childhood; and depending on the quality of

one's childhood experiences, some will have greater and some lesser openness to that later renegotiation.

What are the precise means of IWM formation and re-formation? As suggested by attachment research, you note that formation occurs through the quality of the care of others in infant-caregiver interactions (the extent to which they provide protection, nourishment, and affirmation) and ongoing "engagement in a social, corporate communication process," in which humans process "*explicit* speech-acts in conjunction with *implicit* experience." Re-formation occurs in therapy as intersubjectivity is used to promote self-regulation. The means then would seem to be two-fold: embodiment (holding, feeding, facial and behavioral responsiveness, and touching) and emotionally-permeated discourse.

Significantly, responding to your article provides me with an opportunity to reflect on its implications very personally, since in it, you make positive reference to some ideas things I have written down, and so indirectly affirm me/my thoughts. I, in turn, have now read your article and have been impacted in writing by you. So I would like to reflect on experiences that are somewhat analogous to the processes you spent some time translating. Obviously, writing/reading communication differs in many respects from face-to-face, intersubjective interactions. First, there are no embodied reciprocal experiences: it is a one-way communicative act expressed through signifiers fixed in some medium (marks on a page or computer screen). Second, the expression of affect is minimal, especially in academic discourse. However, in the present case, my reading of your article was especially enhanced by the personal face-to-face relationship that we have developed over the last 10 years. As a result, I read as one able to hear you speaking as I read the written page, feel your personally experienced gentleness in its arguments, and recognize the humility expressed in the text as echoes of the tenor of your body language and spoken phrasing. Making things a little more interesting is the fact that we come from slightly different places—you are a self-identified integrationist and I a Christian psychologist. Yet as we have talked, we have discovered how close our dwelling places are, what similarities we share in the context of our differences, similarities that seem to have grown as we have listened and spoken, written and read. All of this doubtlessly made reading your article more meaningful and so a little more attachment-significant.

We are more than our discourse, doubtless, but our selves are to some extent expressed through it. So when one's discourse is taken seriously, respected, and responded to, such that it affects another's life and discourse, one can be touched and encouraged, perhaps even brought to a little greater wellbeing (safety and security?) by the engaged resonance of another.

My experience and reading have also taught me

that in adulthood we cannot live upon the responses of others, in the way we apparently did when we were very young. For one thing, the food others offer now seems so meager, compared to the impact of those early embodied, discursive feedings. Moreover, as we noted above, human interactions in adulthood are also fallen, and sometimes they can be dangerous and hurtful. Most importantly, even in infancy, the validity of a creature's being cannot really be established by another creature. One's ultimate validity can only come from outside the creation, from one's divine Author, even if that validation is usually both *direct* and *mediated* through other creatures and influences, including the Bible.

The direct mediation of God's nature by those made in his image remains important in adulthood, even if it is characterized by such challenges and limitations. To be most helpful, others must have some solidity, some substance to themselves that really engages us in dialogue and pushes back; otherwise it becomes too responsive and fosters more narcissism. By contrast, if others are so rigid, that they cannot dialogue and respond only in defensive (and in some cases angry) control, the self may feel unacknowledged, perhaps afraid, or even angry itself. Fortunately, such weaknesses in the other create opportunities for the self to continue its development into interdependent differentiation. For believers, this is supposed to occur primarily by living at a higher and eternal order of IWM, being strengthened and healed by their growing attachment to the triune God.

How much can *reading* impact one's IWM? I suspect that no research has been done on this topic, but it seems likely that such impact is much less than face-to-face, embodied, emotionally-permeated discursive interactions. To enhance the attachment effects of reading it would seem necessary for readers to focus their attention on a text with special deliberation, allowing the reformative meaning to touch their heart, so that it softens their protective defenses and opens them up to the other, so that its discourse strengthens and heals.

Interestingly, Sren Kierkegaard (1851/1990) suggested that the Bible was God's love letter to the believer, a theme recently developed by Larry Crabb (2009). The Bible is God's mediated/direct discourse to communicate/commune with us and promote the healthiest renegotiation and reshaping of the IWM possible, made emotionally significant by the Holy Spirit. It probably helps that so much of the Bible consists of stories of God's interactions with people like us, especially the four gospels which contain stories of the Son of God's *embodied* interactions with people like us. Kierkegaard suggested God intends that we read the Bible earnestly, since it was written not just to its original audience, but also by God to us personally, so that it would impact our IWM. However, God's reforming of our IWM in part through reading the Bible is not easy. It requires patient, sustained exposure over many years and

a special kind of reading and focused deliberation called prayerful meditation.

Thank you, dear friend, for loving me and listening to me and letting us communicate/commune in our hearts through writing/reading as well as face-to-face embodied interactions. I want you to know that I have enjoyed very much our time together.

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## The Ambiguity of Translation Work: A Response to Greggo

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Translators spend years becoming fluent in at least two languages so as to communicate the heart of a speaker into the heart language of a listener. Good translators are artists in that they must communicate clearly while using ambiguous, idiomatic language. Eric Johnson (2007) uses this analogy of *active translation* as replacement of the more passive analogy of integration when dealing with the two languages of Christianity and humanistic psychology. He contends that as Christian psychology matures into a unique approach to the care of souls, practitioners must move beyond acts of transliteration (where terms from psychological dialects are imported into the Christian tradition supplanting terms already in existence in the Christian dialect).

Stephen Greggo's essay proves that he is a top tier translator, working within the language groups of Christian theology and psychological theory, especially in the area of group dynamics, group therapy, and attachment theory. As such, his attempt in this issue to translate, *with explanation*, the language of internal working model (IWM), into a Christian psychology is to be both lauded and listened to. In response, I will present two of his standout points and raise three issues that I think warrant deeper exploration.

## Helpful Advances in Identity Formation and Spiritual Growth

After critiquing the underlying evolutionary psychological framework and horizontal focus (human to human) of the IWM, Greggo posits that



this model provides a relational/experiential view of affections and cognition correcting the common individualistic view of human and Christian spiritual growth found in the West. The IWM, Greggo reminds readers, illustrates to us that the self is formed “in a real-world relational context. Actual experience stimulates cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that are gradually encoded in actual neuro-pathways.” Far too often human perception and experience are portrayed by Christian writers either as forming *ex nihilo*, as if the person only developed sense of self and world from God alone. And yet, Greggo avoids the opposite problem of determinism when he points out that human cognitive-affective schemas “are not forever fixed.” Research on marital attachment styles support his view and indicate that secure marital attachment has some healing effect on prior childhood attachment injury (Dickstein, Seifer, St Andre, & Schiller, 2001).

Just how do Christians grow and change? Is it primarily by private internalization of Scripture truth or in community? David Fitch (2005) indicts evangelical views of growth when he states that our preaching and teaching styles “underwrites the myth that the isolated self can transform its own self through its own rational powers with the help of the Spirit” (p. 133). If Greggo is right that “the IWM can be pictured as the relational lens through which we read the biblical text as well as those who communicate the text to us,” then, the use of IWM and the subsequent research on *corrective emotional relationships* is a helpful addition to our understanding of the sanctification process.

### Translation Challenges

The IWM is a heuristic, a means to explain how individuals organize self and other representations and how these representations influence their interaction with the world. Translating one heuristic (IWM) into a construct (heart) from another language (American Christianity) that originated in yet another tongue (the Ancient Near East) is fraught with complications. Some facets of the heuristic fit well and enrich our understanding of heart (or remind us of prior understandings) — the heart is not merely individually constructed. However, an IWM heuristic does not capture well the motivational or drive aspect of the human soul. Greggo is right that our hearts are “the hub of our relational being,” but the IWM is less capable of articulating the innate worship drive ascribed to the heart in biblical texts. These differences do not need to halt the translation process, but do require careful work to ensure that values in the original construct of heart are not lost or overwhelmed by the heuristic IWM.

Whenever we attempt to translate one idea into the language of another, questions about best choice of words will always arise. I suggest that IWM might best be translated into the language of

identity. While the biblical usage of heart illustrates the human capacity for affections, identity speaks to our sense of self in the world. Within the dialect of Christianity, we speak frequently of identity “in Christ.” According to 2 Peter 2:10, God’s people did not have identity as a people until given to them by God himself. Does such an identity, formed by God through community interactions, fit more of the IWM dialect? Greggo himself speaks to this when he says that “human beings achieve a concrete *identity* in relationship to others by engagement in a social, corporate communication process” (emphasis mine).

Finally, while wholeheartedly agreeing with Greggo’s point that Scripture is not merely a set of spectacles, but rather a human/divine relational experience, one could argue that the benefits of IWM could be garnered without the translation process. What he well illustrates is our ongoing critical review of common (yet deficient) understandings of Christian growth and healing as articulated in Scripture. There are times when an external concept provides an important “stimulus for a new understanding of the Bible” (Schwab, 2003, p. 67). However, once the external material provides new insights to biblical texts or categories, they are no longer needed to maintain the new interpretative understandings. One could argue that once IWM is used to remind Christians of the biblical data supporting the relational nature of human growth and development, the facets and features of IWM no longer need to be translated into Christian psychology. In order to avoid this foreclosure on the riches of translation, I would recommend that Greggo or others seek to show how IWM continues to be a useful heuristic to guided community soul care.

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## Translating Psychology Christianly: A Challenge for Heart and Mind

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Steve Greggo (2011) presents an interesting and informative paper that endeavors to introduce a key concept of contemporary attachment theory to a Christian audience. He does this through Johnson's (2007) framework of translation as part of the development of "Christian Psychology" (CP). He then briefly applies these ideas to Christian small groups. In so doing, he has provided us with essentially two papers, one a thoughtful, even ambitious, consideration of important concepts, and the other, an enthusiastic, less developed proposal advocating the small group as a prime modality for soul care and spiritual formation. While he does manage to connect the two, the paper may be viewed as expressing the common division between theory and practice, with theory getting the most ink. To be fair, the author has written extensively on the subject of Christian small groups (Greggo, 2008). This paper represents a deeper discussion of the internal working model (IWM) than what was offered in that text, which in turn had far ranging coverage of groups.

### Useful Rather Than Essential

For Christian readers, especially mental health professionals who might not be conversant with attachment theory and research, Greggo offers a valuable introduction to the IWM and its attachment theory context. He does an even greater service in fitting the concepts into CP. Students of Christian soul care who may be daunted in tackling Johnson's (2007) seminal, 700+ page volume would do well to begin by reading the seventh chapter, "Translating the Texts of Other Communities for Christian Soul Care," which is cited by Greggo. Johnson raises a basic question that is relevant to considering Greggo's effort in this paper. That is, is the translation of a modern psychological concept such as the IWM even necessary for the care of souls? The richness of the Bible's treatment of the heart, which is the object of Greggo's translation, would seem by many, e.g. biblical counselors, to provide sufficient conceptual basis for soul care. After all, millions of believers through history have grown in sanctification without the idea of an IWM. But Johnson (2007) affirmatively answers the question of whether godless modern psychology can be of any value to a theocentric Christian community by admitting that psychology's "comprehensive and sophisticated description of innumerable lesser psychological matters is astounding" (p. 220) and that genuine psychological knowledge should be included in a "comprehensive Christian understanding of human beings" (p. 221). Greggo then takes Johnson's structure for conceptual translation and uses the IWM as a timely example. Thus, while not vital or indispensable to Christian

knowledge, the author's topic can be regarded as valuable for an understanding of a Christian anthropology.

Before critiquing Greggo's success in making such a translation, we should recognize that he understands the predicament of Christian counselors who work in secular settings. Such individuals cannot freely speak of their work in Christian terms. Greggo points out that the attachment perspective offers a language quite compatible with Christian soul care and that it helps justify Christians' use of secular credentials:

[A]n enrichment outcome of this translation exercise is the liberty to incorporate attachment-oriented, empirically-supported approaches into professional-client relationships while retaining an ultimately Christian, soul care perspective. The doxological purpose remains central even as the curative process is described in language well known within the contemporary therapeutic community.

### IWM as Heart

A basic problem with Greggo's attempt to translate the IWM to the biblical idea of heart is the difference in scope of the two terms. An examination of both the Old Testament and New Testament use of the heart highlights the deep and encompassing meaning of the term. Greggo acknowledges this, but proceeds in making the comparison nonetheless.

Banwell (1962) noted that the Hebrew concept of heart, or *leb*, refers to the center of things. The heart was seen as the governing center of the "whole man" that includes physical, intellectual and psychological attributes. Modern terms of character, personality, will, and mind are each part of the notion of "heart." Banwell further states that the Hebrew idea of heart is what "makes a man, or a beast, what he is...and governs all his actions" (p. 509). He quotes C. Ryder Smith who concluded that "'heart' comes the nearest of the New Testament terms to mean 'person.'" (p. 509). Greggo similarly cites scripture and other authors to illustrate the breadth of the meaning of heart.

In line with this difference in scope of the two concepts, Greggo states in his abstract that the IWM "can be pictured as a relational lens through which we read and experience a text as well as those who communicate a text to us." Such a "relational lens" is considerably less than the biblical heart. However, it does fit the psychological literature of the IWM.

As Cobb and Davila (2009) point out, Bowlby, the original author of attachment theory, "conceptualized IWMs as cognitive representations of the world and important figures in it, such as the self and attachment figures" (p. 210). They note that IWMs "may be used interchangeably with *representational models, models of self and other, attachment models, attachment representation and attachment schemas*" (p.228, italics in original). Different theories have similar but not

identical constructs as the IWM. Cognitive theory refers to core beliefs and schemas; interpersonal theory speaks of cyclical maladaptive patterns and psychoanalytic theory has object relations, which is both a theory and a mode of psychotherapy closely related to the attachment perspective (Cobb and Davila, 2009). One can see that a representation or model is a considerably smaller, less encompassing concept than “heart.”

Those same authors describe multiple IWMs within one individual. They note that Bowlby suggested that multiple models could develop in childhood, which is consistent with recent theory and research. These models could stem from separate relationships with parents versus peers. The latter would include friendships and romantic relationships. Subordinate IWMs are based on a general or superordinate IWM that in turn can influence and increase the complexity of the former. Multiple IWMs may not be consistent with one another. This reflects different levels of attachment security across relationships. While one can appreciate the idea of a divided heart, the bible does not correspondingly describe multiple hearts within an individual.

In fairness to Greggo, it should be acknowledged that he does not try to add anything to the biblical concept of heart. Rather, he posits that “IWM may deepen our appreciation for the broader biblical metaphor of *heart*.” In his larger text, he clarifies his intent by noting that psychological terms such as IWM offer “convenience” of simplistic, practical concepts to use in ministry. In this respect, he summarizes the IWM as “the interior model governing the balance of the relational polarities of God, others and self” (Greggo, 2008, p. 140).

However, given the lack of equivalence of the two concepts, one wonders about the appropriateness of the translation. Also, the translation does not work in the other direction. When one looks for a psychological term that best captures the idea of heart, the IWM seems a less likely candidate than a broader concept such as the older psychoanalytic notion of ego or the more general idea of the self.

#### Application to Groups

Greggo proceeds from his extensive discussion of the IWM and the heart by applying these ideas in a relatively brief concluding section on small groups. The brevity of this section likely has to do with limitations of space, along with the prior emphasis on the IWM. The reader is referred to his 289-page text (Greggo, 2008) for a wide-ranging coverage of groups, particularly in a Christian context. His knowledge of and passion for small groups are, respectively, comprehensive and unmistakable. In this paper he thus presents a condensed, hopeful vision of small groups as effective, efficient, and powerful means for soul care and spiritual formation. He declares an ideal: “Communion with the Lord and others in secure fellowship where Jesus Christ is lifted up can fortify and produce a secure and humble IWM.” The question arises as to what exactly are the

“well-crafted group approaches” that he advocates for heart health and healing?

Given his awareness of the complexities and varieties of small groups (Greggo, 2008), it does not seem that he is calling in this article for professional group psychotherapy as one of the small group approaches. Yet, an uninformed reader might think that he is lumping together counseling or therapy groups with other possible Christian small groups. If he were, he would be echoing Pingleton’s (1985) paper proposing counseling groups under church auspices. A careful consideration of the differences in groups suggests that church based groups would likely be incapable of fostering a true holding environment that is characteristic of good professional therapy groups (Siwy & Smith, 1988; Siwy, 2010). Issues of confidentiality, aggression and coping with inevitable confrontation and conflict are best handled in professional settings. It would take a highly skilled group leader with an especially secure relationship within a particular church to be able to function as a group therapist in that church. Conducting therapy groups within a larger institution always raises problems that are less likely to occur in an independent professional setting. In a general sense, this is because of the power of groups. The idea that groups can be a powerful healing influence, which has abundant empirical support (Yalom, 2005), also implies that they can be powerfully destructive if not conducted properly.

While I share Greggo’s enthusiasm for the use of groups, it must be tempered by all the details of implementing them, such as the training and role of the leader, the nature of the group contract, how members are selected, the purpose and goals, whether it is open, closed or time-limited and many other such variables common to establishing and maintaining small groups. The potential for different types of group soul care exists, but research is needed to discover what works best for such non-psychotherapy groups.

Greggo’s enthusiasm in advocating groups may have caused him to overstate the dyadic nature of secular psychological theories and therapeutic techniques which he says have an “entrenched, nearly exclusive reliance on individualistic methodology” based in secular and modernist assumptions. He seems to minimize the influence of decades of family and group theorists and therapists who include the interpersonal, systems, and contemporary relational psychoanalytic perspectives. Adherents of these approaches have long decried the traditional individualistic focus in the mental health field and have succeeded in expanding professional awareness and practice beyond the dyadic perspective.

On a different note, the reader may not realize that Greggo’s mention of the “corrective emotional relationship” (CER), which may be seen as an advance beyond the corrective emotional experience (CEE), is a term that he introduced as “a phrase offered to indicate a grace-based, positive influence on the sin-

tainted internal working model” (Greggo, 2008, p. 142). The ultimate example of the CER is the Holy Spirit’s penetrating redemptive work within an individual. He presents this CER as something that enhances the balance and love of the person’s three poles of relationship: self, God and others. This idea is a creative example of how a CP perspective ventures beyond the confines of secular theory. It speaks of the reality of God that is not reducible to psychological terms.

In a statement related to this idea, Greggo makes an assertion that can be at first confusing and would benefit from rewording. He declares, “Our God is no projection of an ultimate attachment figure. Yahweh is.” Upon first reading, I thought that he was somehow differentiating “God” and “Yahweh” by saying that Yahweh is a projection of an ultimate attachment figure. I was slow to realize that he was referring to Yahweh as the great “I AM.”

### An Appreciative Conclusion

I hope that in my efforts to examine and critique Greggo’s paper I have not come across as being primarily negative. My true impression is quite the opposite. I admire his contribution to the development of CP. He has taken an empirically derived theoretical concept, the IWM, from the literature of scientific, clinical psychology and built upon Johnson’s (2007) foundation by translating it into Christian terms. Is there a better biblical concept for translation than heart? Perhaps the IWM is more like our eyes: the windows of the soul and the lamp of the body. Jesus stated, “When your eyes are good, your whole body is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness” (Luke 11:34, NIV). In any case, I would rather not quibble and detract from a Christian brother’s fine contribution to our understanding of basic human functioning.

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### Considering Internal Working Models in Relational Context: Less “Heart” and More “Heart-to-Heart”

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Stephen Greggo has provided an excellent “conversation starter” for Christian Psychology on the concept of internal working model (IWM) in relation to orthodox Christian thought. His paper, *Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups*, is a fine example of the kind of practical theology that is desperately needed today in seminary and counselor education. As in his previous scholarly offerings, Greggo has found a way to unite the applicable with the theoretical and theological. In keeping with this goal, I am honored to respond to Greggo’s work and offer another voice in the conversation that he has launched with this paper. Let me begin by revealing the assumptions that will influence this reply.

The voice in this reply is one that has been grounded in Attachment Theory since graduate school years in the 1980s. I start with this disclaimer because I want to be straightforward that I am not a disinterested contributor to this discussion. Since finding a brief “afterward” that fleetingly mentioned John Bowlby in Greenberg and Mitchell’s (1983) classic text, I have been hooked by this conceptual frame. Even my dissertation (Stratton, 1991) was a fledgling attempt to delve deeper into this empirical and philosophical view of the relational world. Many aspects of Attachment Theory seemed to me

uniquely reminiscent of a Christian anthropology and a relational spirituality.

Unlike the current trend in psychological research and multicultural clinical practice, psychology graduate programs in the 1980s were not tolerant of discussions involving religion and spirituality. Consequently, I did not find there the formative environment to consider the next piece of my growing worldview. It was not until after graduate school that I noticed that the theological world seemed to have exploded ecumenically with renewed awareness and passion for Trinitarian Theology. I discovered that there was an “attachment theory” at the heart of human design that could be traced back to divine personhood. My enthusiasm regarding divine and human attachment was rekindled as my faith and my psychology found a theoretical and practical concordance, each advancing and critiquing the other.

The final piece to my personal mosaic came in the late 1990s when the neurosciences began to summarize research related to the influence of interpersonal connectedness on brain development and maintenance. My theology and my psychology was no longer simply embedded in a theoretical worldview or therapeutic model; it was thoroughly embodied. It was enlivened. I was now more than ever a convert to this inherently relational and profoundly emotional vision of divine and human personhood. It seemed that humans were indeed created reflections of the perichoretic divine process.

This response to Greggo’s essay is one steeped in these mutually informing influences. Standing within an orthodox Christian tradition, I find the concept of an IWM not only translatable but also theologically defensible and practical for Christian care. The Greggo proposal regarding the compatibility of “heart” as a religious and spiritual linkage to the neuropsychological concept of IWM has, in my opinion, merit. The two constructs at least seem to share common factors, such as cognitive “mapping,” emotional regulation, and mediated behavioral strategies in relational contexts.

As I move forward largely in sympathy with Greggo’s ideas, I hope that I remain dispassionate enough to assist in the advancement of this conversation with those who may not hold to a perspective similar to mine. Toward this end, allow me to state my conclusion at this point. From my perspective, as helpful as Greggo’s ideas are, they do not go far enough. If he desires to articulate a functional view of Christian community, I believe that he stops short of a comprehensive model upon which to base his “corrective emotional experience (CEE).” Theologically, it seems inconsistent in traditional Christian thought to build relationally on the idea of a single and solitary IWM. At best, one might suggest that the construct is too individualistic for a communal Christianity and only inferred from actions and reactions in relational context. This is not to say that internal working models (IWMs) are

imaginary or even inconsequential. Then again, it does suggest that the idea of a discrete and self-contained IWM is not sufficient for a robust consideration of human design and communion.

If the divine Persons of the Trinity are always known relative to each Other and if the *imago Dei* is relational in nature, a human being needs to be seen as a “self-in-relationship.” This thought affirms that there is certainly an embodied self, but it is always embedded in a relational matrix. Neither the particularity of self nor the relational process can be lost in an orthodox view of communion, but neither can they be separated functionally without loss of meaning and understanding. Particularity and process reciprocally influence one another so thoroughly that a new construct emerges from the communion of self and other. That emergent quality is classically called human personhood.

The classical concept of “human personhood is a gift of the Christian faith to human culture” (Stratton, 2006, p. 247). It grew from Christian theology’s developmental struggle to understand and articulate the nature of a triune God. In the modern Western world with an emphasis on “rugged individualism” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985/1996), culture has often gravitated toward over-emphasis on autonomous selfhood, forgetting the creative impact of relational embeddedness. Even our theology has followed this path with a view of the Trinity that seemed at times to emphasize a kind of monism to the exception of a more communal view of the divine Persons. Christian tradition and the “interpersonal sciences” come together to remind us that self and relationship cannot be separated, nor can one be downplayed without distorting personhood. The co-creational dynamic of self-in-relationship cannot be reduced to constituent parts without loss.

From a biological standpoint, Lewis, Amini, and Lannon (2000) describe the co-regulatory dynamic in the following way:

Because human physiology is (at least in part) an open-loop arrangement, an individual does not direct all of his [or her] own functions. A second person transmits regulatory information that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more – inside the body of the first. The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously; the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as [the first person] is regulated. Neither is a functioning whole on his [or her] own; each has open loops that only somebody else can complete. Together they create a stable, properly balanced pair of organisms (p. 85).

Similarly and perhaps in reaction to an individualistic Western presumption, Brennan (2004) suggests that the real “mystery” is how selves actually form and maintain distinct identities when the emotional and physiological “open loop” process is

so compelling at every level of life. Indeed, Christakis and Fowler (2009) in their book, *Connected: How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do*, make the same point in a more provocative way. In their creative "social network" research, they provide evidence that self-related attributes are not only shaped by persons who share a direct relational contact but also by others who are only distantly connected, if known at all. Human beings are simply not as self-contained as Western psychology and theology often seem to suggest.

Selves (and self-representations, to use terminology from attachment research related to IWMs) cannot be de-contextualized without caricature. Moreover, an emphasis on IWMs to the exception of interconnectedness with other IWMs can promote an overly simplified and distorted view. The mysterious synthesis of self and relationship is much more complex to consider, but it is the reality of communal living. Trying to understand one single solitary human being has occupied Western social sciences for centuries, but the result is arguably limited. Trying to grasp another layer of complexity – the way human beings indwell one another – demands that we reconsider our assumptions. It reflects a new hermeneutic. In fact, without questioning human responsibility, Green (2008) makes the case that this reciprocating dynamic in community pushes Western Christian theology to develop maturing views of free will and sin that reflect this synthesis.

The concept of an internal working model (IWM) is foundational to Attachment Theory and was first explained in Bowlby's groundbreaking attachment trilogy (1969/1982, 1973, 1980). The construct has remained central to the theoretical and practical understanding of attachment classifications, often referred to as "styles" (i.e., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) or "states of mind" (i.e., Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), that have become so popular for scholarly, clinical, and general audiences. It is the stability of these "security-based self-representations" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) across time that has made the attachment explanatory framework attractive to most interested in the subject. However, expanding research is focusing on those circumstances where attachment security appears to change, and the embedding relational context seems to have the significant influence on the process (Davila & Cobb, 2004).

Research by Baldwin and associates (Baldwin, 1994; Baldwin, Keelen, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996) suggests that human beings actually construct and maintain both secure and insecure models of self that can be "primed" by the interactive relational environment. Although trait-like attachment processes remain primary, there appear to exist auxiliary models of self, presumably related to implicit memories of other past relational experiences with attachment figures, which are activated and even called forth by the state-like relational context. Change in security-based self-representations

may then be seen as a reciprocating interaction of intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. In this way, attachment security can behave both in trait-like and contextual ways (Fraleigh & Brumbaugh, 2004).

Such findings are of no surprise when one thinks from within the frame of a classic view of personhood. Persons are selves-in-relationship without loss of either aspect. Both particularity and process are necessary to understand how embodied human beings are in and of their relational communities. If we want to advance our current understand of corrective emotional experiences, particularly for the Church, IWMs must be considered contextually. The way human beings indwell one another takes primacy. Relating IWMs, not single and solitary IWMs, are foundational for understanding the healing power of Christian community.

In summary, the functional basis for Christian Psychology can seldom be relegated to the analysis of the individual constitution of the human self. The basic unit in Christian community is not an autonomous heart, but instead, one must engage the reality of heart-to-heart relating as the operative foundation. This emergent paradigm shift is long overdue, particularly in pastoral care and counseling, but it does appear to be happening in psychology, theology, and the neurosciences. Concentration on a "self-contained self" has resulted in a hermeneutic by which practical theology and pastoral training in the West is often unsure how to engage relationships. All Christian churches affirm the goodness of healthy relationships, but congregations seem to have little practical understanding of how to promote them. Greggo's well-considered essay is a helpful step in the right direction; yet, the journey must not end at this point. If the Church is to be the place that makes space for corrective emotional experiences, I am hoping that this article motivates a theological and psychological vision of human personhood, embedded in a Trinitarian reality.

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# From “Lost in Translation” to Creative Heart Care: Expanding Content and Consolidating Process

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My wife and I have a nearly 40-acre parcel of land in a rural community. The scenic contrast of field, hill, and forest describes its appeal. Oddly, a strange sense of dissatisfaction arose when we learned that the zoning designation for our piece of genuine country was “abandoned agriculture.” How could we establish a healthy bond to a place with a forsaken identity? Local farmers bleakly instructed us that our modest field was too small and far-gone to be of any productive use. Sapling trees and mature bushes were a sign that it had been fallow far too long. A young neighboring farmer, eager to expand his fledgling organic operation, gave the field a good, long stare. I was startled as this man of few words pulled up a soil map and stated flatly without explanation, “We can bring it back.” The use of “we” is generous in our farming partnership. Nevertheless, the restoration of this field’s agricultural soul is now a reality.

Admittedly, its crops are not uniform or beautiful to behold. An underlying commitment to organic production requires tolerance of plant diversity. Therefore, under adopted guidelines, the desirable “wheat” has no chemical advantage over “tares.” Stated bluntly, weeds flourish! But we have come to appreciate the value of wild flowers in our field. Further, the amount of stones that surface after each tilling is utterly remarkable. The farmer painstakingly picks and hauls these stones by hand to the hedgerow alongside. Despite these challenges, through this joint venture, our once discarded field produces a meager crop season by season. The strategy, labor, and steadiness of this grower are not only a testimony to his dedication, but also reveal the requisite demands for redeeming neglected territory. Such is the way for relating genuine Christian soul care to contemporary helping technologies designed for growth and change. This is not an enterprise for individual heroic effort. It takes an entire village to venture forward unified with determination, shared conviction of core values, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

On the rare occasion when it is possible to observe the field’s caretaker, I am humbled and thrilled at the intentional investment of his energy and skill. Likewise, I am amazed at the keen insight displayed by such an esteemed team of helping professionals, scholars, and Christ-followers in this Edification dialogue. Much gratitude goes out to all those who have invested in this joint effort to refine

distinctive and effective Christian soul care. Allow me to single out one specific example to illustrate the contribution of the whole. In Christine Browning’s response, she demonstrates her extensive experience facilitating small groups that support heart restoration and health in victims of sexual abuse. This qualifies her as a premier practitioner to apply material surrounding the intersection of Christian psychology (CP), modern therapeutic technique, psychological personality theory, and biblical theology. Through such direct care efforts, hope may ultimately reach those seeking healing from the Savior. This realization is cause to return thanks for the Lord’s grace and blessing!

It is apparent that in ways similar to the philosophical commitment of an organic farmer, worldview convictions produce guidelines that regulate engagement between Christian theology and modern psychological material. This can make discussion about such endeavors strenuous, controversial, and perhaps a touch messy. Like wild flowers popping up in an herbicide-free field, it is best to anticipate the discovery of irregularities. In every instance, each thoughtful response added depth and detail to terms as well as therapeutic implications. However, it is evident that stones were surfaced in plowing through the translation effort offered in “Internal Working Model as Heart: A Translation to Inspire Christian Care Groups.” Whereas comments and critique qualified, exemplified, or extended themes, I feel no need to address discrete points in order to defend the underlying contentions. Instead, my response aims to further the content and consolidate gains from the process.

Eric Johnson (2007) proposes translation as an intentional and advanced interdisciplinary strategy to align concepts for truly Christian soul care. The procedure set out an invitation for volunteers to put it into use. The intrigue of Johnson’s objective and sequence drew me to RSVP with little hesitation, which resulted in an academic dialogue that yielded a revealing case study in CP translation. Given this initial attempt, observations for improvement were bound to surface—four common trends were identified, which will be addressed: 1) the intention of translation; 2) the complexity of translation regarding therapeutic process; 3) the dependency factor in distinguishing divine/human attachments; 4) and realistic expectations regarding therapeutic small group applications. Perhaps in continuing this



exchange, a field thick with theory and empirical research can return benefit for practical, soul-care applications.

### The Intention of Translation

Respondents were wonderfully gracious and generally supportive. Nonetheless, there was a definite preference on the part of these earnest dialogue partners for minor to significant qualifications regarding the link between the attachment schema of an internal working model (IWM) and “heart” as the corresponding biblical metaphor. The suggestion by select respondents (i.e. Hall; Gingrich & Gingrich; Siwy; Monroe) is that the connection itself may be ill-advised, overstated, or misleading. If I may attempt to summarize the essence of the press, it is that the rich, broad, biblical notion of “heart” may be diminished or constricted by an association with a technically defined IWM as a psychological structure. Monroe constructively notes that IWM does not capture the motivational forces or drive to worship which is common to biblical references that include “heart.” Other translation options from the psychological lexicon offered to cover this vast biblical metaphor were “total person,” “personal identity,” and “personhood.” The trend amongst respondents is towards a more inclusive and comprehensive term. Such options are reasonable, on target in principle, and have theological merit. “Heart” in Scripture most certainly reflects core thinking, feeling, and origin of activity. On the other hand, Siwy mentions that perhaps “eyes,” “windows of the soul,” or “light” may be better biblical terms to capture the thrust of the relational lens aspect of IWM. Achieving precision in terminology equivalence was not my intention. Thus, it takes no strain to accept a refinement such as that offered by Gingrich and Gingrich when they say that “the IWM be viewed as one aspect of the heart, or as a mechanism used by the heart.”

Let us not lose sight that by definition a metaphor is a word picture to communicate an idea too big to be contained. In contrast, a psychological term with empirical utility comes tightly defined for the sake of measurement and theoretical precision. The difference in categories makes equality in terminology untenable. However, I am indebted to respondents who highlight important discrepancies between these terms that should not be minimized. Given this exchange, I will strive further to avoid the appearance that equivalence is the primary intention of such interdisciplinary efforts.

The CP method of translation as proposed by Johnson (2007) and further clarified in this exchange by Monroe strives for a robust, vigorous engagement between the language of Christianity and modern psychology. The five steps— comprehension, evaluation, translation, transposition, and composition— does include location of the optimal expression for a construct in Christian dialect. Such a result reflects translation in a concrete, literal sense. Along with the alignment of terminology, this CP

method places prominence on enrichment. Is not the endeavor to increase fluency in reference to the meaningful nuances that are so apropos in Christian contextualization and soul care conversation? Thus, beyond achieving basic, literal convergence, translation as an interdisciplinary exercise reaches even further to impact these two additional layers — conceptualization and conversation. The one layer benefits Christian soul care by building a vocabulary that is useful in conceptualizing pathways for spiritual development and healing. Such translation efforts cultivate facility in telling an aspect of the Gospel narrative in ways that display its redemptive potency. Secondly, translation exercises deepen therapeutic conversation, particularly when a Christian qualifier is applied. The procedure expands the personal narrative of the Christ-follower as it merges with the great Theodrama (Vanhoozer, 2010). Johnson’s response in this exchange explores this aspect of *imago Dei* restoration remarkably well, working from 2 Cor. 4:7 to depict how such spiritual health and interpersonal development glorifies God.

When the goal of CP translation includes enrichment, I remain convinced that Christian practitioners will find that the nuances contained in the relationship between IWM and “heart” yield worthwhile benefits for healing conceptualizations and therapeutic conversation. Imagine sitting with clients or supervisees who yearn to curb runaway emotion, improve interpersonal relating, and take hold of the deep resource of the presence of the Holy Spirit that accompanies cognitive faith conviction and genuine conversion. My inner pastoral-professional translation efforts ponder dimensions of IWM as informed by attachment research while simultaneously reviewing how Scripture speaks to matters of the heart. What aspect of inner experience is automatic, instantaneous, entrenched, biologically rooted, hidden, and thus far outside the current range of awareness? What *affections*, attractions, avoidances, desires, emotions, and comfort zones have engaged? What active presses and pulls invite or stimulate the very intrapersonal and interpersonal patterns that a client would prefer to avert? It is by examining such dynamics in groups or individual settings that interdisciplinary understanding, rightfully submitted to the oversight of the Holy Spirit, gains accuracy in expression by relating a field of empirical research to a vivid and rich biblical metaphor. It is in the subtleties amidst emotional awakening, stilling, and regulation that this exploration produces a crop worth harvesting.

Those in the helping professions who supervise or offer counsel find it necessary to speak to diverse audiences — seminary students, medical personnel, clergy, mental health clinicians, or managed care reviewers. In speaking to clients, the underlying wisdom may be inspired from research related to attachment styles; yet, my translation will reference heart care— soothing, strengthening, conditioning, healing, and sustaining. Becoming conversant in a

diverse world with a commitment to communicate a transdisciplinary perspective, a favored CP term, will require steady and persistent effort in sophisticated translation. With unwavering core convictions, our language may need regular adjustment from theological to technical to the vernacular. Our hope is to reach towards literal correspondence, conceptual clarity, and effective therapeutic conversation to honor our Christian tradition.

### **The Complexity of Translation Regarding Therapeutic Processes**

Monroe conveys the pitfalls of the method remarkably well.

The IWM is a heuristic, a means to explain how individuals organize self and other representations and how these representations influence their interaction with the world. Translating one heuristic (IWM) into a construct (heart) from another language (American Christianity) that originated in yet another tongue (the Ancient Near East) is fraught with complications (Monroe, p. 25).

Acknowledging this embedded complexity is not an excuse for calling off the enterprise, tolerating shoddiness, nor abandoning the field. Rather, the notions of complexity, intricacy, and uncertainty are challenges for enjoyment, not features that provoke uncertainty. At the risk of further exposing the audacity of the undertaking, I need to reiterate that my interest in exploring the potential conceptual ties between IWM and “heart” was a means to establish a bridge between corrective emotional relationship (CER) and Johnson’s (2007) term carditive internalization. These novel depictions reflect Christian theological priorities as they seek to identify dimensions of the Holy Spirit’s movement to produce sanctification. Thus, the endeavor to tie a heuristic to a construct becomes exponentially more complex when it leads into imagining an interpersonal therapeutic process as instrumental in a formation pursuit. Conceptualizing mechanisms for human development within a faith tradition is the attraction of CP.

Carditive internalization is a means of spiritual formation that revolves around reading Scripture, meditation, prayer, worship, and essentially absorbing into one’s heart the redemptive relationship with the Lord of creation. Johnson’s (2007) reflection on inwardness, interiority, and spiritual maturity is not associated with self-fulfillment or aut centrism. Rather, inwardness is a means to internalize or attach ever more deeply to God while recognizing and dealing with sin. The intent to embrace the process of carditive internalization in the midst of the translation exercise is to ensure that an essential means for unmediated experience of a relationship with God is prominent. This reiteration addresses Hall’s concern with the apparent lack of attention dedicated to unmediated communication with God

in the paper. Carditive internalization captures a host of essential practices for relating passionately with God.

The interpersonal blessings of CER and spiritual growth reflected in carditive internalization both envision processes through which God accomplishes sanctification and imparts his glory. Sanctification, God’s grace working its way into the emotional and cognitive core of our being to initiate holy living, cannot be reduced to either pathway. Both are currents within sanctification and re-creation. The conclusion to all the language and process alignment, however complex, culminates in a rather basic point that appeals to common sense. The nurturing and healing of human creatures involves mutuality, relationality, and the strain of heartfelt communication with self, others, and the Lord God Almighty. As I consider these phrases, I hear Stratton’s encouragement to move away from the false security found in a focus on individuality/autonomy and to press on to explore the crucial implications of our Trinitarian theology.

What is so important for those working in the trenches doing discipleship, soul care, counseling, and spiritual formation is not to shudder at the essential complexity that necessarily accompanies exploration of psychological structures and processes of spiritual formation from a Christian theological perspective. Take heart; retaining worldview convictions to sound biblical theology and CP will provoke complex thought. As one former student was fond of saying, “This is good stuff, but it makes my brain burn.” Such theoretical and theological wrestling produces conceptual understanding and possibilities. Lord, help us to embrace both clarity and mystery!

### **Dependency and Distinguishing Divine and Human Attachments**

My peers supply numerous insights on resourcefully working within the potential overlap between the modern psychological story line of attachment theory and a close, ever-maturing relationship with a loving and omnipotent Creator. Consider pivotal statements such as:

- “A secure attachment is likely necessary but not sufficient for agape love,” (Hall).
- “Perhaps it might be helpful to view mediated and direct IWMs as on a continuum, with individuals falling on different points,” (Gingrich & Gingrich).
- “For believers, this is supposed to occur primarily by living at a higher and eternal order of IWM strengthening and healing in their growing attachment to the triune God,” (Johnson).
- “The basic unit in Christian community is not an autonomous heart, but instead, one must engage the reality of heart-to-heart relating as the operative foundation,” (Stratton).

Insights such as these increase understanding on the

operation of intimate horizontal relationships and the potential overlap with the function of personal spirituality in conjunction with divine-human bonds. The literature on the application of attachment theory to spirituality is expanding and those committed to an orthodox Christian perspective are contributing. How terms such as security, secure self, safe haven, symmetrical/asymmetrical, relational schema, mature attachments, and intimacy will fare in any crossover into soul care are matters for further consideration.

When Moses conveyed the commandments of the Lord declared on Mt. Sinai, the list began with a declaration: "I am the Lord God...you shall have no other gods before me," (Ex. 20<sup>1-2</sup>, New International Version). The biblical account of redemptive history contains a litany of repetitious neglect in reference to this primary command. As Christian believers explore ways to foster healthy and holy living, this central, distinguishing message of the Gospel must be retained. Self-sufficiency and autonomy is a sin-stuffed delusion. Security has its ground solely in faith. Shalom is rest in God. Dependence on the Lord and his sufficient grace, no matter the circumstances or relational surround, is our source of eternal life as well as strength for the moment. As Christ-followers, we guard our hearts by submitting all needs, emotions, thoughts, and wishes humbly to God (Phil. 4:7-8). No matter how we come to language wholeness or maturity, the Gospel will return us to ponder our dependency. Terms such as mutuality and interdependency are useful and quite palatable in our age. In the great Theodrama, the Creator of Scripture finds pleasure in his creatures, but He does not rely on them for his being (Job 38-41).

### **Realistic Expectations Regarding Therapeutic Small Groups**

My exploration of the correspondence between a key premise of attachment theory and a central theological construct flows into a blatant appeal for those with commitment to CP to place a greater emphasis on small groups. When presenting this paper before an audience, I confess that I had the urge to proceed with an altar call to pray with those who were ready to repent of their exclusive use of individual psychotherapy and commit to offer at least one group. My passion for group work has not dimmed. The following summary of my premise is perhaps too basic for an academic journal but nonetheless, here it is. Group work exposes relational patterns and concerns. Thus, it offers an ideal methodology to explore matters of relationality and the affections of one's heart for God, others, and self. I contend that there are uncharted opportunities for Christian therapeutic groups to foster interpersonal restoration, character development, and ultimately, support the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification (Greggo, 2008). Respondents were unanimous in their positive regard for small groups within a Christian helping framework. However, push back was evident in

reference to the intensity of my statements as well as on the specific argumentation leading up to the appeal.

I very much appreciate Hall's adamant defense of individual therapy and share her enthusiasm for interpersonal approaches that utilize fully the relational dynamics that surface in the immediacy of the therapeutic session. It is not my aim to advocate replacing such vibrant classical therapy with helping groups. But I will at least wonder aloud if such therapeutic opportunities are as readily available to needy clients in a service climate that emphasizes brevity and efficiency. Siwy also expresses caution regarding a ministry context for group work as well as for my leap from theory to practice. He recognizes the real world obstacles to forming quality groups. Fortunately, Siwy was kind enough to reference material where I develop more fully the opportunity for a wider range of therapeutic groups with a Christian foundation (see Greggo, 2008).

The traditional caveats regarding the limitations of group were not included in my initial paper as is customary in academic articles. Thus, my argumentation left ample opening for these fair critiques. In order to keep closing comments brief, I will offer the following concession. When the trend is evident that the majority of Christian mental health practitioners and pastoral counselors are investing over fifty percent of their direct service hours in a variety of small groups (support style or leader-directed), I will curtail my rhetoric regarding the positioning of small groups in helping that is expressly Christian.

For the sake of promoting an accurate understanding of the type of groups worthy of development, I will succinctly suggest three points triggered by Hall's comments. First, the alliance with the therapist is not as intimate in groups as it may be in psychodynamic oriented therapy. However this, of course, is not a limitation of groups but an advantage. The curative factor for a helping group is located in the experience of cohesiveness, not in a shared experience of the therapist. Thus, the possibility for CERs is concentrated not diluted. Second, the ultimate alliance fostered by Christian helping groups does not find expression in the model of therapist/patient dyad. Rather, it is in a mutual community experience that mirrors or anticipates the body of Christ. Finally, the group experience is not the anticipated resource to achieve earned-secure attachment or even far less dramatic shifts within the IWM. Instead, groups foster interpersonal learning that support and sustain the lengthy and risky journey of intimate relationships external to the group. Enactments within the group prepare the way for generalizing skills and conditioning the heart for real life relationships.

In fairness, my application comments regarding the value of small groups were never intended to sway dynamically-oriented therapists within the integration tradition to lean into group methods.

The original paper was for a Society of Christian Psychology (SCP) conference and the forum is now *Edification*. Those invested in the CP movement recognize the totality of the influence of modernist agenda on psychological theory and helping methods. My intent, then and now, is to provoke a fair appraisal of the extensive and exclusive reliance on the modality of individual psychotherapy with clear tradition in modern medical practice. So again, are not small groups the soul care method that is most consistent with Christian tradition and biblical material? If so, might small groups one day be the default service modality for believers with individual counseling offered as necessary? The Christian vision for both group and individual care would be to return parts of the body back into His active service.

### Progression in the Process

Eric Johnson wrote so personally to me in his response, expressing warmth and introducing a fascinating phrase, “the engaged resonance of another.” Many of the hesitations that I held when entering this project are now silent. “Process,” a term ever popular with group advocates, references the substantial relational communication beneath the conversation. If I were to summarize the experience of my participation in this dialogue in terms of process, it would paraphrase Johnson’s words, expressing satisfaction in this experience of the engaged resonance of others. The message was heard, intentions sharpened, a template for translation laid, and implications made accessible for practice. The tone and tenor of the process between participants exhibits a genuine academic/ministry partnership. We are all of one mind in seeking to bring back a fallow field for a future harvest. There is a core unity of purpose while each contributor retains unique, divergent perspectives.

Consensus and agreement are affirming; however, academic exchanges do not commence for such purposes. Readers are encouraged to shift through the presentation of evidence, the variations of view, and in particular, attend to those subtle distinctions in word choice and definition. There are those with integrationist and CP orientations represented in the mix. Thus, it is worth noticing how commitment in approach shapes the response. Those who review this dialogue may be inspired to develop themes even further, launch a dissertation, empirically explore a hypothesis, or use suggestions to tighten a treatment plan. Perhaps, the desire to care for hearts will arrive in a group so that sufferers can experience as Christine Browning so marvelously expresses “the redemptive touch of fellow travelers who point them to the Wounded Healer.”

Special appreciation goes out to *Edification* editor, P. J. Watson and his team for granting me this privilege. As Eric Johnson mentions, my approach to broaching the barrier between theology and psychology is still a reasonable fit under the integrationist label. I seek to follow in the tradition of Gary Collins, teaching in the counseling department he founded. I strive to retain my “dual citizenship,” contributing to clinic and ministry. Working as a professional psychologist, I must translate what I do to operate in systems that may politely acknowledge Christianity, but exhibit an underlying tension regarding its exclusive and restrictive claims. Training pastors and Christian counselors, the goal is to promote quality and excellence in the help that goes out in the name of our Savior without comprising the message. At the same time, I do applaud the efforts of the Society of Christian Psychology. I hope that it is obvious that there is common ground in embracing a traditional Christian theological position where reliable Scripture is the final authority. When delving into psychology, it is good to share fellowship with those who have eyes and ears attentive to the Holy Spirit so that God’s speech establishes wisdom.

Some hold that certain fields now occupied by establishment psychology are best left abandoned by those who love God and his Word. This is often the preference when the content reflects extensive reliance on empirical investigation or where evolutionary psychology is the dominate worldview. I am one who sees with an aura of hope in the particular fields related to attachment relationships and interpersonal group process. Recall the motivation and vigor of the gutsy organic farmer who brought back our lost acreage. We can appreciate the wild flowers and haul stones as needed. These fields are worth working because the content in these areas increases appreciation for relational processes associated with the yearnings and cravings of the human heart. So, let us explore the inner workings of the human heart and harvest a productive crop to the glory of God.

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# Eyes to See: Christian Aesthetics and Perfectionist Seeing

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*As Richard Winter's (2005) work on perfectionism makes clear, the unfortunate preoccupations with bodily perfection in much of the visual imagery and culture of everyday life today threaten to do great harm to a healthy self-image. Not only does the modern idolatry of one's own image threaten mental, emotional, and spiritual health, it also initiates the unsuspecting into a similarly unhealthy way of seeing ourselves and the world. Throughout the complex and varied history of Christianity, the visual culture of Christians has given subtle and more overt commentary on how to view one's own body in relation to the faith. The Church's visual imagery tends to lead viewers toward meditation and reflection on the significance of what the viewer sees and what is still hidden to our eyes. This way of seeing is best demonstrated by the use of Crucifixion imagery in Western art history, for in contemplating the image of Christ on the cross, Christians engage the more profound questions of their own embodied existence.*

In *Pictures & Tears*, a fascinating history of emotional encounters before works of art, James Elkins (2001) gives careful consideration to the vast range of emotional reactions and life-changing experiences people have had throughout art history when they find themselves in front of great works of art. Again and again, he finds that many of these viewers lack the very language to describe what has happened to them or how they have been confronted by something inexplicably profound in or through the work of art. On the other hand, Elkins also looked into the lives of those who claim to understand quite well what was happening, but report effects that many today would find hard to believe. One such account is the story of St. Catherine of Siena's experience of the early Renaissance master Giotto's "Navicella" mosaic in 1380. (To learn more about or view portions of Giotto's mosaic, follow the link presented as the first web address in the Appendix at the end of this article). Giotto's huge mosaic presents the biblical scene of Matthew 12:22-32 and Mark 6:45-52 in which Jesus comes walking across the water to meet a boat full of his disciples, buffeted by the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee. Standing in an outdoor courtyard of the old St. Peter's church in Rome, she pondered the scene – the uncertain passengers, the faltering Peter, and the resolute Christ, and after some time, perhaps under the weight of all that was conveyed by the picture, St. Catherine collapsed. She was paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of her life.

Like Elkins, I wonder if this kind of seeing is possible anymore. For him, seeing in this way is unavailable because authentic belief in the divine has receded, but for the purposes of this essay, another reason will be offered. Perhaps, the scarcity of these experiences results not from a lack of visual encounter but a destructive overstimulation. As Richard Winter

(2005, pp. 17-18) describes in his book *Perfecting Ourselves to Death*, popular culture's pre-occupation with image – the "perfect look" or the "perfect body," conditions many of us with a tragically flawed kind of seeing. This seeing trains us to implicitly evaluate ourselves and each other in terms of unrealistic or impossible standards, measuring ourselves against the fantastic bodies that adorn the covers of so many magazines and that dominate the television screen and internet banner ads. These habits of visual perception reinforce the assumptions of an unhealthy perfectionist view of the body by perpetuating a mythical self-image that cannot actually be attained.<sup>1</sup> The examples of this image idolatry are so widespread and ubiquitous that they do not bear recounting. The habits of this kind of seeing and perceiving, however, require our careful consideration. This posture of image idolatry constitutes, what Richard Winters (2005) calls a conditioned "response to the values of our culture" (p. 124). Such idolatry surely accounts for a profound number of issues facing Christian psychologists and counsellors.

As Christian counsellors work with their clients to promote a holistic kind of personal health, integrating their approaches to the spiritual, mental, emotional, and bodily aspects of the person, reflection must be given to the myriad ways in which contemporary visual cultures of the "perfect body" can manipulate and distort a person's healthy self-image. This manipulation occurs when a person's self-image comes to be defined by contrast to the "perfect" bodies of celebrities, super models, and other media amalgamations of the currently popular human forms or body shapes. Whereas a person's self-image is composed of "the self-description of mental images we have of ourselves," as Gary Collins (2007, p. 439) makes clear, this self-image bears upon the larger category of a person's self-esteem. For preventing

or repairing unhealthy self-image as a result of perfectionist seeing, Christian psychologists have several strategies that can be employed. Principally, patients require a theological account of the human person that situates every human body within the framework of God's creation, redemption, and restoration. They would also benefit from a historical perspective on how standards of human beauty have changed over time and remain in large part relative to one's culture and social location – a fact illustrated by the history of art and visual culture. In addition to these, counsellors can also draw upon the efforts of scholars engaging the emerging field of visual culture and visual critical studies to specifically reset assumptions produced by the manipulative tactics of contemporary media and advertising cultures. The most influential and significant contributions to the field of visual critical studies include the work of John Berger (1973), W.J.T. Mitchell (1994), Griselda Pollock (1988) and Slavoj Žižek (1991). More specifically, the work of David Morgan (2005), Sally Promey (2001), and S. Brent Plate (2002) engages the field of religious visual cultures.

While that fascinating conversation will not constitute the subject of this essay, I wish instead to address the contemporary issue of perfectionist seeing through engagement with Christian traditions in art history, for Christian psychology can learn a great deal about healthy perceptions of the human body from the ways of seeing required by the best examples of historic Christian visual art. In this essay, therefore, I would like to dismantle the internal logic of perfectionist seeing and suggest several ways in which Christian aesthetics – theological vision and perception, offers us a better way of seeing ourselves and the world. Before engaging specific works from art history, I would like to address the complexities that confuse our contemporary sensibilities with respect to vision and perception.

### The Problematics of Perception

Not only has the media culture of our time offered us images of fantasy and unreality, but that kind of looking is training us in lies about perception itself. Essentially voyeuristic in its approach, media outlets and advertising cultures intentionally doctor or edit their visual imagery to give the illusion of an unmediated perception of beauty – the “perfect look” or the “perfect body.” In this way, the magazine photo spread or the reality TV show attempt to give their audiences an immediate sense of beauty, an actual or complete apprehension of the lovely and attractive person they want or want to be. Their approach deceives, because it relies on our common but false assumptions about the nature of representation. Since the advent of photography a century and a half ago, we have unfortunately lost a healthy appreciation for the distance between our seeing and our perception. In the evolution of media forms that increasingly rely on photography, such as newspapers, magazines, television and webpages,

photographic evidence has become the unquestioned arbiter of what is real and true. As Jean Baudrillard (1999) has argued, the media image or *simulacrum* actually maintains a greater significance than the actual person, place, or event.

Because of photography's seemingly unmediated representation of things, we do not question to the same degree whether we saw what we think we saw, but this uncritical reliance upon photographic media must be challenged. Photography, like all other forms of visual representation – painting, sculpture, drawing, or thermal imaging – remains a medium and hence offers a mediated viewership that cannot ultimately replace or substitute for human seeing and perception. The dilemmas surrounding perception are numerous and daunting, but Ludwig Wittgenstein (2003) offers an illuminating word to dispel this sort of confusion. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, he explains:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful (p. 43).

In other words, the project of seeing and perceiving well can be immensely complex. Paralleling Wittgenstein's reflections, Myers and Jeeves (2003) reveal this complex of factors by concluding that perceptions “depend on where our *attention* is drawn, on our prior *experience*, and on our *expectations*” (p. 61).<sup>2</sup>

While living with the uncertainty that occupies the distance between seeing and perceiving is an inescapable part of what it means to be human, Christian aesthetics models a way of looking through the familiar to find that which is hidden. In this way, a Christian aesthetics maintains quite different assumptions about how we see and perceive ourselves and the world. A Christian anthropology admits that seeing, like all other human activities, remains subject to all the limits of our finite, creaturely existence and the profound and deep effects of a sinful nature. Therefore, any discussion of a Christian aesthetics must be situated within the larger frame of God's salvation-historical mission to redeem, restore, and renew his people and all of creation. Thus, it is not surprising to find a wholly different understanding of human seeing and perception included amid St. John's description of the eschatological consummation of God's mission – a celebratory procession of the redeemed led into the New Jerusalem. Consider his description of that moment in Revelation 22: 1-5:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on

either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (*English Standard Version*).

Through this vision given to St. John, we receive the promise that at the consummation of God's purposes in salvation history, the redeemed will not only be ushered into the presence God – the hope of all covenant history – but they will also finally and fully apprehend the face of God. Throughout all of biblical history, the face of God has remained a symbol of immense terror and fear – to see God meant one's life. But on account of their union with God in Christ, the redeemed will come to see God under no threat of lethal perception (e.g. Exodus 3:18-23). This apprehension of the face of God has been described by the great doctors of the Church as the "Beatific Vision," what M. J. Redle (2003) defines as the "direct, intuitive, intellectual vision of God, with the perfection of charity necessarily accompanying it, is the consummation of the divine indwelling in the sanctified spirit or soul, for by this vision the blessed are brought to fruition in such a union with God in knowledge and love that they share forever in God's own happiness" (p. 168). Rather than a unique privilege of those citizens of Christ's kingdom, the perfect seeing and perfect perceiving that St. John describes here merely reflects the comprehensive nature of God's restoration and renewal of humanity – the New Creation. Both the limits of our capacity to see and perceive and the effects of sin to distort what we actually can see and perceive will be lifted in that moment of ultimate restoration and renewal. Until that glorious occasion, however, we will not experience perfection in our seeing and perception.

On this side of the *eschaton*, we must maintain a healthy suspicion of how we see things and rely on the truth, beauty, and goodness of God to understand and evaluate what we have seen. Awaiting that final restoration of our senses, minds, and hearts, the people of God must rely on the Spirit of God to provide the discernment we need to understand ourselves and our circumstances rightly and also the grace to cover over all our misperceptions. Fortunately, God remains faithful to cultivate in us a true apprehension of things and a wisdom that increasingly sees others and the world through the lens of God's promises and the hope of the New Creation. Two particular instances in the New Testament commend themselves for understanding this difficult dynamic, one of which is conceptual and the other practical.

First, St. Paul refers to the nature of our limited

vision and mediated perception of things when he writes in 1 Corinthians 13: 12: "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." In the context of a call to greater love and charity within a factious church, St. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that we do not have perfect vision or perfect perception and must rely upon the ways of our Lord in dealing with one another. Theologically, St. Paul's articulation of human finitude here matches up quite well with his point in chapter 15 of the same letter, namely the sense of dramatic and comprehensive transformation awaiting the human person at the Resurrection. At that point, he explains in 1 Cor. 15: 42-44: "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

Secondly, St. Matthew records Jesus' harsh warning about the Day of Judgment in chapter 25: 34-40. At the separating of the sheep and the goats, Jesus will confront those who did not recognize him in the world and congratulate those who did.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

From Jesus' description, it stands to reason that both those considered sheep and those considered goats actually saw the same phenomena – the poor and destitute brothers and sisters of the world, but the sheep perceived the kingdom of Christ there and the goats did not. Jesus' judgment here centers on the success or failure of perception. At the very least, this portion of Scripture reminds us that accurate seeing does not necessarily guarantee accurate perceiving.

For the Christian, understanding of the world relies not only on careful and attentive seeing, but perhaps more importantly on the lens of the gospel to perceive what one sees rightly and in light of the grand reality of God's mission. As difficult as it may seem, Christians are called to see and perceive life differently than those with merely natural eyes. Thankfully, we find that we are by no means alone in this project of faithful seeing and perceiving. In his immense mercy and kindness, God has preserved

his revelation for us in the words of Holy Scripture and entrusted it to the Church. Along with the great traditions of Christian faith that have gone on before us, we submit one to another in local communities of faith so that God might restore our sight even now, or as St. Paul describes in Romans 12: 2, so that we might undergo “the renewing of our minds” by which our faculties – seeing and perceiving along with so many others – are redeemed. It is, after all, within these communities of faith that God is at work to redefine our notions of what is beautiful and worthy of attention (i.e. a life transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ), and in this place, members of the community hopefully come to trust one another and value each others’ affirmation and encouragement beyond all other forms. Perhaps, it is not too much to hope that in these communities the level of positive affirmations extended to others might come to repair or develop the notions of self-image carried by each member. In other words, everything necessary to restore healthy self-image, practically speaking, is already present in the Church’s fabric of community and the gospel’s hope for a final and comprehensive restoration of all things (Rev. 21:5).

### **The Image Looks Back**

In the project of acquiring a healthy self-image, we are helped immensely by the rich traditions of theologically informed art and visual culture from the history of the Church. Despite the immense diversity and variety of works in these traditions, a common thread can be identified in that all these forms of imagery understand that embodying theological truth through an aesthetic medium requires a carefully-nuanced and subtle appreciation for mediated types of seeing. In other words, theological viewing requires participation in the life of the image as you experience it. Let me illustrate what I mean.

The nature of theological viewing is probably nowhere better illustrated than in the life of icons in the Orthodox tradition. For instance, an icon like Andrei Rublev’s Trinity Icon from the 15<sup>th</sup> century initiates a wholly different sort of viewing. (To view and learn more about Rublev’s Trinity icon, follow the link presented as the second web address in the Appendix at the end of this article). The subtle wonder of an image like this disrupts and confounds our media-saturated viewership. The angelic figures, balanced composition, and delicate inter-play of colour suggests to our eyes a mysterious depth of meaning that is not immediately found on the surface of this image. Perhaps, one of the essential reasons that generation after generation of Christians find themselves looking into this image is that this image gazes back. The returning gaze of this image, however, utilizes a power completely unknown to the siren calls of our contemporary media culture. The gaze of Rublev’s icon, at once, displays not only the strength but also the receptiveness of its unified figures. Representative of the divine Trinity, the three seated figures demonstrate the mutuality and

tranquillity of their community and at the same time invite the viewer to take a place at the table of their fellowship. This dual reaching-out and reaching-in illumines to us more of the mystery of the Trinity, but in order to see and understand that dynamic within the image we must, in the classic words of C.S. Lewis (1992), resist the urge to “use the picture” for our own ends and allow it to work on us. Or, in his axiomatic expression: “The distinction can hardly be better expressed than by saying that the many use art and the few receive it” (Lewis, p. 19). Lewis instructs:

We must use our eyes. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the pictures in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way. (There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.) (p. 19).

By means of further illustrating this type of theological viewing, let us now consider one dominant trajectory in the history of Christian art and visual culture. Because of their similarly mediated meanings, the following works can also help produce in us better modes of seeing and perceiving.

### **Perfectly Beautiful and Perfectly Bloody: The Renaissance Crucifixion**

Even a brief survey of Renaissance art will show a clear divide between how the body of Jesus Christ on the cross was represented in the Italian High Renaissance, native to artistic centers like Florence, Rome, and Venice, versus the Northern Renaissance outside of Italy in the regions of Germany, France, England, and the Netherlands. Throughout Italy, artists were primarily concerned with depicting the beautiful body of Christ as serene, composed – almost angelic. The Northern Renaissance, however, gave vivid detail to bodily afflictions Christ suffered in his death. The history of Christian visual culture actually attests to the significance of both of these perspectives and, more often than not, we find in the historical record an essentially composed, but tragically bleeding Christ. It stands to reason that the heightened attention to the details of Christ’s body seen in the Renaissance serves to indicate more than artistic flourish. In pursuing this comparison, I will build upon David Brown’s (2009) study of Christian views of the body in the Renaissance period as displayed in the High Italian and Northern Gothic traditions. These developments, in fact, bear a profound theological significance.

In the tradition of painting a perfectly beautiful Christ, Pietro Perugino and his more famous pupil Raphael stand out as prime examples of this approach. By no means the first, the last,



or even the most successful at painting a perfectly beautiful Christ on the cross, Perugino and Raphael represent a unique moment in this broader historical development of Christian imagery. Both artists were immensely successful and internationally recognized for their public commissions and the often dramatic improvements they made to the development of Western painting. Two important ecclesiastical commissions commend themselves for consideration.

Consider first Perugino's *Crucifixion* from the early 1480's that resides in the National Gallery in Washington, DC (see the third item in Appendix). Also known as "the Galitzin Triptych," this three panel altarpiece was commissioned as a gift for the church of San Domenico near Siena and depicts the Virgin Mary, the Apostle John, Saint Jerome, and Saint Mary Magdalene as witnesses to the Crucifixion. Considered the master of the "Umbrian school" of painting, Perugino unites in this piece a deft and graceful treatment of Christ on the cross and attendant saints with an exquisite Umbrian landscape that carefully frames the composition.

Just a couple of decades after the completion of Perugino's work, his star pupil produced a quite similarly constructed Crucifixion scene for a side chapel in the same church dedicated to Saint Jerome. Raphael's work is called *The Mond Crucifixion* and hangs in the British National Gallery in London (see the fourth item in Appendix). Though more compact in its composition, Raphael has surpassed his mentor in delicately presenting the perfectly beautiful body of Christ. Adorned with angels on either side collecting the softly flowing blood of the Lord, Raphael's Crucifixion is perhaps the most beautiful representation of Christ on the cross in all of Western art history. For example, successive attempts in Western painting to rival Raphael's achievements actually represent dramatic stylistic departures like that of El Greco's Mannerist visions or the Baroque austerity and mysticism of Francisco de Zurbarán.

Initially, these works communicate a profound sense of Christ's perfection manifested in his body on the cross. The nature of his perfect beauty, however, seems quite out of place as displayed on the cross. Was not this the very site of his utter humiliation, suffering, and ultimate abandonment by his father? Is not the cross the last venue appropriate for depicting his perfection? Well, some might see things that way, but perhaps there seems to be more at stake here than an unchecked humanist infatuation with the ideal human form. I want to echo theologian and aesthetician David Brown (2009) who has suggested that Perugino and Raphael are representing here a "realized eschatology" of Christ's body. Just as the artists have included Saint Jerome – who would not be born for more than three centuries after Christ – Perugino and Raphael after him present a meditation on the body of Christ, not as it would have appeared in the moment of his disgrace, but at the moment of final restoration and victory. Contrary to dominant

assumptions that classical Greek ideals of perfect bodily forms produced this emphasis on a beautiful Christ, Brown suggests a more subtle reading of this artistic strategy. He explains that "Greek ideals of male beauty were undoubtedly applied to Christ, but in order to deliver an essentially Christian message that was continuous with earlier, first-millennium ways of thinking, Beauty of body, even on the Cross, was being used symbolically to demonstrate the powerlessness of evil against the forces of good" (Saunders, Maude, & Macnaughton, 2009, p. 31). In this way, Perugino and Raphael have united the comprehensive arch of Christ's life in one moment, and we have here both *Crucifixion and Resurrection*.

While some may reject this subtle layering of theological themes with the representation of Christ, we do not, I think, need to go as far as some have gone in claiming that this perfectly beautiful Christ signals a God/man who shares so little of our human experience that he is completely out of reach, unavailable, and unrelatable to the viewer. An unhealthy form of perfectionism with respect to the spiritual life might see this perfectly beautiful Christ, consider a similarly complete perfecting an unattainable reality, and thus abandon efforts at sanctification in the Christian life.

There is, however, good reason for maintaining that Christ has not in fact been completely divinized here. Met by the sheer glory and splendour of Christ's form, our eyes eventually descend and focus on the other figures populating the scene. Juxtaposed with this perfectly beautiful Christ, we find the less than perfect, all-too-human saints. Both Raphael and Perugino, in their own ways, prominently display these saints as emblems of discipleship. Raphael foregrounds Jerome and Mary Magdalene and places them closer to the viewer than the traditionally more revered figures of the Virgin Mary and the Apostle John. More significantly, if much more subtly, Perugino depicts Jerome and Mary Magdalene in a much more humble fashion and actually places them within the architectural frame of the painting's composition. Mary Magdalene and Jerome actually seem to stand at the edge of a pathway cutting through the mountains that frame the scene. Curiously, these pathways do not lead away from the foreground of the scene as much as they lead up to the top of the composition. In this way, Perugino's composition seems to suggest that the saintly paths of Jerome and Mary Magdalene – unsurpassed emblems in Christendom of the penitential life - might in fact lead to the heavenly glory that Christ displays in his beautiful body on the cross. Thus, discipleship is actually affirmed by these works rather than negated, and more importantly, a proper or biblical view of bodily perfection is transmitted. As Stephanie Brown and William Miller (2005) point out, contemporary understandings of perfection relate the sense of "an immaculate and error-free state," but the origins of perfection in the accounts of Scripture imply completion, maturation and reaching a final *telos* (pp.

172-173). In this way, the beautiful body of Christ pictures a final perfection that awaits the faithful disciple.

Whereas the High Renaissance style of Perugino and Raphael seems to commend discipleship through picturing its results, the Northern Renaissance demonstrates a different approach. The opposite trajectory in Renaissance depictions of the Crucifixion initiates a wholly different experience of theological viewing. Iconic in its depiction of the Northern Renaissance's grotesque cross, Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion* from the Isenheim Altarpiece of 1515 represents a stark contrast to delicate beauty of Perugino and Raphael's work (see the fifth item in Appendix). Often described as the most significant art work of the German Renaissance, this altar piece with its immense outer panel (9ft. by 16ft.) depicting this most intense Crucifixion scene has left a permanent impression on the visual imagination of Western culture. As the Oxford's *Dictionary of Christian Art* describes it, "No other Crucified Christ in all Western art exceeds this one as an expression of the full ghastly horror of Christ's terrible death" (Murray & Murray, 2004, p. 239). Whereas the High Renaissance tradition in Italy had included the blood of Christ in the composition as just another specific detail from the biblical narrative, Northern Renaissance artists such as Grünewald make Christ's blood the focus of the picture, as seen in the inclusion of the symbolic lamb bleeding into a chalice beneath John the Baptist. Illuminating comparisons of this emphasis can be found in the work of other seminal Northern Renaissance figures like Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach the Elder, and Lucas Cranach the Younger. Informed by the emerging currents of thought in a pre-Reformation environment and signified by the clear delineation of the Baptist's extended pointer finger, this artist aims to draw attention to and create a particular reverence for the sufferings of Christ. Beaten, bruised, and bleeding, the Christ of Grünewald's *Crucifixion* could not appear a more pitiable or reviled figure.

In the face of this emaciated, writhing figure stretched across a wooden cross, we encounter the inverse of the perfectly beautiful Christ of the High Renaissance – the pre-eminent sufferer, the ultimate victim, a perfectly bloody Christ. Whereas Raphael's Christ seems completely free of any stain from the world, Grünewald's Christ has lost all of his divine esteem. If Perugino and Raphael's vision tempts us to despair that we might never attain the perfect purity of Christ, Grünewald's Christ questions whether we have really suffered anything at all. Do our trials and hardships amount to much in light of this degree of pain and suffering? Why endure anything if our suffering will never come close to the cross of Christ?

Again, our initial reading of this image belies the complex meaning it holds. The particular context of this work bears a unique significance that explains in large part the extreme nature of Christ's bodily

suffering here. Commissioned for the chapel of the monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim, Grünewald's altarpiece was intended for a congregation well-acquainted with intense physical afflictions, for this chapel was located in a lazar-house – a hospital for those afflicted with skin and nervous diseases, also known as a leper colony. In this way, the inmates of the hospital saw before them a saviour who has suffered in the same way as they now do – a Christ with whom they could identify and in whom they might find solidarity. Solidarity, however, was not the artist's only concern, for Grünewald's *Crucifixion* is after all only the front panel of a multi-panel altarpiece. Behind this grotesque scene of Christ's suffering, worshippers would find a similarly astounding vision of Christ's Resurrection glory (see the sixth item in Appendix). Within the altarpiece, Grünewald placed one of the most remarkable visions of Christ's resurrected form found in all of Western art history. Whereas at his death, Grünewald's Christ suffered over every inch of his body, so at the moment of his return to life, the same afflicted figure has been transformed completely into a radiant, beaming son of man. Thus, Grünewald balances the intensity of Christ's sufferings with the eternity of his glory. In this way, viewers of this piece might be reminded of the momentary nature of this life's trials in light of eternal glory with Christ, not as a mode of flippant escapism, but as a reliable means of facing the challenges and difficulties that presently beset us. Or, as St. Paul eloquently reminds us in Romans 8: 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

## Conclusion

It seems that in very different ways, both the perfectly beautiful Christ of the High Renaissance and the perfectly bloody Christ of Isenheim draw their viewers into a space of contemplation and discovery only to return them to reality with a renewed imagination. These moments of visual exploration and perceptual deliberation, often provided to us through the arts, represent a healthy alternative to the incessant conditioning of our media culture. By contrast, these moments of discovery stretch us and grow us. Training our vision in this way helps us to resist the habits of a negative, unhealthy perfectionism that accounts only for the surface appearance of our bodies and misses the hidden significance of embodiment.

As these paintings suggest, in their unique but contrasting fashions, human embodiment has and always will have special worth in God's eyes. As both creator and redeemer of embodied persons, God clearly delights in human bodies and values them enough to initiate a process of perfecting these embodied creatures; perfecting them, that is, according to a divine standard – the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 15:49, 2 Cor. 2.13). Indeed, by the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ,

diversely represented in the paintings discussed above, God has also shown the depths of divine love for the redemption of the human person – soul and body. These pictures of discipleship train us to see ourselves as more than merely souls awaiting release from the body or bodies burdened by the demands of the soul. They redefine our shallow notions of perfection and enrich our hope for the complete deliverance that God has promised in Christ – the sort of deliverance through struggle made known in the haunting words given to the prophet Jeremiah: “I will give you your life as a prize of war” (Jeremiah 21:9, 38:2, 39:18 and 45:5)

To escape this life of struggle with our whole selves (soul and body) is an astounding grace of God, and the more we reflect on this promise the better we will resist the increasingly banal and vain temptations that foster an unhealthy perfectionist seeing. Whether meditating on the body’s deliverance through Scripture or contemplating profound examples of the Christian artistic tradition, moments spent considering the disciple’s journey will mature us and begin to shape in us a more careful seeing and perceiving enriched by the theological wisdom we find in the journey – in short, we will undergo the preparation of the redeemed to behold the face of God.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, perfectionism manifests “the tendency to demand of others or of oneself a higher level of performance than is required by the situation” VandenBos (2007, p. 685). In the context of an unhealthy perfectionist self-image, the demand to perform a better look or maintain one’s body in strict conformity to perceived cultural standards of human beauty can lead to dysfunctional behaviors that include the loss of relationships, depression, eating disorders, and other forms of self-abuse.

<sup>2</sup> For another helpful discussion of perception, see Ronald Philipchalk (1987) tackle the difficult topics associated with seeing in his chapter on sensation and perception (pp. 45-60).

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## Appendix

Below is a list of web addresses that present the artworks discussed in this article.

1. Giotto's "Navicella" Mosaic:  
<http://saintpetersbasilica.org/Interior/Navicella/Navicella.htm>
  2. Andrei Rublev's Trinity Icon:  
[http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign\\_Lang/Russian/trinity.html](http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/Russian/trinity.html)
  3. Perugino's Galitzin Triptych:  
<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg20/gg20-35.0.html>
  4. Raphael's The Mond Crucifixion:  
<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/raphael-the-mond-crucifixion>
  5. Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece:  
<http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/iconographySupplementalImages/crucifixion/grunewald1515.html>
  6. Grünewald's Resurrection panel from the Isenheim altarpiece:  
<http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/jkh/gr7.html>
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# The Soul as the Person Who Experiences the Brain's Psychological Functioning

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*A well-developed view of human nature is essential to Christian psychology. Scripture and theological tradition, as well as one's psychotherapeutic orientation can influence ideas concerning human nature. Within one's view are monistic, or in some manner dualistic understandings of the person. Beliefs in the material and the nonmaterial person shape our understanding of the experiencing person. A Scriptural and theological perspective, of there being a real regeneration in those who are born again, further influences an understanding of human nature and of the experience of the Christian person. This article puts forth a concept that the soul is the real person who animates, yet is mediated by the brain, in this life as a whole person. The soul is presented as being able to impact the brain's psychological functioning. This understanding is relevant for assisting the person in psychotherapy, and in particular, the Christian person in a psychotherapeutic relationship.*

When delivering psychotherapy or counseling services, the therapist is facing a person about whom assumptions are made. The therapist believes certain things about the other's human nature. Consequently, and because there is such a thing, human nature has implications for psychological treatment. One's view of human nature, being more or less accurate, becomes a factor influencing psychotherapy. Though the Christian Scriptures are not systematic in a presentation of human nature, they are here respected as a reliable source of information, some of which is not available anywhere else.

When doing a psychotherapeutic work, conscious experience is at the center. Our view of human nature, and the mind-body problem in particular, affects how we imagine the experience of the person being treated, and it influences how we intervene. Christian psychotherapists, it is hoped, have been thoughtful in their integrating of psychological and theological perspectives, and have invested in their own personal psychological work and spiritual formation. However, an understanding of the design of human nature and the experience of being human is also needed in order to more fully and competently enter into the therapeutic relationship. Brugger et al. (2008) made "a case for the importance of articulating a normative account of human nature for clinical psychology" (p. 3).

Beyond a general understanding of human nature and human experience, even more consideration needs to be given to the special case of being a spiritually regenerate believer in Jesus Christ. If spiritual regeneration is real, then the person's nature has been fundamentally altered and with it the norms

related to its functioning.

Human nature and the related mind-body problem should be of interest to Christian Psychology, especially its practitioners. Consciousness, which is essential for psychotherapeutic practice, is itself a highly mysterious phenomenon, making the mind-body problem more interesting and challenging. Conscious experience, though at work all the time in our everyday lives, has been and continues to be controversial, especially among philosophers (Blackmore, 2006; Robinson, 1986). Nagel (1980) has called attention to the subjective character of this conscious experience and the related difficulty in providing an adequate analogy for it.

A similar limitation in understanding mental phenomena and human nature is referred to by Coe and Hall (2010), as they comment about psychological and theological explanations of human experience. Coe and Hall state that for some, "the Scriptures provide such a neat 'cheat sheet' to understanding the human condition, that the person may never do the relevant observation and reflection on human beings themselves in order to know all that is possible in an understanding of the person" (p. 64). However, this does not need to be the case for Christian Psychology. Though respecting the value and necessity of learning from the study of mental phenomena, Christian psychology has access to the Scriptures as the ultimate referent for understanding what is beyond human imagination, observation, or reflection. With sufficient humility, Christian psychotherapists can admit that the Word of God provides truth regarding human nature. However, they must then be willing to do the hard work of building a "normative account" of human nature

upon the Scripture's foundational teaching.

Theological doctrines systematizing the teaching of Scripture are useful for the task of presenting a Christian view of human nature. One's theology should be considered when attempting to bring the Scriptures and psychology together (Morgan & Yarhouse, 2001). Reformed theology has a rich tradition of thoughtfully clarifying doctrines. While it is outside the scope of this article to argue for the Reformed perspective, I will be exploring its informative benefits with respect to building an account of human nature. Theologically conservative Reformed doctrines concerning human nature are presented in this article--especially those related to the nonmaterial (or immaterial) soul and the regenerate believer in Jesus Christ. The combination of recognizing human limitations in understanding the conscious experience of a regenerate believer and of accepting input, from a theologically informed view of the new nature in Christ, is here promoted as being important for providing psychotherapy that is more congruently Christian.

The issue of understanding human nature will be addressed by focusing on the mind-body problem (though some may think it more accurately described as the personal identity problem). Mind will here be defined as referring to the nonmaterial aspect of the person, and will here be considered as interchangeable with the terms soul, spirit, person, and self. This is consistent with Evans (2005) use of such terms more or less synonymously "to refer to whatever a person refers to when that person uses the term, 'I' to refer to himself or herself as a conscious agent" (p. 330). The term body will be used in reference to the material or physical aspect of the person. Berkhof (1960) states that the usual view is that man consists in two parts, body and soul, and that biblically "the two words 'soul' and 'spirit' are used interchangeably" (p. 61). The positions that are referred to as materialistic monism, dualism, and holistic dualism are also relevant to this discussion. Cooper's (2000) definitions will be used. Regarding monism, Cooper states, "For the materialistic monist, a person or soul is the set of human mental capacities generated by the human body and brain--a 'mentating' or 'personating' organism" (p. 165). He defines dualism--one that is consistent with the biblical text--as meaning a dichotomy of ego and the earthly organism such that "we can survive 'coming apart' at death, unnatural as this may be" (p. 163). Finally, Cooper's definition of dualism "does not require viewing the body and soul as self-contained, independently functioning entities, at least not during earthly life" (p. 164). His understanding of the dualism of biblical anthropology is that it is actually a functional holism (a holistic dualism). Holistic dualism is the view adopted in this article.

This article is an attempt to develop a more accurate understanding of the experiencing person's human nature--one that is informed biblically and theologically, while also accounting for real

psychological and physical functioning and change within the person. Even more to the point, this article is focused on providing a biblical/theological clarification of the regenerate human nature of the experiencing person in psychotherapeutic relationship.

### **The Modern Psychological Perspective on Human Nature**

One may wonder why those in the field of psychology would even have interest in an article raising the issue of human nature in these terms. As Robinson (1986) stated, there is a surprising consensus in psychology in favor of monistic materialism - meaning that humans are whole and material. "According to this position, the universe is not comprised of two mutually exclusive categories of 'stuff,' that is, 'mental' and 'material.' It is comprised of only one and that is material" (p. 435). Robinson reflects on the peaceful agreement among those in the field of scientific psychology, on the position of materialistic monism. From this psychological position, the mind-body problem is about the physical brain generating the mind, not about a nonmaterial substance and a physical substance.

Hansell and Damour (2008), in their textbook on abnormal psychology, make the statement that, "We now know that the mind and the brain are fully interconnected and interdependent, not separate realms as the philosophical 'dualists' once believed" (p. 7). Those in the field of psychiatry would concur. McHugh and Slavney (1998) make the statement that, "We don't know how the brain produces the mind" (p. 11). They do believe that "the mind and its elements are, however, products of the brain" (p. 11). This view is held even though they go on to admit that no scientist has been able to connect a perception of "I" to what is known of brain structure and function.

Johnson (2000), writing on a philosophy of science for Christian psychology, states that modern psychology was based on an avowed rejection of metaphysical concerns and that a version of the positivism, upon which psychology was founded, continues to exert its influence on psychology. In this rejection of metaphysical concerns, it has been impossible to take a stand on metaphysical issues that relate to psychology, such as body-soul or brain-mind.

Beck and Demarest (2005) likewise see modern psychology as endorsing anthropological monism. Classical psychology recognized the reality of the soul. "But modern psychology, influenced by naturalistic evolution and brain science, has focused on the functioning of the brain, thus undermining traditional dualistic anthropology" (Beck & Demarest, p. 123).

### **A Historical View of Human Nature**

In attempting to examine the psychological factors that guided the evolution of Christianity,

Robinson (1986) is unable to find a history of Christian psychology before the fifth century. "Only then, with the confidence that comes from success, did the Fathers begin to create that studiously rational framework by which the Christian view of man might be taught in psychologically meaningful terms" (p. 120). In Augustine's *Confessions*, there was an interior sense or consciousness presented that perceived itself perceiving.

Robinson (1986) credits the Patristic philosophers, with their anti-materialist convictions, as placing the psychological characteristics of human beings beyond physical analysis. They insisted upon psycho-physical dualism. "In orthodox religious terms, the dualism was between 'soul' and 'matter'; later between 'mind' and 'matter.' In our own time, the issue survives as the Mind-Body problem" (Robinson, p. 121).

Kelly (2004) also discusses the defining of the "person" historically. He states that the concept of person emerged from Christianity:

St. Augustine's fourth century *Confessions* manifest what we would call today an intense sense of inward, personal life. As a result of the spreading of the idea of 'person' in culture, by the sixth century, the Northern Italian philosopher and theologian, Boethius attempted to define (somewhat unsuccessfully) what it meant to be a person. A much more fruitful definition was provided nearly six hundred years later in France. The great twelfth-century Christian theologian, Richard of St. Victor derived an understanding of personality from meditating on the communion of love in the being of God among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who wholly interpenetrate and coinhere in one another in such a way that their person distinctness as Father, Son and Holy Spirit remains inviolate (p. 232).

There is in Richard of St. Victor an understanding of the person derived from an understanding of the Trinity.

Church confessions are also a source for understanding the teaching of the church historically regarding aspects of human nature. The Westminster Confession of Faith (2003), from the seventeenth-century, is one of these documents consistent with Reformed Theology. In chapter 32, there are statements regarding the state of man after death. "The bodies of men, after death, return to dust and see corruption: but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them" (p. 122). This confession presents a dualistic, material and nonmaterial, perspective of human nature.

Berkhof (1993) presents a *realistic dualism* also from the Reformed Theological perspective, which he defines as follows:

The simple facts to which we must always return, and which are embodied in the theory

of realistic dualism, are the following: body and soul are distinct substances, which do interact, though their mode of interaction escapes human scrutiny and remains a mystery for us. The union between the two may be called a union of life: the two are organically related, the soul acting on the body and the body on the soul. Some of the actions of the body are dependent on the conscious operation of the soul, while others are not. The operations of the soul are connected to the body as its instrument in the present life; but from the continued *conscious* existence and activity of the soul after death it appears that it can work without the body. This view is certainly in harmony with the representations of Scripture on this point. (pp. 195-196).

Berkhof clearly states a view of human nature in which there is material and nonmaterial. The two interact with each other and influence each other. He also introduces the idea of an intermediate state after physical death, in which there is continued conscious existence--a view that is consistent with Cooper's (2000) definition of dualism above.

### **Intermediate State Implications for Understanding Human Nature**

Human nature and psychotherapy might appear distant from discussions of the intermediate state. What is meant here by the term intermediate state is that time period after physical death and before the final resurrection. The focus here will be limited to the intermediate state as experienced by Christians. Time is spent considering the intermediate state because, for one committed to the doctrine of the final resurrection, it strengthens the case for a dualism of the nonmaterial and material while in the body. But as will be seen in the next section, this dualism exists, as mentioned previously, within a holism as well. Having a firmer grasp on the reality of personal existence without a body can assist us in conceptualizing a nonmaterial person, in a material body, with whom we are interacting in psychotherapy.

There are several passages that are referred to when considering biblical teaching on the intermediate state. On the cross, Jesus said to one of the thieves also being crucified, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, English Standard Version). The person Jesus spoke to on the cross would be present with Jesus after death that very day, in a place referred to as Paradise--a continued existence after death.

The Apostle Paul makes reference to continued existence after death as well. He uses the phrase, *being at home in the body*, to mean while he is alive, and he uses, *being at home with the Lord*, to mean after he was dead. "We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord....Yes, we are of good courage and would rather be away from the

body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (2 Corinthians 5: 6-9). The idea Paul presents is of a person’s continuation after physical life has ended. Whether physically alive or physically dead, there would be the continuation of the person known as Paul.

Helm (1978) has provided a technical philosophical explanation of a theory of life-after-death. In this article, he presents the shadow-man or minimal-person doctrine. The doctrine he presents is thought to closely approximate the understanding of orthodox Christianity. The person after death is called a minimal-person, because of the absence of the body and therefore “nothing that would require the possession of a body at a time is possible for a minimal person” (p. 16). For example, it would not be possible for a minimal person to feel bodily pain. Helm’s view, applied to the psychological, could mean that it would not be possible for a minimal person to have any psychological functioning that requires a brain. The sort of minimal person Helm is arguing for would provide for the principle of continuity between death and resurrection.

At this point, it is appropriate to provide an analogy that has been used in an attempt to clarify an understanding of the subjective character and inaccessible nature of mental phenomena. Nagel (1980) employed this unique analogy. He wanted an analogy that was outside the range of our human experience and imagination. He chose to use another mammal, a bat. He assumed that bats have some type of conscious experience, but yet very different from our own. Bats perceive their external world primarily by sonar, not by vision. He stated that bat sonar is clearly a form of perception, but it is not like anything we can experience or imagine. Nagel used this bat analogy to emphasize that his realism about the subjective domain of experience implied a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts.

As humans, we have never experienced the use of a sonar system instead of sight. By way of comparison, with the experiencing of the person in the intermediate state, just because we have never experienced life without a body, it does not follow that there is no experiencing without a body--just experiencing of a different type--one we simply have no way to relate to directly from our present condition in the body.

Berkof (1993) offers insight into the intermediate state. He states that the usual position of the Reformed Churches “is that the souls of believers *immediately* after death enter the glories of heaven” (p. 679). He goes on to reference the Heidelberg Catechism, along with the Westminster Confession (mentioned previously), and Helvetic Confession, as all promoting this view. Berkof continues on to discuss the biblical passages mentioned above which teach that the soul of the believer, when separated from the body, enters the presence of Christ. He

then emphasizes that the intermediate state “is a state in which believers are truly alive and fully conscious, Luke 16:19-31; I Thess. 5:10” (Berkof p. 679).

With regard to whether the soul after death remains actively conscious and is capable of rational and religious action, Berkhof (1993) states the following:

This has sometimes been denied on the ground that the soul in its conscious activity is dependent on the brain, and therefore cannot continue to function when the brain is destroyed. But, as already pointed out . . . , the cogency of this argument may well be doubted. . . . From the fact that the human consciousness in the present life transmits its effects through the brain, it does not necessarily follow that it can work in no other way (p. 688).

For Berkhof, there is a functioning (including psychological functioning) with the brain in this life and a functioning (including some psychological functioning) without it in the intermediate state. When soul is discussed in this manner, it highlights that the soul is not just some vaporous life energy, but is the person - the deeper true person. The soul is the person, whether in the body or apart from the physical body. However, the relationship between this nonmaterial soul and the physical body needs to be examined further, lest there appear to be too great a separateness between body and soul.

### Holistic Dualism

It is possible to not be trapped in either the monistic or dualistic positions. Cooper (2000) does a thorough work of exploring the monism-dualism debate and then reaches an alternative conclusion--a dualism of biblical anthropology that yields functional holism--a holistic dualism.

Cooper (2000) states, “If to be absent from the body for me is to be with the Lord--still ‘in Christ’ and ‘living together with him’ as I am already now--then I must exist between my death and the resurrection” (p. 161). He is clarifying that duality means that there is an aspect or dimension of the person that can survive the separation from the body. This is different than when monists say there is duality in the kinds of functionality in human nature, because they would deny the surviving after separation from the body. Cooper is not speculating beyond the idea that the essential selfhood or core personality survives physical death. He does not believe it is speculation that believers will consciously fellowship with the Lord, after death, apart from their body. The possibility of that mode of human existence is all that he means by dualism. “When we die, there is a dichotomy of ego and the earthly organism. We are constituted in such a way that we can survive ‘coming apart’ at death, unnatural as this may be. This is all that I mean by ‘dualism’” (Cooper, p. 163).

Of particular interest, for the purpose of this article, are Cooper’s (2000) statements that we,



when considering our nature, might not have even suspected that there is an “ontic duality or dualism inherent in our constitution” (Cooper, p. 198). His point is that we are more than mere organism and that “conceptually speaking, minds and brains are distinct” (Cooper, p. 199). We can reason from an understanding of the intermediate state that we have a separable soul and then conceptually see ourselves differently in this life--as having a distinction between our persons and our bodies (including the brain). If the brain’s psychological functioning and psychopathology are distinct from the person, then there are implications for treatment.

### Assumptions Concerning the Person

Psychotherapists assume there is a conscious someone within the client, with whom to engage in order to address the brain’s psychological functioning problems. From a materialist perspective, this consciousness would have to be explained as somehow arising from the brain.

Perhaps when psychologists have materialistic assumptions, about minds arising from brains, this places them in a situation similar to that of materialistic neuroscientists. Beauregard and O’Leary (2007) present a case for the existence of the soul as distinct from the brain and the rest of the body, but see neuroscientists as starting from a different set of assumptions. Beauregard himself, being a neuroscientist, takes on the assumptions of neuroscientists: “Neuroscientists have not discovered that there is no you in you; they start with that assumption. Anything they find is interpreted on the basis of that view. The science does not require that. Rather, it is an obligation that materialists impose on themselves” (Beauregard & O’Leary, pp. 4-5).

Rather than starting with materialist assumptions, if psychology started with nonmaterialist assumptions, then the door would be opened to further explore both the material and nonmaterial aspects of the person. An understanding of the experience of having a soul distinct from the body could be derived. What if this further step was taken that asserted that the soul does not just emerge from the brain, but is distinct from the brain? One might think that postulating this would mean having a dualism that does not require that there be a brain. In discussing mental events and the mind-body problem, Robinson (1986) makes the following comments:

Indeed, dualism does not even necessarily require that mental events not be the effects of neural causes. A modest dualism only asserts that there are mental events. To show, then, that such events are somehow caused by material events, far from establishing the validity of a monist position, virtually guarantees the validity of a dualist position. To say, that is, that ‘I have a mind that is an entity different from material entities’ is to assert a proposition that cannot be falsified

by *any* demonstration of the causes of the proposed mental entity (p. 435-436).

A holistic dualism can assert that there is a nonmaterial aspect to a person, a soul, and that there is a material brain and a material body, with the nonmaterial and material working together as a unified whole. However, rather than the material brain itself being the originator of human consciousness, it could just as well be understood that the nonmaterial soul animates the brain to produce consciousness and other brain functions, including psychological functions. In this line of thinking, the brain becomes a sort of transmitter or reducing valve. Beauregard and O’Leary (2007) describe this is in their agreement “with William James’s hypothesis that the brain does not generate but transmits and expresses mental processes/events. From this perspective, the brain can be compared with a television receiver that translates electromagnetic waves (which exist apart from the TV receiver) into picture and sound” (Beauregard & O’Leary, p. 292). They go on to state that, “Along similar lines, Henri Bergson and Aldous Huxley have proposed that our brains do not produce mind and consciousness, but rather act as reducing valves, allowing us the experience of only a narrow portion of perceivable reality. This outlook implies that the brain normally limits our experience of the spiritual world” (Beauregard & O’Leary, pp. 292-293). Berkhof (1993) in a discussion of the future intermediate state, also comments on the present life, “From the fact that the human consciousness in the present life transmits its effect through the brain, it does not necessarily follow that it can work in no other way” (Berkhof, p. 688).

Grudem (1994) further develops a distinction between soul and brain, when he makes mention of the Apostle Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:14 about his soul praying but his mind being unfruitful. “The point is simply that there is a nonphysical element to our existence that can at times function apart from our conscious awareness of how it is functioning” (Grudem, p. 480). Grudem believes, “Scripture is very clear that we do have a soul that is distinct from our physical bodies, which not only can function somewhat independently of our ordinary thought processes (1 Cor. 14:14; Rom. 8:16), but also, when we die, is able to go on consciously acting and relating to God apart from our physical bodies” (Grudem, p. 483).

From a human perspective, without the Scriptures to inform, the brain appears to be the source of conscious experience. However, a materialist attempting to explain human conscious experience is much like a person trying to get into the experience of a bat using sonar. Even more difficult, it seems, would be a materialist attempting to understand the experience of a regenerate believer in Jesus Christ. An understanding of this regeneration is dependent upon what is revealed in the Scriptures.

## Regeneration and the One New Nature Experience

The supernatural event of regeneration (the new birth), of the person who then believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, produces an altered and unique human experience. To attempt a materialist understanding of the regenerate believers' human experience is similar to the difficulty in the analogy mentioned above, of a sighted person trying to understand what a bat experiences using its sonar. Just as the sighted person assumes and imposes his sighted experience when trying to understand the bat, the materialist assumes and imposes his understanding upon the regenerate person. This type of understanding will not account for what is actually occurring. Johnson (2000) stated this very clearly. "But to try to understand the redeemed self, the Christian community will, for obvious reasons, receive no help from secularists, since study of the redeemed self can only proceed from a science rooted in regeneration itself ... open to special revelation, which describes the redeemed self in some inspired detail" (Johnson, pp. 20-21). Johnson goes on to make the statement that "the Christian community must go to the scriptures to find out what the consummated self will look like" (p. 21). There has been a dramatic change to the soul in regeneration and what follows is also characterized by an intimate and empowering connection with God.

Berkhof (1993) defines regeneration, in the strictest sense, in this way: "*Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy*" (Berkhof, p. 469). In Berkhof's view the soul comes under the influence of the Holy Spirit and moves in a Godward direction. For Berkhof, "It is an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man, intellectually, emotionally, and morally" (p. 468). Though he understands regeneration to affect human nature as a whole, it is not a complete or perfect change of the whole nature of man: "It does not comprise conversion and sanctification" (Berkhof, p. 468).

We can understand from this that the soul has been made holy, but there still remains the need for further change in the whole person. Stott (1970) states that not one of us is wholly saved yet and then clarifies this further.

Our souls are redeemed, it is true, but not our bodies. And it is our unredeemed bodies which cause us to groan. Why is this? For one thing, these bodies are weak, fragile and mortal, subject to fatigue, sickness, pain and death. It is this that the apostle has in mind in 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4 when he says that in this body 'we groan'. But it is also that the 'flesh', our fallen sinful nature, dwells in our mortal bodies, 'sin which dwells in me' ([Romans] 7:17, 20). Indeed, it is this very indwelling sin which causes us to cry out, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' Such a shout

of anguish is precisely what Paul means by our present inward groaning, except that there the inward groan is audibly expressed (p. 96).

Here a point of clarification is made that there is a redemption accomplished in the soul, but there remains to be a redemption of the body—keeping in mind that the person as a whole is understood as still sinning.

There is a confusion that needs to be addressed, though, regarding what remains in the regenerate or redeemed person. The flesh is still present in the regenerate person, but now as a sinful disposition and not as the actual old sinful nature. There is only one nature in a person at a time. The regenerate believer has a new nature, but still struggles with the flesh. Murray (1971) states that in Romans 6:1-11, "Our old man' is the old self or ego, the unregenerate man in his entirety in contrast with the new man as the regenerate in his entirety. It is a mistake to think of the believer as both old man and a new man or as having in him both the old man and the new man, the latter in view of regeneration and the former because of remaining corruption" (Murray, pp. 219-220). The old man was crucified once and for all. The believer is a person who lives in the flesh by faith (Galatians 2:20).

This clarification that there are not two natures in the Christian, but rather a new nature and remaining sinful dispositions, is a significant issue. The body (which includes the brain) has not yet been fully redeemed, though being in the process of sanctification. Murray (1971) writes about this with reference to Romans 8:19: "the emphasis falls upon the once-for-all breach with sin and commitment to righteousness" (Murray, p. 234). The sinful dispositions still remain in the body, with its brain. Murray clarifies this distinction between the person and what remains to be changed in the body, in his comments on Romans 6:13.

If "mortal body" [verse 12] means the physical organism, then the "members" referred to in this verse [verse 13] must mean the members of the body, such as eye, hand, and foot. Sin is conceived of as a master at whose disposal we place these members in order that they may be instruments to promote unrighteousness. The exhortation is to the effect that we are not to go on placing our physical organs at the disposal of sin for the furtherance of such an end. The positive counterpart is that we are to present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead and our members as instruments of righteousness to God. This fuller statement shows that although the thought had been concentrated upon the bodily (vss. 12, 13a), yet the apostle does not regard the physical as comprehending the sum-total of devotion. Believers are to present *themselves* to God as those alive

from the dead. Here the whole personality is in view....We are regarded as presenting ourselves and our members once for all to God for his service and the promotion of righteousness (pp. 227-228).

The person is here being portrayed as the agent who is able to direct the body (brain included) toward that which is righteous. When person is referred to, the reference is to someone who is present and other than the material body. This other-than-material-person is free to choose to move the body in a righteous direction. This concept, of the person being able to direct the body, is directly applicable to counseling. The person in counseling is then capable of impacting the functioning of his or her body, which would include the psychological functioning of the brain. As the brain's psychological functioning improves, significant barriers to sanctification are being removed.

The regenerate believer, being a person in a body, is capable of having a measure of control over thoughts, feelings, motivation, and actions (a kind of self-efficacy). The person is to move in the direction of having more control over brain functions and bodily actions. Murray (1971) helps us to understand this as there being two different human wills and does this explaining in the context of Paul's statements in Romans 7:14-25. "It would appear to be that the apostle is using the word 'will' throughout this passage, when he speaks both of what he does will and of what he does not will, in the highly restricted sense of that determinate will to do good, in accordance with the will of God, which is characteristic of his deepest and inmost self, the will of 'the inward man' (vs. 22)" (Murray, p. 272). In other words, Murray (1971) is calling the soul's will the "determinate" will. He goes on to say, "It is that will that is frustrated by the flesh and indwelling sin. And when he [Paul] does the evil he does what is not the will of his deepest and truest self, the inward man. This explains both types of expression, namely, that what *he wills* he does not do and what *he does not will* he does" (Murray, p. 272). Murray is further clarifying "that *will* in the psychological sense is present in the practice and performance which Paul calls evil" (Morgan, 2009, p. 164).

This psychological will (competing desire), of the brain, is in conflict with his soul's determinate will. This is not to say that the psychological will is always completely evil or that the body itself is evil. The whole person, as a Christian, is in the process of becoming more like Christ (sanctification), but there are still the old sinful dispositions even while there is positive growth. Spiritual transformation is happening in which the person's soul, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), is taking more control over the brain's psychological will and out of this flows more godly actions by the rest of the body. This understanding of the regenerate believer--of the determinate will of the person versus the psychological will of the brain--is a concept that can be utilized in

Christian psychotherapy. Use of this concept allows the therapist to align appropriately with the client to address the problems in the psychological functioning of the brain.

### **Application of a Soul as the Person Concept to Christian Psychotherapy**

The soul as the person who is experiencing the brain's psychological functioning is a concept that can now be summarized and applied to Christian psychotherapy. This concept draws a distinction between the nonmaterial (the soul/person) and the material (the brain and the rest of the physical body), yet affirms that there is also one whole person--the embodied personal identity. The soul of the regenerate believer has been redeemed having godly dispositions, a determinate will to please God, and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. The brain is understood to retain all its neural functioning and the rest of the body it's functioning, but both are still corrupted by sin and in need of redemption (sanctification). The person as a whole still sins, but there is a process within the whole person that is moving this whole person in the direction of increasing Christ-likeness, both in character and in actions. There is still very much a need for Christian psychotherapy, informed both by a biblical and theological understanding of human nature, while at the same time being informed by a psychology and biology kept in perspective by this understanding of human nature. Psychological and biological treatments are retained as appropriate within this Christian view of human nature as well, since the brain and body are still suffering--still in need of being redeemed.

The concept of the soul as the person can assist Christian psychotherapy by providing an explanation for how a person can detach from a problem and then address it. Beauregard states, "A nonmaterialistic approach to the mind is not only philosophically defensible; it is critical to alleviating some psychiatric disorders. Obsessive-compulsive disorder and phobias, for example, may be more effectively alleviated if the mind recognizes and reorganizes destructive brain patterns. This is not to disparage the role of drugs, therapy, or other useful interventions, but ultimately the mind is the most effective agent of change for the brain" (Beauregard & O'Leary, 2007, p. 126). The soul as the person concept would describe this as the person exerting the determinate will on the brain and the rest of the body's obsessive-compulsive thoughts and actions. Egan (2007) instructs therapists to, "Help clients see problems as external to themselves, not things that define and control their lives. Problems are intruders that get the best of us at times" (p. 244). Egan's statements have even more meaning from a holistic dualism perspective of soul and body.

In a similar manner, Schwartz (1996) utilizes a kind of detachment in his work with individuals suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He defines the enemy as the OCD and

instructs the client to keep in mind what the enemy really is. "The person with OCD has a powerful weapon: the knowledge that 'It's not me - it's OCD.' He or she works constantly to prevent confusing the true self with the voice of OCD" (Schwartz, p. 7). He goes on to describe this in terms that could be compared with the concept of the soul's/the person's use of the determinate will. "Using the Impartial Spectator [mindful awareness], you can distance yourself from your OCD, create a gap or safety zone between your will--your wholly internal spirit--and your unwanted, intrusive urges" (Schwartz, p. 42). Schwartz even incorporates spiritual language and interpretation, stating, "God can certainly tell the difference between what is in your head and is real and what is just a false message coming from your brain" (Schwartz, p. 98).

Carson, Herdley, Dale, and Fox (2009) also utilize a kind of detachment when describing his work with the subconscious. "In working with the unconverted subconscious (in a spiritual sense) and other aspects of the subconscious, one of our primary approaches is to use parts talk and parts work. This is done to help clients identify and often externalize aspects of the unconverted subconscious, then have them interact (verbally and non-verbally) with parts of their own unconverted subconscious and those of others in session, as well as other isolated and estranged parts of themselves" (Carson et al., p. 291). The similarity with the soul as the person concept is in the detaching of one part (the person) from another (the psychological parts) and in the assumption that there is a person who can both be instructed to do this and can, in fact, do the work.

### Concluding Remarks

Since there are already approaches utilizing a kind of detachment, what then is the uniqueness of approaching psychotherapy from the concept of the soul as the person and what unique benefits derive from it? First, this concept has been derived from an interpretation of the Scriptures and a particular theological tradition--one that respects the authority of the Scriptures and holds to there actually being a nonmaterial soul. Secondly, the nonmaterial soul is described as being the real person who will survive death, but in this life animates the brain. The brain is not the originator, but rather responds to the soul. Brain functions (including psychological functions) are not denied, but are placed in perspective as being influenced by the soul. Third, the person is not seen in a strictly dualistic manner, but rather there is an appreciation for the one and the many--a holistic dualism. Finally, a Scripturally informed understanding of human nature provides a clear picture of the already redeemed soul and the empowering Holy Spirit, working together to address the still needed redemption of the material body, with its brain.

What difference would the soul as the person concept make in the lives of regenerate believing

clients in Christian psychotherapy? This concept provides a picture for clients, of their human nature as already redeemed and yet their whole person as still in the process of sanctification, due to the sinful desires in the body. They can more fully grasp that they are truly new in Christ - there is more to them now than the image of only being a sinner or a psychological problem. Their image of themselves is redefined when they grasp that their souls are their real persons, who already desires to please God (being redeemed and freed from the power of sin) and that the Holy Spirit has come along side of their souls, empowering them to address the sinful desires and psychopathology of their bodies and more specifically, of their brains. This is why it is so important for Christian psychology to provide a Christian concept of human nature. As well, we need to remember that when we are interacting with a client, we are interacting with a soul who is the real person. The soul is not hiding and is the person animating the brain, yet this person is being mediated through the brain and the body. This understanding will allow us to see beyond the psychopathology and to engage with the person in the transcending of what in this material life still so easily entangles.

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# Discovering the True Self: Thomas Merton and Contemplation

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*This paper explores how Thomas Merton's concept of contemplation helps us discover our true selves. The reason Merton's writing offers such enlightenment is due to the central place he accords to God in the discovery of one's identity. Merton reminds us of an often forgotten insight: to know our true selves, we must know God, and to know God, we must know our true selves. One major hindrance to discovering one's self and God is the deception of the false self, which results from humanity's fall into sin. The contrary dispositions of the true self and false self in Merton's thinking are explained, followed by a description of Merton's concept of contemplation. Merton's thought about contemplation has implications for the way we undertake psychology and counseling.*

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In *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything across Italy, India and Indonesia*, Elizabeth Gilbert (2007) tells the story of the journey she took to heal from a broken marriage, find spiritual depth, and gain balance in her life. Her book and the movie adaptation owe their popular appeal to Gilbert's skillful writing style and the open and self-deprecating way she looks at her own heart. Her story strikes a chord among so many readers because it is about answering a question shared by every human being: "Who am I?"

Answering this question is different for everyone. It is not as simple as traveling to exotic places, eating delectable food, or spending hours of meditation in an Indian ashram (i.e. a religious hermitage). Many people feel that their identity is a conundrum that will take all their life to solve. Many others judge that such a project is short-sighted and selfish. For them, answering the question is not about introspection, but looking outward to the needs of others.

How shall we, as Christians, deal with this question? Shall we look within or outside ourselves? What does our primary authority, the Bible, teach us about finding ourselves? Actually, Scripture does not give us a nice encyclopedic entry on this topic. Rather, its teachings are better coalesced and taken as a whole in order to know God's will for us on this issue. This undertaking is certainly beyond the hope of a short article. Fortunately, we have help from other believers who have already gained a lot of ground. In this paper, we will explore the insights of one in particular, Thomas Merton.

Thomas Merton sheds light on a lost and neglected truth about discovering one's identity: *to know our true selves, we must know God*. Although others before him had explored this truth (e.g. Calvin, Kierkegaard), Merton's life and writings have testified to it in a way that is particularly valuable for the questions we have posed about identity. The search for identity, and thus the search for God,

Merton called contemplation.

## **Preliminary Matters: An Objection**

Yet, we may hear the objection, "How can the pursuit of God be linked with the search for oneself?" By joining the two, do we not muddy a holy passion for God with a self-centered search for self? Worse than this, might we be in danger of confusing the creature-Creator distinction and setting ourselves up on the same level with God, or even concluding that we are God?

These warnings are necessary to heed and answer. For we cannot forget the Bible's teaching about our finitude, brokenness, and sin. In our search for identity, we must be open to acknowledging and dealing with what is evil about us. Our self-awareness is faulty if it only sees what is good about us, or if it only recognizes the sins of others but not of ourselves. This faulty kind of self-knowledge is avoided not by abdicating self-knowledge, however, but by seeing it as ineluctably following a proper knowledge of God, who is revealed in the Bible and supremely in Jesus Christ. The Word of God teaches us both who we are and who God is, and these revelations go hand-in-hand. It is absolutely true that what God's Word reveals about us is not always pretty; in fact, the first pages of Genesis show that we, like Adam and Eve, are fallen because of selfishness, pride, and idolatry. Modern psychology, especially the self-help kind found in Elizabeth Gilbert's book, neglects this wisdom. If we fail to see God's centrality in the search for our identity, we will only end up promoting a false view of reality.

Merton's antidote is contemplation. Contemplation pursues knowledge of one's true self, that is, the good created self that, though lost in humanity's fall in Eden, has been redeemed through Christ. Humans are created by God. More importantly, humans are created in God's image. As Augustine said, man has, as a function of his nature,

a proclivity to love what is good, with God being the highest and chief good. Man's soul gravitates towards what is lovable. In other words, man is good, and he is meant for good, in fact, the greatest good, which is to know and love the Triune God. If, like Merton, we remember this fact about ourselves, we shall be able to wisely and effectively see both what is good about us and what is bad.

Being a monk and one who wrote for monks, Merton thought the monastic life was the ideal place for contemplation to happen. He did not limit it to monks, however. Every Christian is called to their own journey in maturity. The goal of maturity is a true knowledge of self and of God, so that we will become what we were meant to be, and God will be for us what He truly is. This journey requires contemplation because the greatest hindrance to maturity is deceit. The diabolical working of deceit keeps us from truly knowing ourselves, and thus from truly knowing God. Contemplation works against deceit by confronting the mendacity of our false selves and freeing the true self that is hidden from us. As we shall see, the end of contemplation is not merely discovering our true selves, but in discovering God and in being discovered by Him.

### **The True Self and the False Self in Modern Psychology**

The concept of the true and false self holds a substantial place in modern psychology. D.W. Winnicott held that the true self is the expression of one's real or genuine self (St. Clair, 2000). The true self acts spontaneously out of a person's freedom. When one's freedom is hindered by the demand for compliance (e.g., from a parent), a person will usually react by hiding the true self under a false self. This happens when one feels unsafe in his or her environment. Fear leads to complying with the environment's demands, which is, in effect, a repression of one's true self, or what the person really wants, wills, and feels at his or her core. The false self is "false" because it does not accord with the way a person would act had they felt the freedom to do so.

In a similar vein, Harter (1999) explains the developmental stages of false self behavior from infancy to adulthood. At an early age, children begin to express themselves out of a sense of constraint, not authenticity, and already the divide between true and false selves emerges. Harter (1999) says, "The display of behaviors selected primarily because it meets the needs and wishes of someone else incurs the risk of alienating oneself from those inner experiences that represent one's true self" (p.232).

Psychologists have made key observations about the causes for the true self's enrichment and its alternating obfuscation by the false self. An early factor is language development. While language can facilitate relational bonds and enable a child to construct a self-narrative, it also allows for her to manipulate and distort her experience of reality and

of herself (Harter 1999). Another factor promoting the false self has to do with conditional approval; children who experience approval from parents based on whether they meet certain standards display more false self behavior (Harter 1999). To a further extent, children who suffer abusive treatment learn to deeply suppress their true self, losing it in their memory (Harter 1999).

Modern psychologists therefore understand the loss of true self and the donning of false self mainly in terms of social interaction. That is, persons come to suppress their true self because they have incorporated the opinions and standards of others in spite of and at the expense of their own authenticity. A self is 'true' if it acts authentically, or in accordance with itself. A self becomes 'false' when it ceases to behave authentically, or out of its own experience. Instead of expressing oneself as one really feels, the self that is false behaves in accordance with how it perceives others expect or want it to behave. Thus, modern psychology locates the cause of the false self in external social forces that get absorbed into oneself.

The main difference between modern psychology and Merton's conception of the true and false self lies in what each conception believes is the main, causal context for the loss of trueness and for the donning of falsity. Modern psychology says the context is social interaction between oneself and other human beings. Merton, in accordance with Scripture, says rather that the main context is not with other people, but with God.

### **The True Self and False Self in Merton**

For Merton, the true self is not something inherent in human biology, nor does it develop merely out of the context of social interaction. The true self is who a person was created to be in union with God: "the man who is free and upright, in the image and likeness of God" (Merton, 1957, p. 22). The true self is not simply the experience of authenticity. Rather, it is the creation of God that owes its "trueness" to having its source in God. And just as the true self finds its source in God and not in merely being human, the true self finds its nurture not just in the context of healthy social interaction, where parents and significant others express "unconditional positive regard." Rather, the true self ultimately thrives in the context of communion with God. The life of the true self is the life lived in Paradise, before the Fall, where there was truly no separation between God and man. A constant communion and contemplation of God was the context of human existence in Eden, and so it is still for those who, though not in Paradise, are united to God in Christ. Thus, the source and sustainer of the true self is not other people, but God.

For humans to live out of their true self, they must do so out of freedom, and not out of coercion. Being made like God, humans are created as free agents who act and will. Unlike other creatures,

whose nature is determined for them, we are made with the freedom to be whatever we like (Merton, 2007). God's intent is that we would be like Him by choosing to accept, love, and do His will. Human freedom is the ability to love God, to do his will as one's own will. To be one's true self is to live in the liberty God gives so that one may consciously and willfully accept the fullness of his or her existence, which is to reflect back in freedom the God who made him or her. Freedom is given to people so that they will choose to love God and thereby find their true self. A person's freedom will only lead to finding the true self if it is sought in God. To become one's true self, one must find it in God, as Merton (2007, p. 36) explains: "Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him."

This one, chief problem of human existence owes its complexity to the presence of sin in the world and to man's depravity since Adam. Again, the source of the false self is not in how we relate to others (although society is where the false self is manifested), but in how we relate to God; it is a sin problem, not a social problem. The source of the false self lies in how we seek ourselves outside of relationship with God. And this is exactly how sin works: we seek self-fulfillment in everything except the one place it can be found. Sin is the refusal to embrace God as the source of truth, goodness, and joy. It is rebellion against the only One who can give us what we most need and want: our true selves in God. What is the cause of this rebellion?

The reason that human beings sin and refuse to live in accordance with their true self lies in its obfuscation. The true self is now hidden, buried underneath the layers of falsehood and deception of the false self. The false self is constituted of empty projections and illusions, which Merton (1957, p. 22) says we construct to "conceal the truth of our misery from ourselves, our brethren and from God." The force drawing us away from our true identity is the influence of original sin (Shannon, 1981). Because of original sin, we desire complete autonomy from God, to actually become our own god. Of course, this dream is crushed by the reality of our brokenness and misery, so we construct myriad ways of covering our weakness and sin with superficial projections of ourselves and others. One's fulfillment becomes a matter of constructing an identity out of perceived and imagined successes, and, as Carr (1988) explains, "Having become dependent on self-observation and self-assertion, one seeks happiness outside oneself," and—we should add—outside of God (p. 49). We build the scaffolding of the false self out of the pleasures, experiences, power, knowledge, and glories of this life, in order to "construct its nothingness into something objectively real" (Merton, 2007, p. 35). All this scaffolding, this cosmetic décor, is a vain attempt to mask the shame of our own nothingness

apart from God. It is an illusion we fashion to "exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love—outside of reality and outside of life" (Merton, 2007, p. 34). By living this lie, we make our false self the center around which everything is ordered, and the assumption that our egocentric desires constitute the reality of our life is the fountain of our sin (Merton, 2007).

The lie of sin, first whispered by the devil, captivates us with temptations of self-fulfillment, but in the end we will only find the shadows and emptiness of the false self. Unfortunately, the shadows seem very real to our beguiled eyes: "For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist" (Merton, 2007, p. 34). Merton (2007) emphasizes that because of the false self's controlling influence in our lives, to find one's true self is immensely difficult, so that no one is able to do it alone, and neither can "all the men and all the created things in the universe help him in this work" (p. 36). The only one, he says, who can teach us to find our true self is God.

The true self is regained when God the Father comes to dwell in us in His Word and Spirit at baptism, according to Merton (1949). From that point, "our life becomes a series of choices between the fiction of our false-self, whom we feed with the illusions of passion and selfish appetite, and our true identity in the peace of God" (Merton, 1949, p. 41). All of life on earth will have this struggle between falsehood and truth, selfish passions and the peace of God, because we tend to concentrate our faculties and actions on our false self—on our selfish ambitions, even when they involve the desire for virtue, sanctity, and contemplation. Good spiritual ends are tarnished by competing, fleshly ends. Yet, Merton believed the Holy Spirit always draws us to the true self (Shannon, 1981). More hopeful still, the true self already abides in us, even if we are not able to fully discover it, for Christ lives in us. The true self is already revived in those who undergo the waters of New Birth at baptism.

As for consciously experiencing the new self in Christ, Merton believed, studied, and taught that this blessing is pursued (humanly speaking) through contemplation.

### **Contemplation: The Way of Faith in Light and Darkness**

Merton understood contemplation to be an intimate incommunicable experience of God that goes beyond faith, but not apart from it (Merton, 1953). This definition accords with what has been commonly held in Catholic Christianity throughout history: "the Fathers always understood contemplation to be an experience of God" (Merton, 1953, p. 13). Merton is no maverick in this subject; many others before him held similar views (e.g., Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Benedict, Ignatius Loyola, Theresa of Avila). For the 20th century, however, he stands out as the most influential leader. Contemplation had received



little emphasis in the Christian tradition (including non-Catholics) for about 400 years. These silent years had been due in large part to the Quietist heresy, for which contemplatives had the misfortune of sometimes being mistaken. Quietism denounced liturgical prayer and regular forms of contemplation, advocating a “pseudo-mystical union with God that separated Quietists from other people” (Shannon, 1993). But Merton brought a renewed vitality and conceptually sophisticated understanding to contemplation.

Merton's view is a combination of two streams in contemplative thinking: the way of light (kataphatic) and the way of darkness (apophatic). On the one hand, like many Catholics and Protestants in the kataphatic tradition, Merton insists that the quest for contemplation requires faith set on God's Word. God's revelation is the starting point for knowing Him, and the initial means of knowing is through faith. Merton (1953) equated this initial step with theology: “The psalms are theology. That means that they place us in direct contact with God, through the assent of faith to His Revelation” (p.14).

On the other hand, Merton asserted that contemplation cannot be acquired. It is a gift of God. No amount of striving or study will get it. Merton (1998) says:

Now, while the Christian contemplative must certainly develop by study the theological understanding of concepts about God, he is called mainly to penetrate the wordless darkness and apophatic light of an experience beyond concepts (p. 168).

While he did not depreciate theology, Merton preferred to emphasize the apophatic way, which is to say he believed the experience of God that contemplation seeks is not to fully comprehend who He is, but to become fully absorbed in Him. The light we attain by grasping more and more knowledge must give way to the darkness of relinquishing that knowledge before the infinite, incommunicable divine Presence. And yet, before we go further, it must be made clear that Merton insisted on the necessity of faith: “[Contemplation] is something far greater and more mysterious than the mere light of faith, and yet faith remains the key to it, for the way to contemplation is the way of faith. There is no other” (Merton, 1953, p. 20).

### **Contemplation: Prayer of the Heart**

In *Contemplative Prayer*, Merton (1969) offers us a thick description of contemplation, but he also helps boil it down to a basic idea, “prayer of the heart.” This understanding of prayer was taught by the Desert Fathers, along with others in Church tradition whom Merton studied extensively. The “prayer of the heart” is rooted in the Scriptures, especially the Psalms. The Desert Fathers understood prayer to involve many aspects, but the first was *meditatio*. Meditation works Scripture into the soul through reading, reciting, and memorizing the words. It is

about making the words one's own by “memorizing them and repeating them, with deep and simple concentration, “from the heart”” (Merton, 1969, p. 22). Meditation is not an analytical foray into Scripture, but the penetration of God's words and fusion with one's heart. What Merton understood by the “heart” is more than the mind and affections, for contemplation is to be rooted in the very core of our being, or “the deepest psychological ground of one's personality, the inner sanctuary where self-awareness goes beyond analytical reflection and opens out into metaphysical and theological confrontation” (Merton, 1969, p. 38).

To let the heart be occupied by the name of Jesus is the aim of the prayer of the heart. In everything, from singing corporately, to working at some chore, to meditatively reading Scripture (i.e. *lectio divina*), prayer induces us to keep a “conscious awareness of and dependence on God” (Merton, 1969 p. 37). Right away, one who reads *Contemplative Prayer* realizes Merton is far from championing Gnosticism, tempting us to gain some esoteric knowledge of God. Rather, contemplative prayer is about opening the heart to God in order to grapple with the “ordinary struggles and sufferings of human existence” (Merton, 1969, p. 25). One hears Merton clearly define prayer as a way of life, not a special technique or method performed as an aside to life's grit and grime, pleasures and desires.

### **Contemplation: Exposing the False Self**

If the aim of contemplative prayer is Jesus abiding in our heart, a radical confrontation that takes place in the innermost being, then prayer rises well above techniques motivated by petty self-aggrandizement (i.e. being “spiritual”). The presence of Jesus in our souls cultivates an attitude marked by receptivity, listening, and by “faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, joy” (Merton, 1969, p. 39). This attitude of “watchful listening” opens us to a movement mimicking Christ's passion, death, and resurrection; we are drawn to the “paschal” rhythm, moving from death to life. Prayer is dictated by this movement, and it is marked by the consciousness of our sin and redemption. Contemplative prayer is not the “navel gazing,” self-absorbed exercise we often ascribe to monks like Merton. If there happens to be any actual navel-gazing in Merton's teaching, it is a kind that seeks to become empty of the (false) self. Merton (1969) writes, “Far from establishing one in unassailable narcissistic security, the way of prayer brings us face to face with the sham and indignity of the false self” (pp. 25-26).

The exposure of the false self is of core concern in contemplation. Underlying all of life, Merton says, is the vague but profound awareness that the self we think is our real identity is actually only a hoax, a deception we tell ourselves and others. Merton (1969) named this all too tepid awareness “existential dread” (p. 26). He described it further as “a sense

of insecurity, of 'lostness, of exile, of sin,' and thus ties our dread to the Scripture's teaching about fallen humanity's estrangement from God (Merton, 1969, p. 26). Facing the dread of our lostness and sin is the task at hand in contemplation. It is a difficult journey; plumbing the depths of dread reveals the darkest part of our humanity. We resist exposing our false self because in doing so we come closest to despair, for we come to lose all hope in the shadowy structures which we have depended on for so long. Contemplation hurts because it requires self-denial, mortification of the flesh, and the loss of every comfort save our faith in God alone.

### **Contemplation: Detachment from Everything but God**

When we think of seeking God, we often assume that involves growing in our intellectual knowledge of Him, of praying more and with greater feelings of holiness and spiritual vigor, and of sensing God's presence moving in us and around us. We think of it in terms of increasing insight, virtue, and contemplative dispositions in our heart. Of course, seeking God does and should include these active signs of progress. And yet, as Merton (1969) instructs us, all such activities and experiences are not themselves God, and we must not forget that knowing and loving God as He is in Himself is beyond natural understanding.

If we truly experience contemplation in this life, it will be because we are detached from all created things. Prayer, fasting, and systems of spirituality are not themselves ends, but only means. Clinging to these good pleasures and the desire for more signs of progress and growth is an escape from "allowing God to strip us of our false selves and make us into the new men that we are really meant to be" (Merton, 2007, p. 236). Our false selves resist the truly contemplative way, which is to accept "the responsibility of suffering in darkness and obscurity and helplessness" (Merton, 2007, p. 236). Faith, Merton says, is not based on observable evidence in our lives that God is present. To have faith in God is to enter into darkness and silence: "The living God, the God Who is God and not a philosopher's abstraction, lies infinitely beyond the reach of anything our eyes can see or our minds can understand" (Merton, 2007, p. 131). He continues, "For the way to God lies through deep darkness in which all knowledge and all created wisdom and all pleasure ... are defeated and annulled by the overwhelming purity of the light and the presence of God" (Merton, 2007, p.208). Albeit, God gives us many comforts and gracious signs of His presence and love, and it is good to enjoy them. His seeming absence, however, when He has removed all our supports, all comforting words, and all guiding lights—what John of the Cross (1953) called "the dark night of the soul"—is the way we abandon ourselves and everything else into the hands of God, so that we will begin to really trust, hope in, and love God alone.

### **Contemplation: Emptiness and Inactivity?**

Many of us will ask Merton, "Would not contemplation, as you describe it, lead to a state of mindless emptiness and inactivity? How can this be reconciled with the greatest commandment: love God with all our heart, soul, and *mind*?" Certainly the closing chapters of Merton's life lend warrant to these questions; he grew more and more to affirm the similarities he saw between Christian contemplation and Buddhist meditation rather than the differences. And yet, scholars like Carr (1988) believe Merton never forfeited his conviction that Christianity was the true way to God. Regardless, whether Merton's later thinking about Christianity changed, the earlier works stand on their own merit, and to discredit them would be unjust and unwise. So, we must take the best of Merton and see how he may answer our queries and possibly relieve our doubts.

And so, Merton answers. The stillness and quiet of contemplation are a resting in darkness, in which God dwells mysteriously. Yet, the mind and will of the contemplative are not dead or inactive, empty of thought and volition. The goal of contemplation is not a lazy torpor or sleep, for he says, "The mere absence of activity does not *ipso facto* turn you into a contemplative" (Merton, 2007, p. 242). In fact, if you find that your mind wanders to distraction during contemplation (e.g. thinking about dinner), Merton (2007) advises a swift return to aids that will refocus concentration; books, Scripture, pictures, vocal prayer, and nature can help return one to the quiet expecting of God. The watchful listening and expecting of contemplation are always active, but in a way that may be beyond one's "conscious estimation, and its results may not be seen or understood" (Merton, 1949, p.160). An extended quote of Merton's (1949) may be helpful to consider:

Contemplative prayer is a deep and simplified spiritual activity in which the mind and will are fused into one. They rest in a unified and simple concentration upon God, turned to Him and intent upon Him and absorbed in His own light, with a simple gaze which is perfect adoration because it silently tells God that we have left everything else and desire even to leave our own selves for His sake, and that He alone is important to us, He alone is our desire and our life, and nothing else can give us any joy (p. 160).

We may describe contemplation as an active passivity, or passive activity. It is a resting of the mind and will, but a resting in concentration, absorption, and adoration.

### **Contemplation: Knowing God?**

It bears repeating that contemplation is not merely about us coming to know God, at least not in the sense we normally suppose. For we cannot know God in the same way we can know everything else. He is not like any other object of study, nor are we the

kind of subjects suitably equipped for comprehending Him. Merton (1998) says, "It is in fact absurd and impossible to try to grasp God as an object which can be seized and comprehended by our minds" (p. 103). God is infinite, and it is therefore impossible that we, who are finite, should be able to fully grasp Him. God, who is infinite, can only be comprehended by another infinite being, Himself. Merton (1998) advises us: "[W]e must forget the familiar subject-object relationship which characterizes our ordinary acts of knowing. Instead we know him in so far as we become aware of ourselves as known through and through by him" (p. 103). We know God by being known by Him. What we can know of God is limited to what our nature is capable of knowing, and it is hard to quantify our capabilities. Whatever our abilities, to fully comprehend any object we must be able to study all of its attributes; we must be able to possess it, or have total access to all of its qualities. God is not accessible in the same way, and we only know Him insofar as we come to accept that, in the most pervasive way, God knows us: "We 'possess' him in proportion as we realize ourselves to be possessed by him in the inmost depths of our being ... It is in proportion as we are known to him that we find our real being and identity in Christ" (Merton, 1969, pp. 103-104). In other words, we come to know God insofar as we become known to Him, and as He discovers us, we discover ourselves.

## Conclusion

The insights of Thomas Merton are clearly applicable in Christian psychology and counseling. Hopefully, this taste of Merton has not only resonated with our concerns as psychologists and counselors, but has shown us how integral the knowledge of self is with the knowledge of God.

Helping people find themselves requires helping them find God. For those of us who see the need to help clients and counselees understand themselves better, we must also see the need to help them understand the true God. Only God—who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—can give a person his or her identity, for He is the one who created us, redeems us, and unites us to Himself. And so, we as counselors must help clients seek and internalize the light of God's revelation, in which knowledge of Him and of our relationship to Him is revealed. A number of therapeutic modalities are especially suited for this purpose because of their ability to help internalize God's Word: cognitive therapy, relational therapy, family and group therapy, and symbolic and narrative therapies (Johnson, 2007).

On the other hand, if the deficit of God-knowledge is our overriding concern, we must not neglect the fact that knowledge of God is limited to how far we are willing to let Him know us. God cannot be known by someone who is unwilling to be known. The truth internalized by counselees penetrates only as far as they are being honest to their true self. Consciously, a client may want to

be known by God. Yet, at the same time, she may have the greatest resistance to truly exposing who she is at her core; this aversion to exposure is what Merton called "existential dread." Exposure is averted by means of the false self, which is highly amorphous, taking on forms that are outwardly compliant, docile, and sincere. And so, if we are to effectively help counselees, we must help them confront and deconstruct (albeit, with wisdom and sensitivity) the barriers and defenses that keep them from receiving God in their inmost being. Dynamic and experiential/emotion-focused therapies are most suited to reaching this goal (Johnson, 2007).

As counselors, we have the task of helping people to receive God's love and to love Him, which is also the aim of contemplation. Yet, how can we do so if there is no love in us? The most important corollary to contemplation is charity, or love. In a brilliant work called *No Man is an Island*, Merton (1983) shows that the contemplative person is one whose will conforms to the will of God, and is thus one who is loved by God and in turn loves other men. We must become contemplative counselors. Merton's works weave together the two greatest commandments as they are lived and fulfilled in the hearts of Christians. He left no room for doubt about whether he saw a relation between solitude and service, the cloister and the community, contemplation and charity. What one finds in silence, meditation, and prayer is a greater love for God and man. As we ourselves journey into the dark night of the soul, God strips us of every false way, including a false love. Contemplation leads to a pure, true love in us for God and others by ridding us of the false self and forming us more and more into the person we are in Christ. We are competent to counsel by virtue of the love of God in us. We will receive the love of God more and more deeply into our souls by opening ourselves up to His gaze. And, becoming known and loved by Him, we may then be able to love those we counsel.

Many more insights for psychology and counseling can be mined from Merton. What we are given in this man is a contemplative, or mystical, theologian for our time. The nature of his theologizing is a return to the same kind of meditative, personal pursuit of God and human flourishing found in Augustine's *Confessions*. His is an "autobiographical theology," as Carr (1988, p. 5) says. We can learn from him how to again see theology (which is every Christian's business, whether paid for it or not) as the art of knowing God that I may know myself and of knowing myself that I may know God. In this kind of theology—theology *par excellence*—we take seriously the fact that the God we seek to know is known insofar as we are known by Him. In other words, our understanding of Him will only be as full and clear to the extent that we have allowed His searching gaze to know us. This one insight of Merton's is worth the time it takes to fill our lives in contemplation and ministry. Let us take it up heartily, and let us continue to learn from Merton.

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# Interview with Ellen T. Charry: Towards a Christian Positive Psychology

Ellen T. Charry

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**ELJ:** Please share with us some of your story.

**ETC:** I was not raised a Christian. Indeed, I saw Christianity, or better, the church as a powerful source of violence, evil, and suffering in the world, crushing whatever stood in its path of universal hegemony. The cross, even a church building inspired fear and anxiety. Further, Christian claims that one God is three and that Jesus of Nazareth is God seemed bizarre to me. I saw that Christianity was not the only religion that sought power and concluded that religion is dangerous business, perhaps second only to nationalism and so works better in soft forms. Along with Enlightenment thinkers, I considered that secularism might be the best way beyond commitments that divide people from one another. So, I went back to school to study religion to understand it better.

In graduate school, I studied all the world's religions and realized that we need religion and so cannot get around it. I decided to work to make it be the safest it can be and so became deeply immersed in interreligious dialogue, the attempt to understand the other in order to reflect on one's own commitments in wider perspective in light of insights and commitments very different from my own. The world got larger and larger and through dialogue I was able to contribute to peace and understanding.

As I studied the world's religions, and concluded that we cannot live without it, I found in Christianity something that I did not find in any other: reconciliation. Two scripture passages were compelling—Ephesians 2.13-19, particularly verse 14 and 2 Corinthians 5.16-21, particularly verse 18.

The Ephesians passage is about enemies becoming friends, not friends only but members of the same household. Those who seek your harm may be made family members: "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." The Corinthians passage casts a different light on reconciliation: "All this is from Christ, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." Here were two axes of reconciliation, one horizontal, one vertical, that encompass three dimensions of reconciliation.

The Ephesians passage teaches that Christ is the agent of reconciliation among divided peoples, beginning with Jews and pagans. I read Athanasius of Alexandria's *Contra Gentes & De Incarnatione Verbi*, who extended this argument to all sorts of other national and cultural enmities.

The Corinthian passage lifts up two other forms of reconciliation. First is the idea that God reconciled us to himself in Christ. Now, I had never considered that God was alienated from me or me from him until I read Christian theology. The idea of thinking of myself primarily as a sinner needing someone to intercede with God on my behalf was alienating as it made God distant. At the same time, however, Christ brought God near. I saw the 1988 film, *The Milagro Bean Field War*, that pictured a field hand wearing a Jesus tee-shirt and realized that for him—as Augustine of Hippo later confirmed—God is closer than his own breathing. The incarnate Christ does not simply placate divine wrath that I had trouble appreciating, but brings God into our world. I now think of this in reverse, that the incarnation brings

us into the divine life and co-opts us into the divine drama of the redemption of the cosmos.

I was also helped by William Carlos Williams' (1991) poem on resurrection, "The Term:"

A rumpled sheet  
Of brown paper  
About the length

And apparent bulk  
Of a man was  
Rolling with the

Wind slowly over  
And over in  
The street as

A car drove down  
Upon it and  
Crushed it to

The ground. Unlike  
A man it rose  
Again rolling

With the wind over  
And over to be as  
It was before. (Williams, 1991, p. 451).

The Christian dynamic is the movement from death to life, whereas I had always thought the other way. Here reconciliation takes on a radically new perspective: first death, then life.

The final life-giving point of 2 Corinthians 5.18 is that the reconciling work of God gives us the ministry of reconciliation. Thus, reconciliation functions in three dynamics; God has reconciled us to himself, us to one another, and given us that very ministry of reconciliation as our own. Here I planted my feet.

**ELJ:** You have had quite a journey. And now you are a professional theologian. Yet, your theological orientation seems to be very similar to that of Christian psychology. From your vantage point, what is Christian psychology and how does it relate to the kind of theology you do?"

**ETC:** I suppose that I do not understand this question. It implies that "Christian psychology" is something apart from the psychology inherent and implied in classic Christian doctrine. Here I answer only the first part of the question: what is Christian psychology. I do not answer the question of how I relate it to the kind of theology I do. Perhaps that could be another question.

My understanding is that psychology is inherent in all Christian doctrine, operative both in what is often called "theological anthropology" that falls within the first article of the Creed and in the story of God's relationship to humanity. Thus, Christian

theology embraces both the psychology of God and of humanity.

The phrase "theological anthropology" is simply a synonym for a Christian perspective on human psychology. No Christian theology is devoid of this. That is, "the Christian doctrine of humanity," so-called, assumes a set of psychological assumptions in its construal of human nature or "the human condition." This includes postulates about what it means to say that humanity is created in the image of God (Gen 1) and that humanity is fallen (Gen 3), sinful, or trapped in original sin as the western tradition—stemming from Augustine of Hippo—holds. The Augustinian tradition posits a moral psychology that believes that all persons are vain or prideful. The Latin is *superbos*. After the fall, all persons are born inclining to love things other than God which is the only appropriate object of love. We might call this symbolic sexually transmitted disease self-absorption or self-centeredness. On this view of outward pride, we are at best divided against our self, perhaps wanting to love rightly yet unable not to sin because we inevitably love badly, that is, we love things that we should not love and do not love that which we should love.

The antidote to pride and distorted love is humility. Although it is not one of the three Pauline virtues highlighted in 1 Corinthians 13, humility became the key alternative to pride and the moral and psychological goal of competing systems of doctrine. With this, doctrinal systems bent themselves toward creating the most humble and thereby the most obedient persons possible. Desired psychological transformation is from pride to humility.

This drive toward humility and its chief expression, gratitude, contrasts with another psychological assumption of classic western theological psychology—that humanity is created in the divine image. This ambiguous biblical phrase made room for imaginative construals of what it might mean. It was most often construed as rationality, one of the key features of human life that distinguishes it from brute animals.

Despite being created in the image of God, the pathology of pride, crystallized as vanity, constitutes the core of classic western Christian psychology. This depiction of all persons brought universal divine condemnation in a move on God's part to cultivate humility. This was extended to mean utter moral helplessness to assure abject humility. That in turn necessitated the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. His death satisfies the wrath of God so that the well-meaning guilty, who appropriately languish in despair at their guilt and helplessness knowing that they deserve death simply because they are human, go free and rejoice that they escape the punishment that they deserve. This is the joy of Easter morning. The whole dynamic of the Christian story is the psychological move from despair to celebration.

Although the dynamic is psychological, it has

often been presented as rational or noetic. In the modern period, doctrines have been proposed as if they constituted an intellectually coherent set of notions assent to which “saves” one from the wrath of God by imputation. Here the emphasis has been on persuading the reader that the ideas are cogent enough to take seriously. Indeed, doing so saves one from guilt and anxiety. This depicts the whole story as a purely intellectual undertaking in the narrow sense of the term designed to persuade people that God will not stay angry with them if they believe that Christ placated that anger on their behalf.

The collapse of a correspondence theory of truth beginning in the seventeenth century necessitated demonstrating the rationality of the ideas of this Christian story in other than historical and factual terms. A coherence theory of truth replaced the traditional correspondence theory to show that the ideas fit together even though evidence could not be brought to support them. But focus on either the factuality of the story or its cognitive cogency alone ignore the deeper goal of assenting to the set of ideas in question. The goal is not simply to relieve guilt, although that is an admirable psychological goal. The further end is moral and psychological transformation that make for healthier and more productive communities and individuals. In short, the rationalist interest in Christian doctrine has obscured the moral and psychological dimensions of the story.

This modern development makes it appear that psychology (and ethics) stands outside a system of doctrine, and in terms of twentieth century psychology perhaps knocking at the door of doctrinal tribunals asking to be let in and have a seat at the table. That accounts for a sense of urgency—at least on the part of psychologists—to integrate theology and psychology. But that construal of the problem itself capitulates to the false notion that Christian theology is a set of ideas devoid of psychological meaning and power. Rather the problem is that presenting Christian ideas—especially the idea of salvation—as if it is something attributed to one as a reward for assenting to a certain set of claims that is devoid of emotional and psychological freight is one-sided. This is sad because it trivializes salvation reducing it to a tick on a checklist of items that one can claim about oneself, or worse, that God can claim.

Therefore, it is not that psychology is outside theology and should be let in, but that psychology has simply been ignored in the face of early modern intellectual pressures that called for effort in other directions. In short, Christian psychology speaks of the moral and psychological implications of the doctrines.

Christian psychology includes not only human psychology but also the psychology of God. God is also depicted in psychological terms in the classic theological narrative. He is angry, in some portrayals enraged at human failure to obey him, and either

demanding that sin be punished or needing to be satisfied or placated in order to prescind from executing the punishment of death that all humans deserve. The sinless Christ stands in our place, taking on himself the death that we deserve to pacify God.

More sophisticated psychological construals of God depict him as an astute pedagogue, undertaking or desisting from a course of action in order to bring about some desired moral improvement in people. The goal is often to turn to him or desist from sin, and is often connected to moral transformation, on the assumption that God knows and wants what is best for us which we either do not know or ignore or are simply too weak to achieve.

Classic western Christian psychology then is a tug-of-war between God and us. We are depicted as resistant to what is good for us, and God is depicted as angry, sometimes hurt, loving, and developing an ingenious set of events to achieve a set of goals that include glorifying himself and curing the sin-sick soul. Despite formal philosophical claims of the simplicity and impassibility of God, theology, like the Bible, depicts God as passionate, indeed teeming with a complex emotional life fully engaged with his creatures.

**ELJ:** So from the sound of it, you believe that Christian theology is Christian psychology. Yet modern psychology has defined itself as an separate discipline that needed to transcend its theological and philosophical roots in order to become a thoroughly empirical science. In what ways do you think this was problematic?

**ETC:** First, I would not say that Christian theology is psychology. First, it encompasses more than psychology for it also makes claims about the nature of the non-human world in both its order and its disorder. It makes theological judgments by observing nature based on its belief in creation, a belief as foreign to modern science as it was to ancient philosophy. This is because it seeks to make the world in all its array and disarray meaningful, reliable, and to some extent controllable in order to support life.

Second, theology may not be reducible to psychology but it is inevitably psychological because it depicts the nature and character of God and human life. It must make assumptions about human character, temperament, personality, and inclinations because it is about human life and its foibles and triumphs set in the cosmic framework of the life of God. Theology is psychological in the same way that economics and political theory and public policy are psychological. These disciplines must make assumptions about human nature, and attempt to anticipate how people are likely to react to various and especially changing circumstances. Again, these secular disciplines operate on psychological assumptions (although perhaps untested ones) in order to try and get a handle on how events might go. Political pollsters assess the “mood” of the electorate. The stock market responds

to psychological sensibilities and investors' fears. Bad news from or political unrest in one part of the world makes the stock market "jittery" and indicators fall. Alternatively, investor confidence makes them rise. During the electoral primary season, a string of successes in a few early primaries heralds success in others on the theory that people want to vote for a winner, and so on.

Theology is similarly psychologically informed. Only here what is being assessed is not the effect that fears and confidence will have on markets or political fortunes, but the effect that knowledge of God will or should have on communities and individuals. So, the psychological presentation of God (angry, pleased, distant) will call forth emotions and attitudes on the part of believers.

I appreciate that modern experimental psychology needed to become an empirical science. We have all benefitted from exacting scientific method that quantifies data in controlled double-blind studies, random sampling techniques, and carefully monitored even contrived situations. Science requires the repeatability of phenomena in controlled settings in order to be able to draw general conclusions that are transferrable from setting to setting, perhaps but not always from culture to culture. Theology too has regularly academized and scientized itself in order to retain or gain intellectual credibility and not only in the modern period.

Biblical studies and church history also had to divest themselves of philosophical and doctrinaire theological strangleholds on how texts and events could be/should be read. Theology, however, cannot rid itself of psychological presuppositions by its very nature. Indeed, since Western theology has tended to lump all persons together as having the same personality problem—pride—it needs its psychology to become more sophisticated and nuanced with the help of modern psychology without stepping out of its own theocentric frame of reference that grounds human life in God.

Theology's relation to modern secular psychology and theology challenge one another at multiple points, a central one being the modern notion of human autonomy. Autonomy should not be confused with individuality. Appreciating individual variation is a gift that psychology offers theology and theologians need to learn to think through sensitivities to psychological differences among people. Autonomy, however, is something else again. Without going into the Kantian philosophical origin of the term, it is often used popularly and imprecisely as being self-directed, self-sufficient, and/or self-determining.

It is not clear that even psychology would agree that human beings are autonomous in these ways given genetic, congenital, environmental, and contingent factors that heavily constrain people. Indeed, one of the goals of counseling and medication is to help people adapt and adjust to such limits rather than expend energy trying vainly to overcome intractable constraints. Theology, however, has another reason

for hesitating before autonomy; it claims that all creation is tethered to God by virtue of creation and that God intends people to be God-oriented, thinking through their life in theological terms. However wide or narrow human freedom is within the constraints that psychology recognizes, theology's are narrower because it claims that God is the source and destiny of human life. That is, quite contrary to secular faith in self-determination, Christian theology claims that human life has a purpose—to know, love, and enjoy God. To the extent that the general culture, and psychology with it, dismiss a teleological orientation for human life, it is at odds with theology that claims that we are not our own. God has set us in a web of interrelations and responsibilities to which we must attend to be faithful to who we truly are.

The issue here may not be so much between theology and empirical science as the philosophical presuppositions on which empirical research is conducted. To put a point on it, scientific research may hope to rid itself of theological and philosophical roots, but it cannot formulate questions to test and hypotheses to construct without presuppositions about health, illness, strength and weakness that will admit of theological statement from another perspective.

**ELJ:** You have recently written a book on happiness. That is a topic that has been explored by modern psychology over the past 20 years, especially by those in what is called "positive psychology." In what ways would you say that your book on happiness is an example of a Christian positive psychology, and how do you think it might differ from the approach to happiness of modern psychology?

**ETC:** God and the Art of Happiness (Cherry, 2010) is, as you correctly note, a work in positive theology. Indeed, I hope to make that the focus of my future work even more explicitly. Positive theology shares an important conviction with the positive psychology movement. Both are committed to understanding and exploring human strengths, virtues, resilience, positive emotions, flow, and emotional and social growth.

The most important difference between positive psychology and positive theology is that positive psychology, like all modern psychology, is generally hesitant to locate people in a cosmic framework in which the goal of human striving is given by God by virtue of creation. That is, for modern psychology we are self-directed and so expected to craft our own identity and destiny whereas for positive theology our purpose in life and the goal of our striving is to live in harmony with God's destiny for us as his creatures who are stewards of creation.

This gives positive theology a teleological thrust that secular psychology will not share unless it finds a way to adopt an overarching framework of meaning within which to locate individual striving. Modern philosophy is generally resistant to that idea, having thrown off theological constraints. The theological



framework has a morally directing dimension that positive psychology must work harder to find and may resist on the grounds of “individual autonomy” that seems to derive from Immanuel Kant, but would be for him a contradiction in terms because, despite his theological hesitancy, he retained a universal concept to reason in which all persons participate. Positive psychology may recognize constraints imposed by contingent events and personal limitations and seek to understand and promote well-being within those limits, but it does not see them as stimuli for becoming as productive as possible as positive theology does.

Positive theology by contrast understands creatureliness as establishing both opportunities and responsibilities within which people discern how to use themselves effectively in harmony with the divine plan for the redemption of the cosmos into which they have been co-opted at baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ.

From another perspective, positive theology differs from the current spate of psychological and sociological literature on happiness in at least three ways. First, happiness is not a possession that is heavily dependent on external factors over which one may have rather limited control. It is rather a way of life that enables self and others to flourish in ways appropriate to their circumstances. It is a way of looking at things and discerning the best course of action in order to maximize the thriving of all persons and things involved.

Next, the theological construal of happiness may include but is more than an ephemeral pleasant feeling state, but a deep sense of satisfaction with one’s way of being in the world. Positive emotions contribute to one’s satisfaction with life, but they come and go with passing events. Happiness in theological perspective is not as ephemeral as that, although even the most theologically attentive person will have sad times when their fortunes reverse. Rather, the perspective on happiness I envision is a satisfactory judgment on the quality of one’s way of handling the situations one faces and decisions one is called to make.

Third, happiness in theological perspective is not an individualistic pursuit. Rather, it recognizes that one’s enjoyment of life occurs in webs of social interaction and interdependence within which our actions and projects affect the whole, even if those effects are minimal. Being happy in this sense is a social activity that expands when one functions effectively. One’s flourishing and that of others and the non-human environment are interdependent. Happiness is the ability or virtue of enabling things to thrive and thriving as a result. In this sense, it is a social and ethical experience.

**ELJ:** One of the most interesting themes in your book is how you tie self-love into the love of God. Would you summarize your argument for our readers?

**ECT:** Scripture teaches us to “love our neighbor

as yourself.” St Augustine of Hippo took this very seriously, and argued that if scripture says this, self-love must be appropriate. He taught that self-love is proper and to be applauded when we love ourselves in God and for God and live righteously. Sinful behavior, while undertaken because we think or hope it will be gratifying is self-hatred. Yet Christians have spurned the idea of proper self-love because they mistake it for selfishness. In *God and the Art of Happiness*, I work with the thought of Bishop Joseph Butler. On theological grounds, Butler argued for a proper understanding of self-love against the psychological egoists of the seventeenth century (especially Thomas Hobbes) who argued that all human behavior is selfish and self-centered. He did not bring examples of human activities that are clearly motivated by self-giving love, like a mother’s love for her children. Nor did he argue that self-care is essential for being able to care for others. Rather, Butler argued that being obedient to conscience, or the voice of God within, is self-love. He also said that some human behavior that gratifies simple desires, like preferring chocolate to vanilla iced cream, is not sinful or selfish, or even that liking iced cream is selfish. Such desires are what we would call morally neutral, and such harmless gratifications are appropriate. His great realization is that obedience to God is self-love, and by implication, we may say that its opposite is self-hatred, although he did not draw that conclusion. To my knowledge, he was the first to separate self-love from selfishness. I draw from this that self-gratification in obedience to God is what I would call theologically “toward” (or appropriate), so that there is no reason for Christians to disdain pleasure and enjoyment of life’s joys.

**ELJ:** How ought we to distinguish the holy self-love of which you write from the vicious self-love to which Paul refers disparagingly in 2 Timothy 3:2?

**ETC:** Second Timothy 3.2 associates “lovers of themselves” with vicious character traits and bad behavior. This association may be appropriate, but it is incomplete. Leviticus 19.18 calls us to “love your neighbor as yourself,” and Matthew 19.19 and 22.39 uphold that. For example, regular eye exams to be sure that one is in good shape for driving protect both self and other and so expresses virtuous self-love. Similarly, being economically independent is what I would call a virtuous style of self-love because it is a form of self-care that enables one not to become a financial burden on family, friends, or the state. One could easily multiply examples in which strong self-care expresses positive self-love. That is, construing self-love as exclusively vicious fails to grasp the full implications of activities from which one benefits immediately, but whose consequences ripple constructively to others. Such good behavior is directly toward self but is not selfish, nor is it simply prudent but enacts love of others. In short, care for our own well-being promotes the well-being of others.

From a slightly different vantage point, people who develop proficiency in the arts, crafts, have skills like cooking and auto mechanics, and expertise in specific areas and enjoy using their training and skills for the common good or the uplift of others are engaging in virtuous self-love and contributing to the social well-being of the whole. Good cooks enjoy themselves and enable others to enjoy themselves. Auto mechanics are especially important, for example, since they keep vehicles safe on the road.

Yet from another vantage point, those who benefit from the arts and specializations of others for their own enjoyment and well-being, and seek them out, are not necessarily acting selfishly when they gratify themselves with pleasurable activities, unless the impact they have on the viewer, listener or participant, fans out in destructive ways. Selection of entertainment can cut both ways. Uplifting forms of entertainment are both enjoyable and virtuous when they nourish the soul, expand one's world, and support the artists and their fields. On the other hand, since Tertullian in the late second and early third centuries, Christians have been concerned about forms of entertainment that might support violence and other untoward behavior. The issue here is not that seeking out pleasurable entertainment is selfish, but that one must learn to be discriminating in selecting entertainment.

Perhaps Christians have so focused on misuse of self that the vast arena of virtuous self-enjoyment has simply been unrecognized, although Augustine did distinguish self-love from self-hatred much as I have here. Recognizing virtuous self-love, and even defining it as virtuous to distinguish it from debilitating and destructive styles and activities that are not self-love, but actually self-hatred parading as if it were self-love, will perhaps inject a note of confidence in the way of life that many Christians actually pursue.

**ELJ:** Salvatore Maddi (2001) grouped 20<sup>th</sup> century personality theories under three headings: conflict, fulfillment, and consistency models, each with two subcategories. If a personality model were to be developed from your book on happiness, using his categories, I would say it was a Christian "Fulfillment: Actualization" model (he presents Maslow's personality model as a humanistic example of this subcategory, but I think Aristotle would also fit here). As I have said, I like what you are doing in your book. However, I also think a full-blown Christian personality model would include something about "intrapsychic conflict" (another subcategory in Maddi's scheme) because of a Christian understanding of human sin. How do sin and intrapsychic conflict fit into your understanding of the human person?

**ETC:** This is a good question. Perhaps I was not clear or did not develop this enough in the book. There are several ways of understanding sin. One is that sin is resistance to God's grace/blessings,

a refusal of God's reaching out to us, or God's Yes to us as Karl Barth might put it. Another is that sin is pride, as Augustine is best known to have put it. Perhaps another way of putting Augustine's point is that sin boils down to self-deception as Joseph Butler put it. Another way of putting pride, vanity, or self-deception is self-absorption that blocks other truths from taking root in us. Certainly, there are others. Disobedience to the divine will is a popular construal of sin, but apart from the clarity of the Decalogue, "the divine will" may be a slippery entity.

Augustine had another and more profound way of understanding sin, that identified not the symptom but the root of the problem as the divided self. This may name the conflict that Paul describes in Romans 7, but not elsewhere. The divided self for Augustine is the pull of one's loves in opposing directions, which Augustine stated as between God and everything else as if "everything else" were not God-related. We need not think in such binary terms, however.

We may say that the beauty, wisdom, and goodness (classically referred to as the divine intellect) that simply is/are God also inhere in the created order that is well-ordered and operates beautifully for the fructifying of other parts of creation. Therefore, to love cows for the milk they give, pear trees for the fruit they give, and rain for the growth it gives are to love the creation as it is in God, so to speak. For all of these lead us to God's beauty, wisdom, and goodness. Loving, honoring, and caring for these things is to love them in God. Loving them is an expression of the united self not stretched taut in a false tension between God and not God. Rigidly distinguishing loving God from loving creation then is too gross a formulation to exemplify the divided self about which Augustine worries.

The divided loves about which Augustine worries and that Maddi aptly calls "intra-psychic conflict" distinguish toward from untoward love.

If Christianly speaking, toward love cannot be simply love of God opposed to everything else, how can we better define the distinction between toward and untoward love. If "toward" love is desire and consequently care for God and the things of God, perhaps untoward love is desire/love for things as they are separated from God. That is, not for things in themselves necessarily, but for things as they function apart from the beauty, wisdom, and goodness with and for which they were created. In this sense it is not the things in themselves, but in the context of their use in particular instances, that separates them from God.

Augustine's most famous example of this understanding of sin in his own life was his account of his encounter with a pear tree when he was about sixteen recounted in his autobiography. Running with other adolescents, they decided to denude a neighbor's pear tree of its fruit, just for the sake of the "high" of stealing. As an adult, Augustine reflected on the thrill of wrong-doing that motivated him, urged by his friends. The pears were inedible and so the

boys threw them to the pigs where they were rightly used. But the act of stealing was sinful because the boys were disrespecting the context in which the tree existed. It did not belong to them.

Had the tree belonged to the estate of one of their families and they had permission to taste its fruit, throwing the pears to the pigs would have been a virtuous act. But as it was, the deception and thrill of wrongdoing made what could have been a virtuous act into a sinful one. Sin then is love for misusing creation, or perhaps better, using self in ways that belie one's identity as a creature endowed with the beauty, wisdom, and goodness of God by divine design, just as the cows, pear trees, and rain are. That is, on Augustine's view, sin is self-betrayal that has everything to do with Maddi's intra-psychic conflict in the sense that it betrays a confusion about who one is and where true self-expression and dignity lie. This is not simply a matter of self-ignorance on the Platonic assumption that to know the good is to do it. No, we are not that simple. The conflict here involves the deeper recesses of the psyche that the Freudian tradition brought to articulation.

Here we must distinguish between confusion and conflict. Confusion is cleared up by information processed by reason. The problem is simply a matter of sorting out—in this theological sense, sorting out who we genuinely are as creatures, and for the Christian, who we have been made by baptism into the divine life. This is basically a cognitive activity, which assumes that reason can be in full control of our decisions.

But perhaps Paul and certainly Augustine knew what Freud named for our day. Reason does not drive the chariot that control two winged horses, one of which is noble and righteous, the other of which is irascible, irrational, and driven by concupiscence as Plato depicts the human soul in the *Phaedrus*. The chariot is not driven by reason that has control over the horses. Rather, Augustine argued that our behavior is driven by love. Love is the charioteer, and our love is divided as suggested above between toward and untoward, or godly and ungodly loves.

In sum, Maddi's intra-psychic conflict is deeply Augustinian and therefore Christian whether he realizes it or not.

**ELJ:** One of the challenges that we face in Christian psychology is the modern separation of theology and philosophy from the sciences. As a result, we have Christians who are psychologists who stay away from theology, and we have a hard time getting theologians and philosophers interested in contributing to Christian psychology. (As you know, you are something of an exception.) What can we do about this disciplinary division?

**ETC:** There is no easy way through these modern disciplinary divides. Psychology, being divided into experimental and clinical fields, itself illustrates the problem. While classical philosophy resonates deeply

with theology and psychology, as the work of Pierre Hadot (1995) has demonstrated, modern analytic philosophy has no theological or spiritual sensibilities. Modern theology, wanting to present itself as a "science" among the sciences created a separate discipline of "practical theology" with several sub-disciplines, against which "theology" is a theoretical science. Following Kant's division between pure and practical reason, theology disjoined theoretical from practical theology.

To bridge these walls, theologians will need to write more integratively so that non-specialist psychologists seeking to develop theological sensibilities and an accessible discourse for expressing them become comfortable thinking theologically. Language is part of the problem here. Modern theology developed a Greek-based vocabulary of its own that may be off-putting to psychologists. This rarified vocabulary acts as a shorthand for those in the field, but is not necessary to express the ideas. Therefore, one step in creating a more user-friendly environment for psychologists will be avoiding specialized jargon.

From the other side, empirical psychological research, while seemingly far distant from theology, shares common interests with it. Both identify problems that people suffer from, and both want to help people find a way beyond their problems and toward a better life. The findings of research psychology may be more accessible to theologians than theology is to psychologists because of the accessible way in which research findings are published. When common interests do emerge, the next challenge is translation. Psychological insights about personality, temperament, particular symptoms, stressors, dysfunctional behavior, and so on will help theology understand its psychological commitments better as theologians seek to interpret human life in both its beauty and its ugliness in light of God and the ways of God as Christians articulate these.

Perhaps terms for a dialogue need to be established in which each field would identify core issues that it thinks the other might be interested in and see if an interactive language could be attempted. This would require creating welcoming environments in which people could develop a sort of bilingual capability to translate back and forth.

**ELJ:** Is there anything you would like to say to Christian psychologists and psychotherapists to help us on the way? Here is your chance.

**ETC:** I think I have more questions to ask of Christian psychologists and psychotherapists than to offer. Perhaps the most pressing question for me is how Christian psychologists manage what seems to me to be a gap between western atonement soteriology and modern psychology's understanding of healing and transformation. Western atonement soteriology holds that we can do nothing to help ourselves before God. We are rotten to the core and only divine grace in

the form of the death of Christ covers our sinfulness with his righteousness so that God looks away from the just punishment that we deserve and loves us or accepts us on account of Christ's—that is God's own self-sacrifice. The effect of this is expected to be relief from fear of eternal punishment.

This view contains two main foci. One is that we can do nothing to help ourselves, but only trust that this is how things are between God and us. The other is the most we can really expect from God in this life is—as the hymn puts it—“blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.” Salvation, on this model, is psychologically soothing, but it does not seem to encourage thinking about what we can do to repair damaged or malfunctioning parts of our personality because a) that is impossible and b) it does not matter in any case since through Christ God has decided to look away from our sinfulness. A theologian like Calvin encourages self-examination in contrast to God so that we confess our sinfulness and throw ourselves on God's mercy, but this does not talk much about growth and change subsequent to “conversion” or “being saved” to work on repair subsequent to the insight that something is wrong with us. At this point, the theology of Gregory of Nyssa may be helpful because he has a dynamic understanding of personality and deepening discovery of self-in-God as life-long.

Another way of putting the western situation is to note the high doctrine of grace in the Augustinian tradition. It intends to promote humility before and dependence upon God, but it can end up teaching helplessness. It seems to me that psychologists would not be comfortable with that. Indeed, the whole movement toward “empowerment” on behalf of the marginalized has been to encourage people to think that they are not helpless before opposing

forces. Even if we assume that the helplessness being encouraged by theology is only helplessness before God and not on the horizontal plane, two points are worth noting. One is that the theological literature has not clearly articulated that distinction, and so helplessness functions broadly. The other is that if our helplessness before God is the result of sinfulness as an ontological reality, not simply the activity of making poor decisions, then our posture toward others should reflect what/who we truly are: helpless sinners. The supposed distinction between being coram deo (before God) and coram hominibus (before humanity) quite breaks down, leaving us back with properly learned helplessness.

**ELJ:** What will you be working on next that might be of interest to Christian psychologists?

**ETC:** Beyond several immediate commitments, eventually I hope to write a positive doctrinal theology that illustrates the potentially salutary effects of Christian doctrines deriving from the Nicene Creed. It will explore the moral, spiritual, social and psychological usefulness of Christian beliefs and practices on adherents, beginning with the doctrine of God. Stay tuned.

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## Review of Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005)

### *The Reciprocating Self - Human Development in Theological Perspective*

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**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, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. His email address is [pjamieso@dbq.edu](mailto:pjamieso@dbq.edu).

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**Balswick, J.O., King, P.E., & Reimer, K.S.** (2005). *The Reciprocating Self - Human Development in Theological Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 334 pages. \$27. (Reviewed by Heather R. Snyder, M.A., Marriage and Family Therapist Associate, Heather Snyder Counseling PLLC, Louisville, KY. Email: [heathersnydercounseling@gmail.com](mailto:heathersnydercounseling@gmail.com))

Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005) proposed to address what they refer to as “the developmental dilemma” or what they describe as the lack of a guiding teleology in existing developmental theory. The authors contend that the solution to this dilemma is to provide a cohesive and theologically informed understanding of the process and goal of human development, providing a lens through which to evaluate existing developmental theories. Balswick, et al., understand the goal of human development to be becoming a reciprocating self, which they define as the self “fully and securely related to others and to God” (p. 9). They assert that “God has created human beings for relationship” and “to be a self in reciprocating relationship is of major importance in negotiating the developmental issues” (p. 10). Thus, the reciprocating self is the goal of human development, emerging only over time and only within relationship.

Balswick et al. seek to show that a biblical understanding of the relationality within the Trinity as well as the doctrine of the imago Dei provides the foundation for understanding the reciprocating self (p. 21). They purpose in this book to put forth an integrated and holistic view of human development based on both this biblical model of relationality, as well as on the research of social science. A secondary purpose of the book is to present developmental life-span stages and address their corresponding developmental issues in such a way that readers can trace their own development and understand their own developmental issues.

After presenting their purposes in the first chapter, the authors readily admit in the next chapter that their understanding of being human and the processes and goals of human development are strongly influenced by the biblical doctrines of the imago Dei and the Trinity—understanding the imago Dei to mean that humans are created in the image of God, and understanding the Trinity to mean that God is one divine being, consisting of three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) existing in relational oneness. Furthermore, Balswick, et al. understand the image of God possessed by humans to consist of a kind of reciprocity that mirrors that which exists between the persons of the Trinity “where the three live with and for each other” (p. 31). They, therefore, present a Trinitarian model as the foundation for a biblical developmental teleology. Based on this understanding, Balswick, et al. surmise that to live as beings made in the image of God is to exist as reciprocating selves, as unique individuals living in relationship with others. The reciprocating self—“to glorify God as a distinct human being in communion with God and others in mutually giving and receiving relationships”—is, therefore, “the goal of human development as God intends” (p. 31). The authors acknowledge that “this is an eschatological goal, meaning that reciprocating selves will only come to completion in the eschaton.” They assert, however, the importance of “enabling others now, as far as possible, to become reciprocating selves” (p. 49). Balswick, et al. support their developmental teleology by drawing on biblical texts that describe the unity of (Jn 1:1; 5:19; 14:9, 28; 17:21) and distinctness between (Jn 1:1; 5:26) God the Father and Jesus, the uniqueness that exists between humans (Ps 139; I Cor 12:7, 17), the intended relationship between humans (I Cor 12:13), and the intended relationship between the Trinity and humans (Jn 17:21, 24).

The authors expand on the development of the reciprocating self, in the third chapter, by asserting that “human relationships are meant to be reciprocal

unconditional commitments characterized by reciprocal gracing, empowering, and intimacy” and asserting that human relationships are “authentic—the way they are meant to be—to the extent that they are modeled after the way God enters into relationships with humans” (p. 50). Here the authors draw on the biblical texts of the Old Testament where God—our relational model—relates to Israel as father, as spouse, and as faithful lover and of the New Testament where God is depicted as the groom in relationship to his bride, the church. Balswick, et al., acknowledge that human relationships will fall short of the biblical ideal of reciprocity due to sin (which they understand to be a failure to be in right relationship) and assert that only God’s forgiveness provides the means for the development of the reciprocating self, allowing for right relationship with God and others. The authors also note that a self’s development into a reciprocating self is contingent on the extent primary caregivers (who are also sinners) have developed into reciprocating selves. According to Balswick, et al., if a relationship does not develop the commitment, grace, empowering, and intimacy of reciprocity, it will, instead, “fixate on contract rather than covenant, law rather than grace, possessive power rather than empowering, and distance rather than intimacy” (p. 53).

In chapter 4, the authors acknowledge the limitations of contemporary secular developmental theories due to their naturalistic assumptions and their failure to take into account the biblical concepts of *imago Dei* and sin. The authors, however, also recognize that each of these theories “may provide essential insights and confirmation” for the model of the reciprocating self (p. 69). Balswick, et al. assert that the theories most helpful in contributing to the understanding of the reciprocating self are those that “conceptualize human beings as self-conscious agents who are not only acted upon but who are capable of being active agents in relationship, actively participating in the formation of their own environment” (p. 69). The authors focus specifically on psychoanalytic, object relations, symbolic interaction, social learning, and life-span development theories.

Balswick, et al., discuss life-span development at length, beginning in chapter 5 where they echo Vygotsky, Lerner, and Bronfenbrenner by asserting that “human development must be understood in the context of an individual’s total bio-socio-cultural environment” (p. 90) and thus concluding that it is within the relationships of one’s social contexts of dyad, family, neighborhood, community, and culture that the reciprocating self is formed. The authors continue in chapters 6 through 11 with a discussion of the sequential stages of life-span development, with a chapter dedicated to each of the developmental stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood and young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. In each chapter, the authors provide an overview of the developmental tasks that

will likely be faced; the type of scaffolding required, the social contexts experienced (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem) and their influence; the cultural contexts experienced (macrosystem) and their influence; and, finally, the extent the person is capable of functioning as a reciprocating self (potential strengths, limitations, and developmental issues) in each stage of development. These overviews of the developmental stages include discussions of such issues as physical growth and development, neurological development, cognitive development, motor skill development, language development, infancy attachment, relational and social skill development, adolescent peer group identification, increasing differentiation and autonomy from family, identity formation, development of the self, development of a sense of meaning and purpose in life, sexuality, marriage, parenthood, empty nest, aging, and retirement.

For each of the developmental stages of the life-span, the authors demonstrate how the concepts of unconditional love, gracing, empowering, and intimate relationships are connected with parental support, monitoring, intervention and control, respectively, identifying “an optimal profile of parenting behaviors that scaffold the reciprocating self as it develops” (p. 157). Also, Balswick, et al. note that these strategies are important at all stages of development (including adulthood), but they must be implemented in age-appropriate ways. Such optimal parenting, especially early in a person’s life, not only provides the foundation for optimal functioning in the present, but also has a “carry over” affect providing the foundation for optimal future functioning. All of these conditions work together to facilitate the development of the reciprocating self—self as a unique individual while in relationship with another.

In the final part of the book, the authors emphasize the theological, which they recognize as an aspect of human development that is often neglected. Balswick, et al. address the theological by attempting to “move beyond the boundaries imposed by naturalistic assumptions and to consider the moral, spiritual and religious dimensions of human development” and their significance for the formation of the reciprocating self (p. 26).

In chapter 12, the authors address morality, asserting that the reciprocating self is a moral self, capable of making moral decisions that lead to actions and consequences. This chapter provides a survey of the field of moral psychology from which the authors conclude: 1) moral identity results from “transformation experiences,” 2) such moral identity is part of what makes up the reciprocating self, and 3) commitment to such moral identity is motivated and sustained by reciprocity with God as well as other people (p. 246). Such an understanding of moral development is “beyond a traditional cognitive stage-development model” (p. 26).

Balswick et al. continue to emphasize the

theological aspect of human development in chapter 13. They give a brief history of the place of religion and spirituality in the history of psychology, explaining that religion and spirituality were initially central to the field of psychology with early psychologists being “committed to establishing psychology of religion as a scientific enterprise;” only for religion and spirituality to later be rejected as “a viable field of scientific study” by the field of psychology throughout much of the twentieth century; and finally, toward the end of the twentieth century, the field of psychology “began to heed the overwhelming evidence that spirituality and religion were a significant part of life” resulting in a revival of interest in religion and spirituality that continues today (p. 264-265). The authors then offer a brief survey of the existing developmental theories on faith, religion, and spirituality, noting the value of James Fowler’s six stages of faith development in identifying the influence of psychological development on faith development; underscoring James Loder’s recognition that faith development is not merely cognitive but also relational and that “the divine may intervene in supernatural ways beyond the scope of scientific explanation” (p. 283); and acknowledging the significant role of environment, fidelity, and identity in spiritual development as observed by Lerner (p. 283). Balswick, et al., then proceed to put forth their own theory of spiritual development based on their understanding of the reciprocating self, referring to it as differentiated faith, and defining it as “to experience intimacy with God that allows for communion with the Godhead and does not sacrifice the particularity of the individual” (p. 275). It is proposed that differentiated faith is influenced by supernatural, biological, social, cultural, and psychological factors and is lived out in communion with God and in community with others.

Chapter 14 describes the church as a reciprocating religious community and describes the role of the reciprocating self within that community. In describing the reciprocating community, Balswick, et al., draw upon the Trinitarian model of relationality put forth by theologians such as Jurgen Moltmann and Miroslav Volf. The authors assert that it is within the reciprocating community that a differentiated faith is “best developed, nurtured, and maintained” (p. 285). The authors also assert that the self that is able to reciprocate and positively contribute to a reciprocating community is the self that has a “well-formed personal identity” (p. 288). Conversely, reciprocating communities facilitate the development of personal identity and the reciprocating self. In addition, the church is a reciprocating community when it is “structured so that it can respond to the developmental needs of persons at all life-span stages” (p. 292).

Asserting that “God’s intention for humans is to develop as distinct individuals in mutual and authentic relationships with divine and human others—for God’s glory” where the “potential for

maximum human development is contingent on being nested in caring and supportive relationships with others...characterized by unconditional love, grace, empowering, and intimacy” and understanding all of this to constitute the reciprocating self (p. 297), the authors conclude that the reciprocating self, as a developmental model, provides a theological understanding of human development, provides an overall meta-theory and goal for human development, and emphasizes optimal development rather than pathology.

The authors give both a primary and a secondary purpose in writing *The Reciprocating Self*: “to put forth an integrated and holistic view of human development based on both this biblical model of relationality as well as on the research of social science;” and a “secondary purpose ... to present developmental life span stages and address their corresponding developmental issues in such a way that the reader can trace his own development and understand his own developmental issues” (p. 9). Overall, Balswick, et al., are successful in accomplishing their stated purposes. They are thorough yet concise. They remain focused on and guided by their purpose throughout the book. The organization is such that each new chapter or section briefly informs the reader of what is about to be explained, proceeds into an in-depth discussion of the topic, and is followed by a summary that reiterates the key points. In addition, each subtopic builds on previous discussions thus contributing to the accomplishment of the overall goal to facilitate an understanding of the reciprocating self.

One of the weaknesses of this book is its over-emphasis on grace and its minimization of God’s law. Balswick, et al., emphasize “unconditional commitment,” “gracing,” “empowering,” and “intimacy”—those things gained through Christ’s death and resurrection. The authors, however, fail to explain the role and importance of God’s law in human development and for human well-being. The authors fail to acknowledge that God’s grace does not nullify God’s law. Instead, the authors seem to set God’s law against God’s grace, as if they are incompatible and at odds with one another. This can be seen when the authors say that relationships that are not reciprocating consist of “contract rather than covenant, law rather than grace, possessive power rather than empowering, and distance rather than intimacy” (p. 53). The authors’ discussion on unconditional commitment and on intimacy raises many questions, such as: What about God’s requirement for obedience? God is not in relationship with everyone, so on what is relationship with God contingent? What of the alienation that results from sin and unrepentance? Balswick, et al., assert that God’s love is unconditional and attempt to support this assertion by referencing the biblical parable of the prodigal son, stating, “Just as the father in the story welcomed his wayward son home with open arms, Jesus responded with unconditional love to a

people who had rejected his Father” (p. 55). But did the father not welcome his wayward son when he repented? And does Jesus not receive sinners when they repent? While the wayward son was living in rebellion, he did not enjoy closeness with or the blessings of a relationship with his father. Likewise, those living in rebellion against God do not enjoy the communion and blessings that result from right relationship with God. It would seem that there are indeed conditions demonstrated in the parable of the prodigal son, just as God’s love is conditional. To say otherwise is to say that God receives and communes with unrepentant sinners. It would seem that obedience and repentance are conditions of relationship with God.

The authors do attempt to give place to God’s law when they state, “Although the covenant of grace rules out law as a basis for relationships, community members living in grace will accept law as patterns, order, and responsibilities in relationships. In reality, much of our daily living has agreed-on rules for regularity and order (p. 59). However, in doing so, they seem to depict God’s law as merely a helpful option for relationship with God and fellow humans. It would seem that worshiping only the one true God, honoring father and mother, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying, not coveting (to name only a few of God’s laws!) is more than just an orderly, responsible way to live. The Bible does not present God’s law as suggestions for living, but, rather, as an expression of God’s love and protection, commands for a life that is pleasing to God, and obedience to which demonstrates a life that honors God. Balswick et al. are correct to emphasize the importance of grace in relationships. However, they do not seem to deal biblically or adequately with the importance of God’s law. God’s law shows humans their sinfulness, shows them their need for God’s grace, and provides the parameters for a life that is both pleasing to God and most optimal for human well-being. Through God’s grace, humans are empowered and provoked to live a life of obedience to God’s law.

In chapter 2, Balswick, et al., discuss what it means to be human and to be a reciprocating self. The authors seem to equate being human with the imago Dei and equate the imago Dei with relationality. They assert, “Interpretation of the imago Dei strongly influences our understanding of what it means to be human. Consequently it has a significant bearing on our understanding of the processes and goals of human development” (p. 31). The authors explain that the imago Dei was traditionally understood “to refer to certain characteristics or capacities inherent in the structure of human nature” while more recently the divine image within humans has been associated with such human characteristics as reason, will, and the individual self (p. 30-31). Balswick, et al., go on to explain that the sufficiency of these theories to explain the imago Dei has been questioned by many. The authors reject all of these and, instead, draw on

“the relational social understanding of the Trinity” to propose a relational understanding of the imago Dei.

The case for a relational understanding of the imago Dei that the authors proceed to make is not only persuasive, but is also well supported both biblically and theologically. However, it may be flawed in its assertion that being human should be understood wholly in terms of the imago Dei and in its assertion that the imago Dei should be understood wholly as relationality. Such assertions raise many questions. Is humanness more than the imago Dei? Is it only the imago Dei that separates humans from all other created beings? Or are there other things that are unique to humans? The answer to these questions of course depends on one’s understanding of the imago Dei which brings us to the authors’ assertion that the imago Dei should be understood wholly as relationality. Could there be more to the imago Dei than relationality? For example, is it possible that relationality is just one component of the imago Dei? Perhaps reason and will are other components of the imago Dei. And what of the human inclination toward creativity? Does man’s creativity in areas such as art, music, and literature not reflect God? Grudem (1994) lists the following as some of the aspects of the imago Dei: morality, spiritual capacity, immortality, reason, will, abstract language, creativity, emotions, relationality, authority over creation.

Balswick, et al., assert that “to be human is to be created in and for relationship with divine and human others...the image of God does not lie in the individual, but in the relationality of the persons in community” (p. 35). Can it be accurately said that apart from communion with God and other, a person is not human and/or does not bear the image of God? If the imago Dei is relationship with other, does this mean that the individual person does not/cannot in any way bear the image of God on his/her own? (Was Adam not created in the likeness of God? Did Adam not bear the image of God prior to being in relationship with Eve?) These are questions the authors fail to ask, and consequently fail to answer. Maybe it is better to say that the more a person communes with God and other the more he/she has reached his/her potential as a human, as an image bearer of God. Perhaps it is better to say that the more a person has reached optimal development, the more he/she has achieved the state of existence that God intended for humans. Perhaps, instead of saying a person is more or less human, it is better to say that a human cannot be more or less human, but can exhibit to greater or lesser degree of what Grudem (1994) describes as “the excellence of our humanity” (1994, p. 444). Perhaps, then, Adam bore the divine image prior to his relationship with Eve but exhibited a greater degree of the excellence of humanity in his relationship with her.

In chapter 13, the authors speak of differentiated faith. They explain that differentiated faith “emphasizes both unity and uniqueness...is not



only characterized by intimacy with God but also a life that responds in action to the mutual love of the Creator and created [humans]" (p. 275). In their discussion of differentiated faith, Balswick, et al., do not speak of God as the initiator of spiritual/religious development, as the initiator of the development of differentiated faith. Rather, they say that differentiated faith "allows for the presence and action of God in the process of formation" (p. 275), and they speak of a "potential divine intervention" in which case "the Holy Spirit may interrupt and reorder the development of the human spirit at any point" (p. 283). When the authors speak of God in this way, they seem to imply that spiritual/religious development can occur apart from God and seems to depict God's role in development as being secondary or maybe as merely one of many possible contributors to spiritual/religious development. Balswick, et al., also assert that differentiated faith consists of adherence to "a particular religion" (p. 276) and "an acknowledgment of a transcendent other (e.g. God, a higher power, absolute truth)" (p. 278). Are they really insinuating that it doesn't matter which God or religion one chooses? If so, this smacks of postmodern thought. In addition, such a position undermines the biblical picture of God, the God of the Bible, as the one and only true God who is the author, initiator, and facilitator of all true spiritual/religious development. If the reciprocating self is truly "a distinct human being in communion with God and others in mutually giving and receiving relationships" as the authors suggest (p. 31), then it would seem that communion with God is both primary and necessary for becoming a truly mature self, a reciprocating self. And, conversely, a self not in communion with God is unable to achieve reciprocity, the goal of human development. In all fairness, it should be noted that the authors do at times speak of differentiated faith in terms of "intimacy with God and the church" (p. 276). However, their failure to remain committed to a distinctly Christian stance in their discussion of differentiated faith is not only confusing, but also undermines the strength and persuasiveness of their argument that developmental maturity depends on communion with God.

Finally, when Balswick, et al. speak of faith in such terms as "commitment to an ideology," "moral and civic identities," "sense of fidelity," and "noble purpose" (p. 280), they do not seem to distinguish between "faith" that is simply adherence to a chosen set of religious, ethical, or moral code and "true faith" that is initiated and facilitated by the work of God and demonstrated by obedience. Consequently, the authors seem to paint a picture of differentiated faith as being merely or, at least, in large part, moralistic.

In conclusion, the authors of *The Reciprocating Self* make significant strides in developing a holistic view of human development that draws from both a biblical understanding of relationality as well as the field of social science. Although some of the points presented in this book lack biblical support, need

further development, and/or need clarification, this book should be considered an important and valuable contribution to both the fields of social science and theology.

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Hasker, William. (2008). *The triumph of God over evil: Theodicy for a world of suffering*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 228 pages. \$20. (Reviewed by A. Cara Cochran, Summit Counseling Center, Chattanooga, TN. Email: cochran.cara@gmail.com)

Imagine sitting in a classroom, when, with no introduction, a video montage begins on the screen in the front of the room with graphic images of starving children, war-torn regions, devastation following Katrina, aftermath of wildfires, teenagers smoking crackpipes, foreclosure signs, robbers attacking the elderly, and dozens of other jolting scenes. The imagery invokes, not only feelings of sadness, but hopelessness, anger, doubt and powerlessness. The professor then asks a seemingly innocuous question, "Where was God?" How do we answer? When tragedy surrounds us, Christians are hard pressed to provide a logical, satisfactory response. Unfortunately, the inability to answer often leads us to avoid the question altogether. Will the answer change our view of God, or is the challenge of an unanswerable puzzle not a worthy investment of time and scholarship? In *The Triumph of God over Evil*, Hasker invests time and scholarship to fearlessly ask, "Where is God when tragedy strikes?" Following a brief synopsis of the content, I suggest strengths and weaknesses.

The author of several books including *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (2004), Hasker earned a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in theology and philosophy of religion, and serves as emeritus professor of philosophy at Huntington University in Huntington Indiana. From the first pages of the preface, Hasker demonstrates his accomplishment, not only as a philosopher, but also as an educator. The reader can almost hear him enter the classroom and pose the questions to be addressed. Each chapter is a well crafted lecture in philosophy: a central theme, an examination of relevant arguments, and arrival at a logical conclusion. Hasker makes excellent and frequent use of the writings of other experts in this most complex question of evil, contrasting the various perspectives, and challenging them with his own well-reasoned viewpoints. These elements together lend themselves to a thorough, focused treatise on the ultimate question: How do we account for "evil in the world in the light of the theistic conception of God, where God is said to be perfect in knowledge, power and goodness" (p. 16)?

Although evil is a subject about which Hasker has written previously, one of the purposes of the current work is to organize content in order to help the reader understand “how the various pieces fit together” (p. 9). A second purpose is to move beyond a strictly philosophical discussion to include the basic tenets of Christian theology in order to provide a more complete response to the basic question of God and evil. Hasker intends to address this second purpose with a thorough discussion of what we can understand about God’s choices at creation and the ways in which we might understand God’s ultimate victory over evil (p. 10).

Addressing the problem of evil is no mean feat, and Hasker is careful to lay the groundwork for the scope of the book from the onset. A cogent argument of such a difficult topic necessitates delimitations. Here, the question of evil is addressed only within the context of Christian theology. Further, Hasker does not subscribe to the concept that the experiential aspects of evil should silence the philosophical discussion, but rightly observes that one’s perception of evil influences one’s response in the face of evil. However, he primarily limits the discussion to the philosophical elements of evil noting that “they are very different concerns, and conflating the two is a source of trouble” (p. 21).

Hasker’s theological perspective also serves as a delimitation to the discussion. Greatly simplified, from the standpoint of philosophy and logic, there are only a limited number of ways to explain how evil can exist concurrently with a loving, omniscient, omnipotent God. Two traditional views include determinism and free-will. Hasker goes into great detail to evaluate these explanations in the third chapter while noting from the onset that his preferred understanding of the co-existence of God and evil is from the vantage of open theism. He states that “the central idea of open theism is that God is ‘open,’ that is, affected by and responsive to the world” (p. 26). From this conceptualization, God has given humanity the ability to be truly free in the decisions we make, and since open theism rejects divine foreknowledge, God does not know which choices will be made in the future. Open theists also “refuse to go along with the idea that God’s goodness is of a radically different kind than human goodness” (p. 28), which takes away one of the primary arguments in discussing the problem of evil.

After laying this foundation, Hasker addresses the Holocaust, perhaps the most monumental demonstration of evil imaginable. In light of this horror, is any attempt at reconciling an omnipotent, loving God with the existence of such atrocities even possible? In the second chapter, Hasker unpacks the Holocaust theologies of John Roth and D. Z. Phillips in order to demonstrate that, despite this black stain, the reality of the Holocaust does not make the existence of a loving God irreconcilable with the existence of evil. Hasker does an admirable job with emotionally charged material in this section.

Following the epic question of whether the Holocaust changes everything about our understanding of God, Hasker devotes the third chapter to the compatibility of God with evil. Here, he goes into greater detail regarding determinism, free will, and the understanding of molinism, or middle knowledge of God. In the fourth chapter, he views creation through the lens of philosophy, and looks at what we can and cannot understand about God’s choices at creation. If God is all-powerful, could he have created a better world? If not, why not? From any theological perspective, these questions are unanswerable, but worth consideration. The discussion of creation is logically followed by the discussion of natural evil in the fifth chapter. In considering the role of God in relation to evil, it is one thing to consider the choices of human beings to be cruel, but what of nature itself? Who made the choice for Katrina to devastate the Gulf Coast in 2005? Here, Hasker presents the views of Henry Morris and William Dembski, each of whom understands natural evil to be the result of sin. He contrasts this view with that of Diogenes Allen who understands natural evil to be a part of the harmonic order of creation. Hasker then sets into place a “constructive theodicy for natural evil” (p. 122). Echoing C.S. Lewis (1950), he notes that, although the presence of natural evil does give sufficient reason to question God’s love, “he is not a tame God, and he has not given us a tame world.” (p. 146)

Hasker proceeds to investigate the theodicy of moral evil, and expounds further on the nature of free will. From his perspective, free will is “essential for an adequate theodicy” (p. 149). In the seventh chapter, Hasker begins to pull many of the previous topics together more succinctly. The skeptical theist defense is presented, which reminds theologians of any persuasion that we are limited in our abilities to understand God and his relationship to evil (p. 180). In a bit of self-deprecation, Hasker notes that philosophers “sometimes tend to think that, given a pad of paper, a ball-point pen and a couple of hours free of interruption, we can figure out just about anything” (p. 183). The greater part of the chapter is spent in exploring the argument of William Rowe who, as part of his concept of God and evil maintains the following understanding:

An omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being (that is, God) would prevent the occurrence of any serious evil unless he could not do so without thereby losing (without equivalent compensation) some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (p. 188).

Hasker counters this logic by painstakingly deconstructing Rowe’s view point by point.

The final chapter goes beyond the questions posed previously regarding whether the goodness of God can be reconciled with the evil of the world. Here, Hasker discusses which will be the final victor. Ultimately, he concluded that, since a world without

sin, pain, and destruction is unimaginable, there is no possible way for us to understand in a tangible way what this victory may look like.

The *Triumph of God over Evil* is aimed at those who have more than a passing interest in philosophy, and theodicy in particular, and presents an intricate challenge to those who will take it on. My perspective primarily comes from the areas of psychology and theology, so, delving into Hasker's complex philosophical arguments posed a, not unwelcome, challenge. A challenge, yes, but there is much to commend. Very often discussions of difficult subjects of Christian doctrine are avoided. Sometimes this is because the subject matter is simply too difficult to attempt to understand or, perhaps it will lead to disagreement. Or there is no known answer, therefore, discussion is considered to be a waste of time. Although I cannot agree with all of Hasker's arguments, his willingness to address the subject from a logical, scholarly standpoint is laudable.

The first of Hasker's two goals in this text was to pull together previous writings to complete the puzzle – here he has succeeded fully in my perspective. The second purpose was to include the basic tenets of the faith into the conversation. With this purpose, I was left wanting. Although the scholarship of Hasker's writing is exceptional, his premise in expounding on the problem of evil is based in his belief of the openness of God. I claim no great scholarship with the concepts of open theism, but several questions came to mind as I worked through the content.

In Hasker's initial explanation of open theism, he distinguishes it from classical theism in several ways, one of which is to note that in open theism, "God is profoundly affected by the events in the lives of his creatures: he suffers with us when we are afflicted and rejoices when we find true happiness" (p.27, 28). In contrast, the traditional sense of impassibility does imply that God is unmoved and is not affected emotionally by anything created. This understanding came into Christian thought through the writings of Plato, and then of Philo, both of whom believed that a God who could experience love was vulnerable (McGrath, 1997, p. 249). Although Hasker clearly states that classical theism does not represent the "consensus view of all Christian theologies" (p. 26), the choice to focus on this narrow view of God's immutability is still confusing. Hasker seems to imply that God, as represented by open theism, sympathizes with us and takes pleasure in and with us while other theological perspectives represent God as, "devoid of an affectional nature essential to personality and agape love" (Lewis, 1996, p.553). Further, many evangelical theologians who subscribe to the immutability of God do not narrow this attribute to the full extent of the classical understanding of impassability (Erickson, 1998; Grudem 1994; McGrath, 1997). Does this make a difference in Hasker's overall premise? Perhaps not, but, to borrow language from empirical science, it is certainly a confounding variable.

Further, the rejection of, and refusal "to go along with the idea that God's goodness is of a radically different kind than human goodness" (p. 28) seem somewhat at odds with other aspects of Hasker's thought. In the discussion of creation, Hasker grapples with the motivation of God's creative acts, and ponders the possibility that God might have chosen not to create at all. He notes of this possibility, "We are hindered in this not only by a bias in favor of our own existence, but by the extreme poverty of our grasp of such a situation" (p. 97). Hasker acknowledges the skeptical theist's cognitive limitations (p.183), and his ultimate conclusion demonstrates that we are vastly limited in the way in which we might understand the triumph of God over evil. Why do our great limitations not extend to consider the possibility that God's goodness is "radically different" from anything we can fathom?

Hasker's writing does not fully describe his view of scripture. Although he clearly does not adhere to a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, his views of other genres of scripture are not discussed. Job, the original textbook of theodicy, is cited several times, as are other scriptures. Hasker states that the idea God does not know the future does not mean that he is diminished, but that "there is simply nothing for God to know" (p. 23). But what does this mean for the many accounts of prophecy in scripture? How are these understood in light of open theism?

Hasker's work is logical, and very well reasoned. The concept of a God who does not possess foreknowledge, and is willing to risk, allows the question of evil to be answered relatively neatly despite the complexity. But, at what cost? I had a mental image of trying to make a water balloon fit into a small box. When you can make one part fit nicely, another part of the balloon bulges at the other end. By explaining the problem of evil through the openness of God, a myriad of new questions are raised. In attempting to solve, perhaps, the most perplexing puzzle of eternity, what are the consequences to other foundational doctrines of the faith?

Although Hasker has found a means to provide potential answers to the question of evil, questions remain. Is it necessary, or even wise to find answers to questions? I strongly agree that the questions should be asked, wrestled with, and even debated, but when we become intent on solving the mysteries of the faith, we risk our openness to God. Do I really want a God whom I can explain? Does open theism really provide potential answers to the problem of evil, or are we left with a God who is diminished? At what point does the quest to understand God become a quest to manage him? If God is not omniscient, perhaps I do not need to be so concerned about his commands – he may have a different perspective tomorrow. I also agree that God is willing to risk, but not in the sense of open theism. God is willing to risk not being understood by his own creation.

On a daily basis, counselors sit with those who

have experienced unimaginable tragedy and evil. We feel helpless, even angry. When faced with the inevitable question of “Why?” what do we say? I can explain that God does not know the future, so he could not have prevented evil from happening. Or, I can say, “I don’t know,” and listen in disquiet as the client tells me her fears and doubts. One answer is logical, but provides no hope. The other requires humility and faith. Do I want logical answers and a diminished view of God, or can I live with the discomfort of questions and doubts? Uncomfortable faith in a truly omniscient God is preferable to a reasoned understanding of a God who does not know the future. The triumph of logic over hope seems a hollow victory.

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**Malony, H. Newton & Augsburger, David W.** (2007). *Christian Counseling: An Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon. Pp. 165. (Reviewed by Philip G. Monroe, Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, PA. Email: pmonroe@biblical.edu)

In this offering, H. Newton Malony and David W. Augsburger undertake the dangerous, but important task of re-defining and delimiting the field of Christian counseling. Augsburger (a pastoral counselor) and Maloney (a clinical psychologist) have been writing and teaching in the Christian counseling world for a combined 50 years — years of examining and documenting the integration of the disciplines of psychology and theology.

But the present text stands as signpost of change in the thinking of these two gentlemen. This little book offers a reconsideration of the entire scope and identity of Christian counseling. They admit that their prior stance was one that hesitated to use the label Christian counseling at all. They saw themselves as training “Christians who counseled” rather than ‘Christian counselors’ (vii). Why? “We paid too much homage to current psychological theory instead of boldly proclaiming our explicit reflections on the implications of Christian faith for counseling practice” (vii). Now freed to be explicitly Christian in their identity by postmodern influences

on psychology, they wish to prescribe rather than describe the world of Christian counseling.

We have no intention of doing a survey and, on the basis of the results, describing what Christian counselors do. In an unapologetic manner, we intend to detail the parameters of what we firmly believe should be the foundations and applications of Christian counseling (viii).

Their 157 page book explores foundational assumptions, applications, and “destiny” (i.e., some thoughts on our postmodern world) of Christian counseling. The authors begin by asserting that Christian counseling must be marked by more than mere assent to statements of faith. “Simple Sunday-school repetition of religious jargon will no more suffice than will lack of training in counseling for those who attach Christian to the service they provide” (p. 6). They believe the Christian counselor must exude substantial connection to the whole of Christendom by way of their personal character and practices. Further, counselors are not merely spiritual beings, but practitioners of the Christian religion. As such, they have a deep conviction that absolute truth exists outside humanity and thus hold themselves accountable to the historical teachings of the Christian faith. In fact, the authors would prefer that Christian counselors be certified by denominational bodies. They worry that without this accountability counselors may fall into “quasi-religious” functioning.

In chapter two, the authors take time-out from their prescriptive work to remind the reader that not all that name the name of Christian counseling are the same. Further, not all seeking Christian counseling are looking for the same thing. They illustrate low and high expectations of Christian counseling from counselor and counselee perspectives in a four cell box (p. 15). Thus, one hallmark of authentic Christian counseling is the clear communication of what the counselor means by Christian counseling so that clients can make an informed choice.

Chapter three explores the substance or starting point of Christian counseling. All counseling, the authors contend, is evangelistic in nature. “It is now accepted that all counseling is propositional. Every counselor imposes a point of view on those who come for help. All counseling is rhetoric -- that is, designed to influence clients” (p. 18). They go on to distinguish between overt and covert forms of “evangelism,” but contend that all counseling makes metaphysical or quasi-religious claims about the nature of persons and the nature of change. Thus, “sharp distinctions between religious and psychological theories are ill-advised” due to the subjectivity of theories (p. 20). They point out that all theories make observations about life and provide meaning to those “facts.” Without acknowledging prior theological work, their point of view seems to parallel the work of Cornelius Van Til and his presuppositional apologetics—that there are no uninterpreted facts. Thus, the authors contend that the

Christian counselor may freely admit that God is the intervening or interpretive variable in Christian counseling. What God says and does shapes the work of Christian counseling. The “master motive” of the Christian counselor is to encourage an encounter with God and to aid in the interpretation of that encounter.

Moving quickly to the methodology of Christian counseling (chapter 4), Malony and Augsburg offer some prescriptive thoughts on the practice of counseling. What happens “after you say ‘hello?’ In other words, what do you do when the door is shut and there is nothing but space between you and another person?” (p. 26). All counselors should listen first and advise later. While listening is universal to all counseling models, the Christian counselor’s advice ought to be uniquely Christian. They note that Christian advice may include encouraging (not always explicitly) prayer, reading of the Word, worship, acts of service, etc. However, they assert that five specific activities set the Christian counseling session apart from all others: praying for the client prior to meeting with them, inviting the client to start with silent prayer or use of short liturgical prayer, proclaiming that Christ is present in the session, seeking either insight or new habits (the heart of counseling), and concluding in prayer by committing clients to God. With these activities, both counselor and counselee acknowledge the super-ordinate goal of connecting and submitting to God as well as the particular presenting problem. The reader may note that the most specific of these five activities happen either at the beginning or the end of sessions with the heart of counseling (seeking insights or behaviors) potentially the same as prior forms of Christian counseling.

In chapter five, the authors explore the work of investigating faith in the counseling office. The counselor ought to help a client assess his or her level of faith, to strengthen understanding, to put such faith to work, to act in concert with that faith, and to feel supported in the process. Lest this sound too humanistic, the authors prescribe optimal Christian faith: awareness of God, acceptance of God’s grace, repentance, trust in God’s leadership, involvement in Christian community, ethical living, and continued growth and exploration of faith.

Christian counseling ought to foster forgiveness, and so the authors explore both the work of forgiving and being forgiven. While not directing the outcome of such work, they see that the work of forgiveness and reconciliation as essential to the life in Christian community.

Chapter eight considers a set of ethical moral presumptions that all Christian counselors embrace. In this short chapter, they consider the value of humanity, the brokenness of humanity, and the need to look toward an external morality, ethics, and virtue to shape our counsel. Chapters ten through thirteen make a quick tour of application. They explore conflict mediation, contextual or cultural

issues, matters of sexuality (and the tension between Christian teaching and social mores of the day), and family systems counseling.

Finally, the authors consider Christian counseling in light of postmodernism in their last chapter. They wish to argue that postmodernity provides an avenue for Christian counseling to be upfront and direct about its background, biases, and values. The philosophical underpinnings of postmodernity (relativism), while inconsistent with Christian truth statements need not undermine the work of Christian counseling. As they conclude, “Relativity is not a threat to those who claim to have the word of life for a waiting world (cf. John 3:16)” (p. 157).

Readers ought to recognize that this book, along with others (e.g., Johnson, 2007, McMinn, 2007, 2008) reflect a significant change — where Christian professional counselors explore what it means to be a Christian counselor without first worrying whether their secular counterparts will agree. The move away from modernistic assumptions about the incompatibility of science and faith provide the avenue for this positive exploration. It is refreshing to see those who have long practiced a particular form of counseling rethink their framing of the practice of counseling. However, the reader ought to ask whether their change is wholesale or merely a rejection of prior timidity about identifying first with the faith and second with the practice of counseling. One might well wonder whether such a change might also include a rethinking of the main building blocks of counseling — human development, personality, pathology and brokenness, healthy relationality, the nature of change, therapeutic practices, ethical standards, etc. Some of the re-thinking has been done (and is being done) by the aforementioned authors in a way that puts flesh on the bare bones of this book. Certainly, there is indeed much more work to be done, especially in the area of emotions, healthy relationships, change mechanisms, and ethical practices derived from clear Christian teaching. But for those who have not considered what it means to be a Christian and a counselor, this book may be a quick read and an introduction to deeper realm of Christian psychology found in this and other like-minded publications.

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**Powlison, David.** *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context.* (2010). Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press Pp. 352. (Reviewed by Sam R. Williams, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Email: swilliams@sebts.edu.)

David Powlison's original dissertation, "Competent to Counsel?: the History of a Conservative Protestant Anti-Psychiatry Movement," began with the title of Jay Adams' first book. However, because of the potential that non-historians would misunderstand the intended meaning of the term "anti-psychiatry," the title was changed for the book version reviewed here. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* does not read like a dissertation, *solus Dei Gloria*, but it does provide an engaging, comprehensive, and incisive historical analysis of the biblical counseling movement. It is nearly a biography, as it is in large part a summary of the role and work of the founder of the biblical counseling movement: Jay Adams. There may not be any figure that is more controversial, nor one that has exerted more impact on evangelical Christian counseling than Jay Adams. At the very least he has, more than any other contemporary figure, defined the terms of the discussion and highlighted the key issues and questions. What makes Christian counseling distinctively Christian? What does it mean to be "biblical"? What is the proper role of the church in the care and cure of the soul? How should Christian counseling interact with the secular psychologies?

Powlison describes Adams as a skilled "turf-warrior" with four foes: pastoral ineptitude and evasion of the counseling task, the secular mental health profession, the mainline and liberal pastoral counseling movement, and evangelical psychotherapists, AKA "integrationists." "He was well suited to play the role of prophetic innovator in the eyes of those who would come to embrace the paradigm shift he proposed; he was well suited to appear impudent and opinionated, even demagogic, in the eyes of those offended both by the matter of his propositions and by the manner in which he stated them" (p. 21-22).

Implicit within Powlison's account of the development of Adam's counseling model are both positive and negative lessons. Positively, Powlison reminds us that Adams proposed a comprehensive (even totalitarian, as all worldviews are) meta-psychology arguably consistent with a reformed evangelical understanding of the Christian faith. Powlison spends three chapters describing Adams's "knowledge system" or counseling model. It is a remarkable account of a man with a mission and the clarity of mind and mission to pursue it relentlessly, if not furiously. Although the Christian Counseling wars have subsided and the skirmishes that remain

have become passé for many, it is a shame that Adams' "positive system" is so rarely studied. Powlison's book opens the way to regain an appreciation for the seminal and innovative meta-psychology of Adams, which for many readers has been difficult to appreciate because of his bombastic and dogmatic manner of communication and the rudimentary nature of his system.

Powlison describes Adams's "knowledge system" as radically theocentric and notably consistent with his premises and purposes. Adams viewed the counselor's role as directive and pastoral, emphasized the counselees moral responsibility for themselves, and both parties' responsibility to Someone Else – the God in whom they lived and moved and had their very being. Problems were explained in decidedly spiritual terms, and solutions were to be derived from the Scriptures. Consequentially, the ideal institutional location for both diagnosis and cure was the church and decidedly not the mental health establishment. As Powlison notes, Adams' institutional program was "secessionist." Since he viewed the secular mental health system as an interloper and a pernicious competitor, he proposed a completely separate, alternative delivery system. "He operated with the instincts of a revolutionary, not a reformer. Without a backward glance he was willing to lead like-minded people to separate from existing institutions and to form new institutions" (p. 31). In our day, where professional ethics inevitably follow cultural trends, a second look, at least at Adams' institutional proposal, may be warranted even if not wanted.

The typical reader who finds themselves immersed in the teaching or practice of counseling will be enriched by the attention that Powlison pays to the dynamics of the historical development of professions (in this case, the various mental health professions). This is an intriguing account of the boundary/turf wars inherent in the establishment of a profession's "valid" (culturally accepted) jurisdiction. Many of us function as if psychiatry, clinical psychology, and the various counseling professions are givens in our world. Powlison's historiography reminds us that our mental health culture is an artifact, created by particular people in particular cultures at particular times for particular reasons, some more warranted and sensible than others.

Perhaps Powlison's book also provides some negative lessons. His account of Adams's ongoing battle with others in the Christian counseling movement is instructive. According to Powlison, "Adams's millitance proved as provocative as the content of his views. He was a controversialist, out to define and magnify differences, not a diplomat out to blur or reconcile differences." (p. 33) These qualities are lived out in Adams' response to "the airport meeting" during which Adams was both commended and critiqued by leaders of the chief institutions teaching evangelical psychotherapy (Bruce Narramore, Fred Donehoo, Fred Tweedie, Vernon Grounds, Henry Brandt, and others). Following this meeting Adams

wrote, "I concluded, 'They're too soft. They don't have enough rough edges. Maybe that's why they haven't done anything earthshaking in this field.' So I went home and I sharpened it up more!" As a result, "Adams gained followers among pastors and their parishioners but largely lost the interprofessional conflict." (p. xvii)

Most of those who would be reading this review are aware that Powlison is a, if not the, leading figure in the biblical counseling movement and therefore might doubt his objectivity about a movement that he promotes and defends and a person by whom he was profoundly influenced.

While Powlison clearly respects and appreciates Jay Adams, it is apparent (even in the introduction, Powlison characterizes Adams as an "agitator" and his first book as "inflammatory") that this work is not a payment of homage to the biblical counseling movement's founder. Although Powlison does not claim to be an objective, impartial historian, his tone throughout the book is dispassionate and fair-minded. His work is more narrative history and only rarely explanatory or evaluative. It would seem to me that he achieved his objective, "to subvert both the canonized and demonized versions of 'Jay Adams' and 'integrationists'" (p. 229).

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### ERRATA

Please note in the Edification 4(2) article entitled "Grace and Christian Psychology - Part 1: Preliminary Measurement, Relationships, and Implications for Practice" by Sisemore et al., an error appears in Table 2 on page 62. The Mean Clinical Score for the Grace Scale should be 3.01 rather than 3.99.

# EDIFICATION

THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL  
OF CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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