Dialogue on Christian Psychology

Discussion Article
Christian Counseling in the Public Square: Principled Pluralism for the Common Good
James W. Skillen

Commentaries
Principled Pluralism: Toward a Religious Revival in Psychology? One Muslim’s Perspective
Jaleel Abdul-Adil

Resisting a Separatist Position as a “Distinctively Christian Psychology”
Anna A. Berardi and Nancy S. Thurston

Principled Pluralism—But who is the Gatekeeper of the Commons?
William Hathaway

Realizing Values in a Complex World: Caring for the Other
Bert H. Hodges

A Response to James Skillen: A Call for a Biblical Psychology
Kalman J. Kaplan

The Need for Ecumenical, Denominational and Empirically-Supported Christian Psychotherapy Approaches in Public Settings
P. Scott Richards

Political Realities Underlying Skillen’s Principled Pluralism
James M. Siwy

Confessional and Structural Pluralism for Christian Psychology Majors: A Response to James Skillen
Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen

A Radical Alternative to Principled Pluralism
Stephen D. Viars

Author’s Response
Genuine Public Pluralism and the Establishment of Justice
James W. Skillen
Articles

Christian Psychology and the Gospel of Matthew ................................................................. 39
Jonathan T. Pennington

Identifying Character Strengths and Virtue as the Efficacious Component of the Therapist’s Person ........................................................................................................ 49
Donald A. Russell

Interview with C. Stephen Evans: Humanizers versus Limiters of Science, the Role of Philosophical Assumptions in Psychology and Reasons for Dualism ........................................ 58
C. Stephen Evans and Michael A. Cantrell

Edification: Book Reviews ....................................................................................................... 65
Bryan N. Maier, Editor
Christian Counseling in the Public Square: Principled Pluralism for the Common Good

James W. Skillen
The Center for Public Justice

Increasingly, the psychological profession recognizes the diversity of perspectives on, and approaches to, counseling and the study of psychology. This essay supports the legitimacy of distinctively Christian approaches in this field. This is not to suggest that nothing is common among all approaches, but that what is common in diagnoses, scientific assessments, and accountability standards are often contented from different perspectives. At the same time, psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors with distinctive points of view must carry out their work in a public governance and accreditation context. That context is also regularly in contention, and its rules and laws are made by professional organizations and public officials who operate from different points of view on what is good and just for the public. Christians in the academic and professional field of psychology should not assume that the common terrain of science and public governance is “secular” (and neutral) and that their Christian viewpoint is only of private “religious” significance. Rather, they should contend for the equal treatment, in their profession and under public law, of diverse approaches in the field, including their own: in other words, genuine pluralism. They should also work openly and cooperatively from their distinctive viewpoint to help shape the laws and rules that will govern everyone in the profession.

In a recent book by Tom Burns (2006), Oxford University Professor of Social Psychiatry, entitled Psychiatry: A Very Short Introduction, he writes: “Few issues polarize us as much as how changeable we believe human behavior to be. The disagreements are not just calm, academic ones but fuel (and are fueled by) political and social beliefs reflecting fundamentally different worldviews” (p. 86). Psychiatry, says Burns, “is fascinating because it deals with consciousness, choice, motivation, free will, relationships—indeed everything that makes us human” (p. 1). Given this reality of fundamentally different worldviews and the complexity of what it means to be human, we should not be surprised that psychiatry, as well as counseling and psychotherapies more broadly considered, manifest different approaches, different diagnoses, and different treatments. After all, says Burns, “Psychiatric diagnoses rely on making a judgment about why someone is doing something, not just the observation of what they are doing” (p. 7). Thus, the development of these psychological arts and disciplines “is dependent on the values and structures of the societies that [foster them]” (p. x).

At the same time that we highlight the diversity of worldviews, values, and social structures, however, we must also recognize that “difference” is not the only key word here. People are people; similar conditions and behaviors can be recognized across the board; many treatments, including those that employ drugs, will be used by psychiatrists and therapists who have different worldviews and different convictions about what it means to be human. Even though, as Burns (2006) says, referring to DSM-IV, it is debatable whether an “entirely ‘atheoretical’ diagnostic system” (p. 113) is possible, it has not been complete nonsense for the American Psychiatric Association to establish a criteria-based system of “carefully listing features of the disorder that are present” as a counterbalance to the wide “variations in diagnostic practice” arising from the “traditional approach of pattern recognition and reflective empathy informed by extensive familiarity with normal and abnormal behaviours” (p. 8-9).

Moreover, when we take cognizance of how closely interconnected humans are in society, even with their different worldviews and convictions about the meaning of life, it is beyond doubt that the work of counselors, therapists, and academic psychologists cannot be isolated from the common social, political, and legal contexts in which they live and work. Think only of the development and use of asylums in the nineteenth century or the legal decisions leading to deinstitutionalization in the 20th century. Is it not of great public consequence, for example, that “California now has more psychotic individuals in prison than in mental hospitals” (Burns, 2006, p. 60)? In this context too, however, humans are unable to deal with matters of great public weight on the basis of a supposedly neutral, unbiased, public reason. There is no way to bracket worldview differences when it comes to deciding how public law should govern society.
Whether or not one agrees with Burns that “Western societies are increasingly individualistic with less social cohesion and greater risk-consciousness” (p. 66), it is hard to counter his observation that “the emphasis of the 1940s and 1950s on shared social capital such as public schooling and health care has given way in varying degrees to a consumerist approach with an emphasis on personalized care” (p. 66). Today, he says, “differing lifestyles and behaviour are accepted as choices and tolerated as long as they do not infringe the next person’s liberties” (p. 67). Yet these changes, according to Burns, are connected with a growing uncertainty “about social norms” and are unfolding along with “a vast increase in alcohol and recreational drug consumption in Western societies” (p. 67). Surely with regard to all these matters, the worldview differences among psychologists, psychiatrists, and ordinary citizens will manifest themselves in important ways.

What should we do about all these social changes and the political and legal decisions that accompany them? How should they affect your approach to therapy and research? In your judgment, which decisions by the psychology associations or accrediting agencies that affect your work are legitimate and appropriate? And what kind of political and legal decisions that bear on counseling, therapy, and public health care should we, as citizens, be calling for?

**Freedom for Diversity in Counseling and Research**

I want to argue that the freedom and obligation you have to develop a Christian approach in your work should be fully protected and encouraged by the laws of the land and by various public licensing and accrediting agencies. And this should be done in an equitable, pluralistic manner that gives the same protection and encouragement to those who approach counseling and therapy from different points of view. In addition, you as Christian professionals should be exercising your responsibility, both individually and as an association, to help shape the public standards designed to hold for everyone who practices in, and is served by, your profession. There is no neutrality in either your personal realm of practice or the public-legal realm of the commons. The distinction we should draw between these two realms, therefore, is not between “private Christian work,” on the one hand, and “public secular conditions,” on the other hand. Instead, the distinction we should draw is between the practice of Christian counseling, on the one hand, and a Christian contribution to the shaping of just public standards for the equitable treatment of clients and counselors who operate from different worldviews, on the other hand.

To set the stage for my argument in favor of principled pluralism, return with me for a moment to the observations of Professor Burns. Positive steps have been taken, says Burns, since the decades following World War II when psychoanalysis gained a near monopoly in the field of psychiatry. We are much better off today, he believes, with the rise of “a whole series of new psychotherapies” (p. 79) radically different from psychoanalysis. One reason to prefer greater diversity is that “the qualities of a good therapist transcend the different schools of thought” and most research “confirms the crucial importance of establishing a good therapeutic relationship” (p. 77). A monopoly is not good, in other words, in a field where the very possibility of establishing a good relationship between counselor (or doctor) and client (or patient) is affected by worldview, diagnosis, interpretation of the “whys” of behavior and not only the “whats,” and judgments about what makes for healthy persons and societies. There may be a common arena of psychological research and practices, but there is not a general agreement about what it means to be human, about what normal and abnormal behaviors are, and about how best to treat those who experience personal or social-psychological distress.

Since Christians who are engaged in these professions bring (or should bring) relevant Christian assumptions and convictions to bear in their practices, it only makes sense that they should work to develop their practices in as thoroughly Christian a manner as possible. But how can room be made for such an effort in our highly diverse society where ever-increasing worldview diversity is feared by many as the main problem to be avoided or overcome? Should not religious and other sources of difference among people in public professions be confined to private expressions so that common rational standards and practices can be established for the treatment of any and all persons and so that insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid, educators, and public officials can cooperate without constant argument, confusion, and public controversy?

**Pluralism in Support of the Public Commons**

What I mean by pluralism, I hope will become clear, is not something that would promote public disintegration or anarchy. Instead, pluralism, as I am using the term, expresses the conviction that government and semi-public organizations that are empowered to license or accredit public responsibilities must do justice to legitimate differences where they exist rather than stifle or obliterate those differences in the name of an unjust uniformity or monopoly. Most of us take for granted the separation of church and state. That means we stand in support of an American political community that establishes no religion and supports the equal treatment of all churches and church-like religious bodies. Public pluralism in this sense means
a *uniform* public legal order of freedom for *diverse* religious bodies. The law is uniform, but its universality as public law upholds religious pluralism rather than religious uniformity. Insofar as there is broad public agreement that this is a good system, then the very recognition that religious confessions and practices do not fall under the competence of government means that public unity—public commonality—is strengthened among citizens precisely because public law gives equal treatment to a diversity of non-government responsibilities. (For an extended argument for this type of pluralism, see Skillen, 1994).

This kind of pluralism, as a concomitant part of a just public commons, looks more like the way the United States deals with the military chaplaincy program than it does like the way our states and cities handle public education. In explaining this difference we will get to the heart of our chief concern today with freedom for a distinctively Christian development of psychologically related professions in the American public square.

In the armed services, the American government recognizes that military personnel are more than merely military personnel. They are also family people, often members of different religious bodies, and much more. Consequently, when service members are sequestered on bases and on the battlefield under military command, the government does not establish a government-run, one-size-fits-all religious ministry with interchangeable staff members who pray only one prayer and offer comfort in the name of only one American-friendly deity. The government does not say to service members, you can get your private religious ministrations at home, but here on the base or on the battlefield you are on public terrain and thus you have only one public-religious option. No, the government recognizes that American military personnel participate in diverse religious communities or none at all and that in order to do justice to them, it should contract with those diverse religious bodies to bring their own “ministers” to the bases and the battlefields to serve those who want to be served by them.

Notice the unique form of the resulting pluralism that does not run counter to the public common good. The faiths and ministry officials are many, but the public organization—the U.S. Department of Defense—that supports the diversity of chaplains is one. In fact, the government provides chaplains with the same uniforms, military ranks, compensation, and housing. From the military side, the chaplaincy program is a single program. Yet, that one program starts with the recognition of religious diversity and protects the integrity of the non-government responsibilities of the diverse chaplains who remain under the authority of their particular churches or religious bodies. Government does justice in and to the commons precisely by establishing pluralism within the chaplaincy program.

Consider the contrast with public education. American history, in this respect, took a different course (an extended background for this is found in Glenn, 1988; McCarthy, Skillen, and Harper, 1982; and Glenn, 2000). Education in American public life is generally, though mistakenly, seen as arising from within the governed community rather than outside it. The common school is thought of more like a department of state or local government than like an expression of *in loco parentis* or as an independent service created by educators on behalf of students. In our American experience, the public aim of making free education available to everyone led to the establishment of a government-funded school system—the common school—to educate every child. In the early nineteenth century, when this system took shape, one of the primary motives of the majority WASP communities was to keep Catholics at bay with the consequence that Catholic schools were denied equal treatment. The majority common schools were not nonreligious, but were believed to be nonsectarian. It was the Catholic sectarians who were forced to opt out of the public benefit of free schooling if they chose to educate their children in their own schools. Today, the government-run schools are still considered to be nonsectarian, but that means that every kind of independent school is considered sectarian and ineligible for public funding and equal legal treatment. How is that distinction justified today? The justification is made primarily on the basis of the government’s right to hold a public monopoly over the secular, nonsectarian terrain in contrast to the terrain of parochial, sectarian particularities. The public sector, in this view, requires secular uniformity whereas diverse educational philosophies arising from non-government organizations and worldviews must express themselves in private at their own expense even if they are performing a public service of educating American citizens.

Do you see how different these two public systems are—the military chaplaincy program, on the one hand, and the government-run common school, on the other? In each case, a public, governmental agency establishes a single system. But in the first one, social diversity is recognized and built right into the system of cooperation between government and independent religious bodies. Diverse religious groups are not considered unfit for public cooperation and public protection and benefit on an equal-treatment basis. No single faith is granted a monopoly, but neither is secular rationality, or civil-religious deism, or Americanism granted a monopoly in the chaplaincy program. By contrast, in the arena of public education, diverse faiths and worldviews are not welcomed.
on an equal-treatment basis into a pluralistic system. Instead, government hires one-worldview-fits-all instructors; and those who want to teach or have their children taught from a different point of view have to pay their own way in private. Pluralism in the case of education is freedom for diversity in private, not freedom for diversity in public.

Implications for Psychological Services
What I am proposing to you is a principled pluralism with two focal points.

The first focal point is the integrity of your approach to your profession. Insofar as many of you teach psychology in Christian colleges or work in Christian counseling centers, you may feel you have the same freedom as anyone else in our society to conduct your work without interference or limitation. If that is true, it is largely due to the American tradition of allowing considerable freedom for diversity in private. And that is a very good thing, indeed. Yet as soon as you or your institution has to meet the requirements of an accrediting agency, whether it is a semi-public professional organization or a government agency, you undoubtedly feel the pressure to comply with so-called sectarian standards that may in fact pinch or conflict with the way you would prefer to do your work. To the extent this is true, it is probably because government's approach to the funding of psychiatric care, or an accrediting agency's approach to approving licensed psychologists, is more like government's approach to licensing and funding of public educators than it is like government's approach to licensing and funding military chaplains.

In face of this challenge, it seems to me that we should be working to achieve genuine public pluralism for counseling and therapy practices and for psychological research and teaching in a system that is more like the pluralism entailed in the public chaplaincy programs. As Burns points out, and as many others recognize, there is a wide variety of approaches to counseling and therapy and different worldviews operative in such work. Why should one approach or worldview be granted a public or semi-public monopoly? A monopoly of that kind in this arena represents a governmental overreach that can only harm or stifle the human service you and others in your professions offer. To be sure, there are good reasons for public and semi-public bodies to uphold the common good, and that means exercising a responsibility that embraces every citizen. Without doubt there are common protections, common or comparable diagnostic measures, standard charges for certain treatments, and much more that legitimately fall under public jurisdiction and should bear on anyone licensed to treat patients, counsel clients, or conduct psychological research.

Think, for example, of the legitimate public-legal interest in safety and environmental standards for all automobiles. Automakers are free to produce almost any kind of car they want, in any color and design, but each car must have certain safety features, emission controls, and mileage standards. However, such public-legal requirements are, or should be, enforced in a way that does not impose inequitable treatment, resulting in an advantage or monopoly for one automaker and disadvantage or exclusion for others.

In the chaplaincy program, there is nothing wrong with the Pentagon imposing certain general expectations and requirements on all chaplains, including how to wear their uniforms, where and when to hold services, and more. But those general public requirements should not have the character of excluding or disadvantaging some religious bodies and giving a monopoly or an advantage to others. The military should not privilege Protestants over Jews or Catholics over Muslims. On the actual turf and under the auspices of the government-owned military base, chaplains of diverse faiths are supposed to have equal access to service members of their faiths. Public education, in my view, should have a similarly pluralistic character so that parents are free to choose from among a diversity of schools, including non-government, faith-based schools, without any financial or legal discrimination to their children.

In the case of your profession, you ought to be able to conduct your counseling and psychiatric practices in a thoroughly Christian manner within a public or semi-public accrediting system that provides public-legal protection and equal access for a diverse range of professional and disciplinary approaches. You should not have to stuff your practice into a private box if it is distinctively Christian any more than another professional should have to stuff her practice into a private box because it is too Freudian, or too behavioralistic, or too atheistic. Accrediting agencies and government bodies ought to take into account, as a matter of justice, the diversity of worldviews operative in the realm of psychology and psychological services precisely so that you, the professional, can offer a distinctive service to those who want it. None of the approaches should be granted a monopoly; nor should any of them be excluded from the public-legal benefits offered to others simply because its viewpoint or worldview is disliked by those who happen to be in authority.

The second focal point of my argument for pluralism has to do with the framework of accreditation and public governance of psychological counseling, treatment, and research, insofar as such services are a matter of public health, safety, and well-being. We may be inclined to think of the public realm as one where
“they” confront “me” or “us.” “We” are just trying to do our job, render our service, or keep up with research and teaching. “They” throw up hurdles, hoops, and perhaps a few legitimate guidelines to satisfy an anonymous public, or a congressional mandate, or the stipulations of a recent court case. We might even think of all that public regulation business as the normal stuff of a nonsectarian or secular society in which sectarian like us are trying to carry on our Christian work.

Yet there is another way to think about the public context in which we live and work. We, too, are equal citizens with obligations to the public trust, and we are servants of God for the common good as one part of our Christian service to neighbors. There is nothing in the U.S. Constitution and or in the Bible that says Christian faith or any other faith should be confined to private exercise and that public life should be untainted by religious worldviews. That way of thinking is the fruit of a very particular worldview that has no more claim to neutrality than any other. What is required of government, we should argue, is the upholding of justice for all, which includes not inhibiting the free exercise of religions. Included among the diverse religions of our society are those that are constituted as ways of life and not merely as ways of worship. Christians should be as concerned about public justice as we are about every other sphere of our lives because we believe that governments exist by the grace of God rather than that the Christian religion exists by the grace of governments.

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Skil len, 2004) --- for historical background, see Skillen & McCarthy, 1991, and Center for Public Justice, 2007 --- it is precisely from out of Christian faith that we ought to be contending for a political community that is constituted by equal treatment of all faiths and by the principle that government’s limits arise from its positive obligation to recognize and protect non-government responsibilities originating outside government. Let me explain briefly what I mean by these two dimensions of principled pluralism. The New Testament makes clear that God sends rain and sunshine to the just and the unjust alike and that we are supposed to be like our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:43-48). Jesus’ explanation of his parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) makes clear in a similar way that the wheat and the tares are supposed to grow up together in the same field and that Christ’s disciples bear no responsibility to separate them. That responsibility belongs to God’s angels and is saved for the end of this age. The apostle Paul admonishes believers in Rome to live at peace with everyone insofar as it is within their power to do so (Romans 12:18). If this is the biblical mandate, then one implication for public life, it seems to me, is that Christians should, as a matter of principle and not as a matter of grudging acquiescence, be working to build and uphold states or political communities (such as our republic) that provide equal treatment of all citizens without regard to their religious or irreligious confessions. This does not mean that we relinquish all concern about the faiths others hold or that we should accept all other faiths as equal in validity to biblical faith. To the contrary, it is precisely as Christians who believe in Christ as the way, the truth, and the life that we recognize that we live by his grace alone and that no one lives by our grace. As long as it is still today and until Christ comes again, we should be living in conformity to the will of the one who gives rain and sunshine to the just and unjust alike and who calls us to serve our neighbors in the way that God serves us. The kind of public justice we should be working to uphold is confessional pluralism as a matter of principled justice.

In addition to the principle of confessional pluralism we should also be ardent in support of what I refer to as “structural pluralism,” which is a simple way of saying that a political community of citizens and government under the rule of law ought to be built on the recognition that humans have a variety of non-government responsibilities, most of which are organized or institutionalized socially. Governments do not create families, or artistic talents, or scholarly communities, or entrepreneurial enterprises. Nor is it just for governments to act, as the Liberal tradition contends they should, as if only individuals exist and that all social relationships and institutions can be reduced to the contractual constructs of those individuals. Christians should be structural pluralists in affirming the independent reality of social institutions that play a role in constituting us. Such institutions cannot be reduced in their meaning and identity to either extensions of government or to individual willfulness. Otherwise, we are reduced to fighting for the freedom of our religious way of life as a private individual right, on the one hand, or we must try to fight for majority control of government so we can impose our way of life on everyone (or at least gain some advantages and privileges for it), on the other hand.

No, we should be structural pluralists in contending that marriages and families, colleges and farms, symphony orchestras and scientific laboratories, counseling practices and business enterprises have distinct characteristics and responsibilities grounded in who we are as the image of God, male and female in our generations, constituted for complex social life by the Creator of the ends of the earth. Government in a political community, consequently, ought to uphold the rights and responsibilities of various organizations and
institutions and not merely the rights of individuals. We should contend that government is not omnicompetent and has no authority, even when empowered by a majority, to break down every human institution into its supposedly individual contracting parts and then impose whatever it wants on the whole of society in the name of civil-rights protection. Insofar as structural pluralism is violated, government becomes boundless in its efforts to advance what is imagined to be individual freedom. Following that course, it will not be long before all psychologists and psychiatrists will be pushed to function in the same way according to the same standards defined by a single majoritarian worldview. The rationale will be that insofar as any such caregivers perform a service with public funding or are licensed by a public or semi-public authority, they should be treated as government or semi-public employees, with no right to bring any of their private, “sectarian” beliefs into the public square.

You and I need to recognize the strong obligation we have as citizens, and not merely as psychologists or professors, to help shape a public order of just laws that will uphold the integrity of non-government organizations and institutions to fulfill their own God-given responsibilities. And this, in conjunction with confessional pluralism, will mean working for laws that will allow Muslim, atheist, and agnostic psychologists and psychiatrists to conduct their non-government practices with the same public treatment that Christians and Jews should enjoy.

All in all, my argument for principled pluralism adds up to the admonition that we should be exercising both our citizenship and our non-government responsibilities in appropriate, publicly open, Christian ways, working to shape public laws that uphold justice for all in keeping with confessional and structural pluralism. Our religion, on biblical terms, is a way of life and not merely a way of private worship. We are called to live publicly and not merely privately as Christians. But that does not mean that the way we approach public life or institutions in which Christians and non-Christians share responsibilities is by trying to gain a monopoly or privilege for our view of life by means of public enforcement. No, we should go about the promotion of the equal treatment of diverse faiths and ways of life, including the freedom of different worldview groups to organize their own counseling centers, colleges, schools, art associations, and political think tanks. And we do this by working for public laws that uphold confessional and structural pluralism as the principled framework within which government may partner with non-government organizations to assure access to services.

There are, of course, additional aspects to public lawmakers beyond the responsibility to uphold the two-pronged principled pluralism I have just outlined. Think, for example, of the matter of institutionalization or deinstitutionalizing psychotic individuals. Or what about a public-legal judgment that any expression of moral disapproval of homosexual practice should be treated as a hate crime? What about limitations on the use of the “insanity defense” in court cases? Which abnormalities in behavior should be recognized as lifestyle choices and which as unhealthy or morally repugnant practices that should be restrained or prohibited by law? Which kinds of behaviors should be considered criminal, which not? These are just a few of the kinds of questions that we as citizens should be engaged with as part of our effort to help shape a just public order—the common good of the republic. Most decisions on these kinds of questions cannot be dealt with pluralistically; they are a matter of one or the other, this or that, up or down, one rule for all. They are like the question of whether to have military chaplains at all and whether to provide public support of schooling in the first place. These are the all-or-nothing, one-or-the-other decisions that precede the question of whether there is a pluralistic way for government to partner with non-government organizations in making sure that services such as medical care, counseling, education, and help for the poor are available.

You as professionals in the arena of psychological services, teaching, and research have some particular gifts and insights that should have an important influence in shaping what will be the all-or-nothing public laws of the land, the up-or-down rules that will govern your professions. If you do not exercise that responsibility in various individual and associational ways as part of your contribution to the Christian enrichment of citizenship, then you will, in essence, be choosing to concentrate only on your private responsibility, leaving the responsibility of shaping life in the public square in the hands of others. That, I contend, we must not do.

James W. Skillen (Ph.D., Duke, 1974) is president of the Center for Public Justice, headquartered in Annapolis, Maryland (www.cpjustice.org). His recent books include In Pursuit of Justice: Christian-democratic Explorations and A Covenant to Keep: Meditations on the Biblical Theme of Justice. His address is Center for Public Justice, 2444 Solomons Island Rd., #201, Annapolis, MD 21401. His email address is jim@cpjustice.org.

References
Center for Public Justice. (2007). Guidelines on gov-

Dialogue on Christian Psychology: Commentaries

Commentaries on James W. Skillen’s “Christian Counseling in the Public Square: Principled Pluralism for the Common Good”

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. James W. Skillen’s article on “principled pluralism” presents a unique opportunity to expand the dialogue to other communities, who should also have a voice in assessing the possibilities. The commentaries below, therefore, try not only to analyze “principled pluralism,” but also to serve as an exemplar of what it might mean. James W. Skillen reacts to these commentaries in the next article.

Principled Pluralism: Toward a Religious Revival in Psychology? One Muslim’s Perspective
Jaleel Abdul-Adil
University of Illinois at Chicago

“Irincipled Pluralism:” Toward Religious Revival in Psychology?
I was pleased to see Dr. James Skillen’s article on “principled pluralism” as a clarion call to Christian psychologists and counselors to publicly profess and promote their faith-based views. Dr. Skillen reminds Christian practitioners in particular and the field in general that the notion of pluralism implies multiple equivalent perspectives that have inexplicably excluded traditional world religions like Christianity. As a practicing orthodox Muslim, I have also been disappointed about implicit and subtle preclusive presumptions about the role of religion as a mental health resource due to “superstitious,” “backward,” “antiquated,” and “proselytizing” contentions from the field. Thus, I share Dr. Skillen’s quest to shed such anti-religious attitudes in developing pluralism within a contemporary context that includes multiple faith-based approaches, including world religions.

A key objective in developing Dr. Skillen’s principled pluralism is to revive the notion of religion in a public sphere. Advocates of faith-based approaches must challenge the field to embrace public manifestations of religion in words and deeds that extend beyond private rituals (e.g., prayer, fasting, etc.), personal diets (e.g., abstentions from certain foods and beverages), and diverse wardrobes (e.g., male and female head-coverings). Moreover, psychologists of faith must assert faith-based concepts, principles, and models of assessment and intervention to inform mainstream psychology models as well as generate new models for treatment and assessment that can help address modern mental health crises.

The Politics of Pluralism
Dr. Skillen correctly shatters any myths about utopian exchanges in reminding us that of psychologists “cannot be isolated from the common social, political, and legal contexts in which they live and work.” This point profoundly resonates with Muslim psychologists in the U.S. who were inextricably linked to the tragedy of September 11th – often as both suspected associates of the attack perpetrators as well as overwhelmed providers for the besieged Muslim community. This paucity of Muslim providers in the face of immense mental health needs was exacerbated by the number of Muslim youth and families who feared seeking desperately needed services due to perceived mistrust of, or mistreatment by, mainstream psychology institutions. Thus, a more inclusive psychology paradigm to adequately prepare providers for responsively dealing with the specific contemporary crises of Muslims and other faith-based communities is a vital need for truly pluralistic psychology.

These politics of pluralism must also address intra-cultural and inter-cultural controversies about the definition of self-identity among both clients and counselors of faith-based traditions. For example, practitioners may have differing interpretations of their shared faith that has implications for establishing and maintaining rapport, as well as developing faith-based methods of assessment and treatment. In addition, faith-based psychologists must collectively and actively address any inter-cultural conflicts, confusions, or stereotypes regarding “who” and “what” constitutes a “true” member of their faith in the eyes of the public at large (e.g., most Arabs are Muslim, but most Muslims are not Arab, etc.). Finally, these faith-based discourses must also confront the existing “orthodoxy” of psychology that defines “normality” and “abnormality” in broad brushes that sweep away critical complexities that are essential for understand-
ing diverse cultural groups.

**True Diversity: Tolerance of the Intolerant?**

While commending the aspirations of tolerance and diversity espoused by Dr. Skillen, I realize the requisite struggle to establish a truly tolerant society where “differences” are considered “equal” (or even “equivalent”). Dr. Skillen’s assertion that “different lifestyles and behavior are accepted as choices and tolerated as long as they do not infringe the next person’s liberties” is a concise yet controversial point. There are varying perceptions about key components of Dr. Skillen’s statement, including definitions and applications of “accepted,” “infringement,” and “liberties.” Unfortunately, the faith-based perspectives in psychology continue to be cast (fairly or unfairly) as fringe views associated with “fanaticism,” “intolerance,” and other discrediting labels despite national movements for greater inclusiveness. Although some people may fear that spirited faith-based debates will degenerate into “cultural crusades,” we should also avoid the insincerity of false consensus where our lurking assumptions and biases drive our daily decisions without critical open scrutiny.

Rather than shrink from the battle, faith-based psychologists should assert their views to enrich and shape the intense debates on difficult political and legal issues. For example, key controversial issues such as the death penalty, abortion, and the role of psychologists in military interrogations are difficult for any psychologists (faith-based, secular, agnostic, or even atheist). Although forthcoming faith-based contributions may be prematurely labeled as “intolerant” in the U.S. due to the bitter legacy of Church-State clashes rooted in Western culture, psychologists should share their religious-based convictions to contribute to resulting reforms and policies. Psychology in particular and society in general should be challenged to tolerate the so-called intolerant!

**Laws of the Land: Means or Ends?**

I appreciate Dr. Skillen’s emphasis on exercising his Constitutional rights and protections to develop and practice a Christian approach to psychology. Psychology curricula regarding teaching, training, research, and practicum as well as social legislation regarding licensing and accreditation should indeed expand to include support for Christianity and other faith-based approaches. For example, many Muslim and Christian adherents may share the objective of dismissing any false dichotomy between “public” versus “private” manifestations of faith, because these two world religions are considered “complete” ways of life. Thus, faith-based practitioners may be motivated to assert their views as a reflection of both their religious views and professional training that are protected legal rights.

Institutional rights, however, can be both a boon and a bane for advocates of non-mainstream views in the early phases of social change and reform. For example, Dr. Skillen correctly reminds us that commonly-accepted psychology approaches like psycho-dynamic and cognitive-behavioral models were once considered “radical” during their initial introductions to the field. The existing institutions are often initially obstacles rather than supports for novel ideas. Thus, proponents of these novel approaches had to have the character, courage, and commitment to overcome initial skepticism and procedural antagonism toward their new ideas.

Faith-based advocates must also be prepared to continue drawing on their religious inspiration to continue advocacy even after achieving initial institutional recognitions and reforms. Ironically, faith-based civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., of the Southern Christian Leadership Council was initially criticized as a “race agitator” and “criminal” by Southern society for actually following civil rights laws. Yet Dr. King has now been elevated to national hero with a commemorative federal holiday after he successfully continued his quest against initial opposition. As starkly illustrated by this civil rights era, glaring gaps can occur between initial legislation passage by institutions and actual attitudinal change by communities (e.g., the South’s slow adaptation of civil rights, the continuing discrimination against ethnic minorities and other culturally diverse groups, etc.). Consequently, reform and recognition of institutional laws can be a useful means, but not an ultimate end to promoting novel approaches like faith-based models in psychology and society.

**Cacophony and Cornucopia of Reform**

Dr. Skillen is correct in urging the multitudes of faith-based practitioners to request available institutional resources. I do, however, think some skeptics would challenge the analogies between military chaplains and public school education. Although soldiers and students are both ultimately supervised by government-appointed representatives, the distinctions between mature adults and impressionable youth with regard to their respective ability to critique and select religious messages is significant in the Western-oriented U.S. culture. Dr. Skillen will be even more helpful in his future writings if he makes direct and psychology-specific illustrations of his points.

A more relevant and accessible analogy for sectors of governmental religious pluralism that can serve as precedents for psychology actually occur in mental health. Multiple U.S. government organs (e.g., the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration,
In my work, I often reflect on the irony of needing to advocate for faith-based approaches in a profession that has historical roots in religion and spirituality. Despite being derived from religious-spiritual, humanistic, and philosophical views, “traditional” psychology in mainstream Western society often views the world religions as an anathema to progress and healthy development. Paradoxically, contemporary psychology also states goals of inclusiveness and diversity for client’s self-professed identities and lifestyles that inevitably include faith-based practices and principles. Moreover, recent government legislation has recognized and rewarded the importance of faith-based views, institutions, and communities as part of revitalizing individuals, families, and communities. Hence, contemporary psychology has a steep hill to climb to achieve its stated multicultural goals with regard to faith-based constituencies.

Religious Representation? Dr. Skillen’s military chaplain analogy begs the question whether you can truly have one “representative” of any religion for psychology. Dr. Skillen describes the military chaplaincy program where one chaplain serves multiple faith-based constituencies, and I have seen similar programs in hospitals and other government-run institutions. Yet I have also seen the limitation of attempts to distill an understanding and presentation of any religion with as much history, richness, and complexity as world religions to enable quick competency by any single practitioner (let alone any non-member).

On the other hand, I seriously doubt that government will attempt the unwieldy task of identifying and hiring representatives of each religion to serve the religious needs of each population at a mental health site. For example, just serving the particular needs of Christians and Muslims on inter-group levels (Baptists, Catholic, Methodists, Presbyterian, etc.) and intra-group levels (African-American Catholics compared to immigrant Latino Catholics, etc.) would require multiple qualified providers that would quickly exceed any budgeted funds, space allocations, and other requirements for successful implementation. Of course, establishing consensus on standards, qualifications, and other criteria would be an extremely daunting task.

Rather than these “representative” models, I would argue that Dr. Skillen’s point for incorporating instruction about faith-based practices at fundamental professional points of curricula, practica, post-doctoral practice, and continuing education would enable a cadre of newly trained religiously-sensitive providers that may ultimately produce a collective paradigm
Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology

I would urge Dr. Skillen to further clarify the ultimate goal of his article: Is he suggesting that government reform is the ultimate objective? I would disagree with an over-reliance on government, since grass-roots movements have been initially responsible for most (if not all) of the most significant societal changes in U.S. history (for example, U.S. administrations were facilitators rather than initiators of modern civil rights movement). Although it would be incredibly difficult to effect fundamental change without government’s massive legislative, financial, standardization, and enforcement resources, I would also note that government works best in synergy with active citizens who are conscious of monitoring and, when necessary, challenging current operations.

Dr. Skillen is right to remind us that government has no divine authority. Even when there is an overwhelming majority, people of conscience (whether religious or otherwise) must make sure “numerical might” never automatically and unconditionally equals “intellectual right.” The motivation and commitment to principled stands are necessary in this era of increased conformity led by government regulations, health maintenance organization (HMO) and other managed care reimbursement requirements, evidence-based treatment criteria, and other standardization pressures. This conformity is an immense obstacle to developing and disseminating new faith-based approaches, and only ardent supporters will withstand the storm of criticism.

Welcome to the Frontline? These types of faith-based stands will be made easier if/when a significant segment of religious psychologists stop bifurcating their professional identity into “secular” and “spiritual” dimensions. Of course, this public identification and advocacy of faith-based views will require wading into the torrential debates on drugs, premarital and extramarital sex, abortion, and same-sex relationships as identified religious adherents. These faith-based practitioners may then have an even tougher time discussing and defending their “unpopular” views that may contradict the prevailing majority viewpoints that are legal, widespread, and yet “immoral” to certain religions.

In today’s turbulent times, all psychologists and counselors must realize that there are (and always will be) tough discussions and decisions that will not please everyone. Faith-based practitioners and non-faith-based practitioners can both contribute their respective ideologies as “preferred models” in spirited development and debate that can ultimately produce a positive paradigm shift toward a more inclusive foundation for psychology teaching, practice, and research. Rather than be intimidated, frustrated, or disheartened by these inevitable disagreements, we should all be inspired to advocate even harder for our respective views because of the high stakes and related responsibilities to “share the word” toward universal advancement.

Jaleel Abdul-Adil, Ph.D., maintains professional and research interests in culturally-sensitive, evidence-based models of mental health for urban youth and families in university-based clinics and community-
Resisting a Separatist Position as a “Distinctively Christian Psychology”
Anna A. Berardi and Nancy S. Thurston

The co-authors of this reflection on Skillen’s article embrace the challenge to respond in a thought-provoking, yet gracious spirit. In a pleasantly surprising manner, these relational values parallel the mutual dialogue that we engaged in as we co-conducted this response. While sharing a common calling, the authors differ in some places of resonance and concern with Skillen’s work. This response reflects shared ideas, a sifting through the wheat and tares on behalf of what may be the ultimate responsibility of a Christian psychology.

As educators for graduate mental health professions in two different departments in an evangelical Quaker university, each author wrestles with these questions: What is our role in preparing Christians for a vocation within the mental health professions? How do we mentor students to become safe and effective clinicians who reflect the heart and mind of Christ? Our programs each embrace this common calling using different methodologies in compliance with licensing bodies and professional accrediting agencies that likewise support our Christian educational environment. In turn, our programs are transparent in disclosing our distinct faith orientation and our commitment to holding students accountable to the academic, professional, and clinical competencies commensurate with the practice standards of our respective professions.

A place of resonance with Skillen is an element within his call for principled pluralism. While neither author fully endorses all aspects of Skillen’s conceptual framework, both acknowledge that communities legitimately long for greater public support to organize themselves within private systems informed by values of central importance to them. Principled pluralism might rest more comfortably if we acknowledge the government’s role in promoting an agreed-upon common good and then allowing communities the choice to implement those objectives in accordance with the unique needs of those communities. For example, imagine tax dollars for education justly dispersed in either the public or private arena, provided that these settings utilize qualified teachers and hold students accountable to basic academic standards. If the private sector agrees to abide by these basic (secular) standards, the general public might be less fearful of embracing pluralism and allow greater sharing of public funds to supplement private education. Such a mutual stance would flush out private sector settings that eschew best-practice educational programs, perhaps what Skillen wishes to avoid, while promoting a more just, pluralistic, and perhaps effective distribution of public funding.

Our mutual concerns center on Skillen’s ultimate agenda: a dedication to shaping public policy to reflect distinctively Christian values due to the belief that secular social systems (e.g. mental health practice) require professional behaviors contrary to Christian faith and practice. Under the guise of endorsing pluralism, Skillen argues that Christian mental health professionals should advocate for a “distinctly Christian psychology.” Such a system would include its own separate accrediting standards and would practice guidelines sanctioned by law, granting its practice equal legitimacy alongside secular psychology.

Skillen invites many points of entry into a dialogue, whether it be an elaboration upon elements of mental health practice that he may have misrepresented, to alternative viewpoints regarding the relationship between Christians and public institutions such as the military and public education, to his use of the subjective nature of truth to fuel speculation regarding the value of the social and behavioral sciences. However, the focus here will reflect upon a key concept embedded in Skillen’s call for a “distinctively Christian psychology.” While we support retaining laws protecting the right of private institutions to train professionals within their faith communities, we disagree with the creation of a separate Christian psychology as proposed by Skillen.

On a most basic level, these authors resist a distinctively Christian psychology that may inevitably overlay more pathological interpretations of faith as antidotes to human psychological struggle. For example, “Christian counseling” has been known to overtly
push for marital reconciliation despite the psychological and physical danger to its members, to shame vulnerable persons into believing that their distress reflects inadequate faith, and to blame physiological disturbances on demon possession. Each author regularly encounters various versions of these toxic faith approaches, and has known such practices to cost many people a loss of faith, and for a few, a loss of life. The proliferation of such counseling approaches speaks to the dangers of giving an ill-informed separate “Christian psychology” legal endorsement. Likewise, it adds to the urgency for placing well-educated and trained practitioners in religious environments with the skills to bring hope and healing congruent with that community’s understanding of faith.

Concern also exists that a separate Christian psychology would avoid taking to task why the Christian professional believes that one’s practice causes a compromise of faith values. This perhaps speaks to a lack of understanding about how to be authentic and transparent, yet not prescriptive (Bergin, 1983). In addition, it also leads to questions of discernment regarding whether one’s vocation is best suited as a mental health professional, rather than as a ministerial professional in which spiritual direction and discipleship are the central organizing principles informing the relationship.

On a deeper level though, disagreement with Skllen can be illustrated by a brief explanation of three elements characterizing what a distinctly Christian psychology might entail. First is an affirmation that faith informs understanding of the social and behavioral sciences, and likewise these disciplines inform the understanding of faith. The second and third elements identify two complimentary agendas embedded within the educational process: a commitment to the spiritual formation of the student, and the examination of how faith systems can undermine and contribute to individual and community health.

In the educational environment, these authors invite students to encounter Christ, and to seek a renewing of their hearts and minds in order to live a life characterized by love and justice as a direct reflection of one’s relationship with God (Romans 12:1-2; Micah 6:8) This involves a lifelong commitment to spiritual growth. It is a tough and painful challenge for most of us, yet a journey well informed by the social and behavioral sciences. Its ultimate purpose is so our lives might be lived in service to others in a manner that is balanced, life affirming, and renewing for persons on both sides of the equation. Likewise, spiritual development within graduate mental health education is naturally in service to training knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, given the direct link between successful therapeutic outcomes and the person of the therapist (Blow, Sprenkle, & Davis, 2007).

A hallmark strength of mental health practice involves engaging in the observation of relational patterns within and between persons, families, and larger cultural systems. It means looking at recent and remote history for patterns of behavior passed down from one generation to the next, revealing, perhaps in code, hidden attitudes and beliefs that take root deep within our psyche. Taking a cue straight from scripture, we recognize that persons of faith must never assume that the sins of the past will not be repeated. So the biblical stories are told over and over, stories of how people of faith lose their way and stories of how God lovingly calls us back by a renewing of hearts and minds.

For Christian practitioners, this assessment of relational patterns must be applied to the faith communities we serve to discern how these systems support or undermine the well-being of its members and the larger community (Berardi Maher, 2006). Inevitably, this means identifying places where the human ego endorses manipulative ways of being to advance an agenda, with an exclusionary attitude viewed as God-endorsed. Volf (1996) writes extensively about the human processes at play through the generations when systems of thought and behavior intending to protect and nurture people of faith become oppressive, misguided, and hence distinctly evil. What is designed to be inviting and inclusive now becomes distorted and exclusionary.

Rohr (2003) echoes these observations as he speaks to how Christians have lost an understanding of encounter with Christ in a manner that changes the hearts and minds of both people and the institution of the church. He challenges us to examine how we have committed idolatry, creating an image of God after our own likeness. Hence, a distinctly Christian psychology may involve teaching students how to engage in this very type of critique of Christian systems and modes of thought, lest we endorse and promote the very types of attitudes and behaviors that ultimately divide communities and undermine just and caring relationships.

Skillen rightly observes that human relations appear increasingly distressed and contrary to God’s intentions. Concern for human pain and suffering is of central concern in the social and behavioral sciences. Our profession is replete with theorists who surmise that we are becoming increasingly alienated from our relational nature, unable to discern right from wrong, and responding to others from a place of entitlement and exploitation (Borszowny-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Erikson, 1964). Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) echo this theme, citing how increasingly difficult it is for many to make sense of their lives and to find a moral compass to guide decisions from a ground of meaning shared by
the broader community. Their work, along with many others, voice concern that if mental health professionals do not understand these larger cultural patterns that undermine personal and communal health, we will merely endorse and perpetuate them (Doherty, 1995; Pipher, 1996).

The disciplines that shape mental health practice invite Christian professionals to engage in a rigorous process of deconstructing the myriad of influences that disorder us from our intended nature as relational beings. This includes examining how human ego influences our understanding of the Gospel and distorts our image of God, thus increasing our likelihood of promoting a Christian worldview of our own creation. We are challenged to examine ways we are then tempted to prey upon people’s fears and good intentions to buy into our version of how a “distinctively Christian” citizen thus responds.

This challenge of helping the Christian student look for the relational patterns within culture (with one’s faith community a central focal point), while nurturing one’s relationship with self, other, and God, may be an element of a distinctly Christian psychology. Such training would allow the professional to take the knowledge and skills of one’s chosen profession and be instruments of healing within human systems fraught with relational brokenness and distortion. Thus, a Christian psychology would be able to identify how persons of faith come to think and act in ways far removed from God’s intention, yet boast as does Lamech (Genesis 4:23-24) that our hurtful behaviors are God-ordained and protected from scrutiny. Our mission is to look for these patterns within one’s self and the greater community, and respond with the love of God so we may no longer be mesmerized, but renewed.

And as biblical history teaches, Christ’s response to his faith community’s blindness was not received warmly. He taught a new way of seeing, of responding. His message was not one of exclusion, but of clearing specks from our own eyes, of embracing other, of being moved and challenged by other, of seeing face to face. Loving our neighbor and our enemy is intimate and life altering for both sides of that relationship. Yet a heart and mind informed by the love of God is so contrary to human logic and defended tendencies. Hence, Christ was judged, ostracized, and eventually killed by his own faith community for teaching and embodying love.

We accept that the life and work of Christ is our example and primary source informing a distinctive Christian psychology. However, we must look at the whole story, including how the biblical narratives continually capture the way faith communities often struggle to embrace the transformative nature of God’s message. A distinctly Christian psychology needs to be informed by the story in its entirety. We thank Skillen for reminding Christian mental health professionals of the need to be active participants in the Public Square. However, we resist his call for a separate profession for fear it may be embraced within some of the very systemic ways of being that a Christian psychology might be called to dismantle.

Anna A. Berardi, Ph. D., is Associate Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy and Director of the Trauma Response Institute, Graduate Department of Counseling, at George Fox University – Portland. Her professional interests include a specialization in traumatology, couple’s therapy, attachment issues across the lifespan, integration of faith and practice, and the supervision and training of independent mental health practitioners. She is an AAMFT-Approved Supervisor, a licensed marriage and family therapist in California, and a licensed professional counselor in Oregon. Her email address is aberardi@georgefox.edu.

Nancy S. Thurston, Psy.D., is Professor of Psychology, Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology, George Fox University – Newberg. Nancy’s professional interests include a specialization in trauma, couple’s therapy, attachment issues across the lifespan, integration of faith and practice, and the supervision and training of independent mental health practitioners. She is a licensed psychologist in Oregon and California. In addition to serving on the faculty at George Fox University, she works as a ministerial assessment specialist for the United Methodist Church. Her email address is nthurston@georgefox.edu.

References
there is no legal or principled warrant for the privi-

uniform

public legal order

Borszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Krasner, B. (1986). Between
give and take: A clinical guide to Contextual Thera-

New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel, Inc.


Principled Pluralism—But who is the Gatekeeper of the Commons?
William Hathaway
Regent University

James Skillen raises a number of important themes that have often taken a secondary role within Chris-
tian psychology and the Christian counseling literature for Christians involved in mental health professions. What should be the public face of Christian psychol-

your positions? Skillen argues that “the free-
dom and obligation you have to develop a Christian approach….should be fully protected and encouraged by the laws of the land and by various public licensing and accrediting agencies.” It is not clear exactly what form of practice Skillen would anticipate being fostered by such regulatory protections and encour-

ages. He does state that Christian mental health professions “should work to develop their practices in as thoroughly Christian manner as possible.”

Skillen’s argument stems from several claims. He points out as nearly axiomatic that the basic contours of the mental health professions are shaped by world-

view and value assumptions. Even our nosologies are not mere products of descriptive science but reflect such biases. He further contends that governments must “do justice to legitimate differences where they exist rather than stifle….those differences in the name of unjust uniformity.” He bases this latter claim on an understanding of religious liberty that is more in line with the Adamsonian model allowing for public ac-

commodations of a least some religious forms than do Jeffersonian models of religious liberty (Witte, 2003). The principle of pluralism derived from religious lib-

ty, he posits, means “a uniform public legal order of freedom for diverse religious bodies.” Accordingly, there is no legal or principled warrant for the privi-

leging of a secularity in mental health practice that excludes public expressions of religious particularities within such practice contexts.

As a general principle, I would tend to agree with Skillen. However, the situation gets much more com-

plex when we attempt to instantiate his proposal in concrete forms. Let us look back to his proffered ex-

"example of principled pluralism in action, the military chaplaincy. In contrast to the public school systems that evolved into a non-sectarian educational context with its systematic sterilization of public faith from its contexts, the military chaplaincy provides a public context for religious ministries that allegedly explicitly exemplifies particular faith traditions without secular cooption. Skillen sees the military chaplaincy as an ex-

ample for the mental health professions.

But is this the example we would want? I spent several years as an Air Force psychologist working at both Air Force and Army bases. During that time, I worked closely with a number of base chaplains and attended ministry home groups, such as Navigators or the Officers Christian Fellowship, sponsored by the local chapels. Clearly the military chapel programs are an important and vital part of the life of people of faith within the military. I also encountered numerous chaplains who inspired me with their personal faith, Biblical understanding, and ability to minister to such a diverse flock. Yet my family chose not to attend the services at the military chapels. We attended services at local Christian fellowships that were invariably present by American military bases, including those that were overseas. We did this because of a complication with the way the chaplaincy is established in the military.

It is true that military chaplains have to be or-

dained or otherwise “vetted” by their relevant faith communities. However, the military has some major categories of faith that it attempts to always have present on its bases. For instance, every base will typically have both a Protestant and Catholic service and so the chaplains will be assigned to run the respective type of faith services. There are some less relevant forms of faith (at least within America) that have chaplains in the military, such as Buddhists or Wiccans, but these are relatively rare and so organized chapel services representing these traditions would be the exception. So who decides what faith tradition contributes to a typical service? The government has made these deter-

minations, at least on occasion, and not the sponsor-

ing faith groups that vet the chaplains. At least since the 1960’s, Mormons have been allowed to enter the chaplaincy within the U.S. military. I was told by a chaplain this occurred through an executive decision made by President Johnson in response to his very pos-

itive impression of the Mormon secret service agents he had encountered. The military then decided that

Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology
its Mormon chaplains would be part of the Protestant ministry teams at the base chapels. So, when I was stationed in Germany, a Mormon chaplain would take his turn giving the sermon in the Protestant chapel service and would regularly teach Sunday school for the Protestant Sunday school program at the chapel. But here is the amazing follow-up: faithful Mormon military members would not attend his services because non-Mormon chaplains may be teaching. They were expected to fellowship and worship at a local Mormon ward that met off base!

The evangelical chaplains I knew in the military were not happy about this arrangement, but they were required to submit to it by their chain of command. The situation is even more troubling when one realizes that there is nothing exactly like a “chaplain/pastor” role in Mormonism. So Mormons adapted themselves to this role in order to take advantage of the government made opportunity for evangelism and inclusion into a Christian protestant ministry context. Now, I personally had no objections to Mormons being allowed into the military chaplaincy, but just as they understood that their attending Protestant ministry contexts involved a compromise of their faith identity for their own adherents, I did not believe that the government should have forced Protestant ministers to accommodate them into the Protestant services. Yet I suspect that these sorts of problems are inevitable if governmental bodies are charged with “encouraging” religious particularities in its public venues.

I agree that there should be no sterilization of practice contexts in the mental health professions that precludes religiously explicit forms of professional practice a priori. The challenge, however, is that such professions operate in a publicly granted and regulated fiduciary space. When professionals voluntarily seek licensure, they are agreeing to be regulated by the judgment of peer professionals and the public. It is unlikely that licensing boards could be so constituted that every professional could be reviewed or evaluated, if necessary, by a board made of people of “similar” faith, whatever that might mean. Licensing boards typically have only a handful of members who are all political appointees. So, it would not even be tenable to have several representatives of the most prevalent faith traditions as targeted representatives on the boards. This means that every professional must practice with the realization that they may have to justify their work to a general professional audience.

Ideally, our professions will gain sufficient multicultural sophistication to recognize that professional practice does not mean secular practice. On the other hand, it is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future that licensed Christian practitioners will need to be prepared to give an account justifying their practice habits to professional peers that may not share their faith perspectives. I have argued elsewhere that this raises the issue of role integration that I believe is also at the heart of Skillen’s thoughtful piece (Hathaway, 2009).

William L. Hathaway, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology, in the Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology and Acting Dean of the School of Psychology of Counseling at Regent University. He is also an adjunct professor of philosophy and religion at Old Dominion University and Saint Leo University. His clinical and scholarly interests have focused on the clinical psychology of religion, integration of Christianity and psychology, and philosophy of religion. He is a licensed clinical psychologist in Virginia, where he has served on the State Board of Psychology. He is currently past president of the Psychology of Religion Division 36 of the American Psychological Association. His email address is willhat@regent.edu

References

Realizing Values in a Complex World: Caring for the Other
Bert H. Hodges
Gordon College

During a sabbatical in England a number of years ago, a respected colleague and I were discussing our opinions about our various colleagues in the department. We quickly agreed on those we considered the most impressive scholars and researchers. After a while our attention turned to a young assistant professor in the department that we both considered quite promising. My colleague murmured several appreciative comments, then made the following surprising statement: “I wish he would take his faith more seriously when he’s doing his psychology. It would make it so much better.” Two surprises here, perhaps, for some readers: The first is that the young professor of whom we spoke was a very serious, very conservative, practicing Roman Catholic. The second is that my friend who made the statement was himself an atheist/agnostic.

My friend, who is a first-rate thinker, recognized that taking one’s faith seriously in all dimensions of one’s life was not an impediment to good scholarship,
but an invaluable resource. Christians are not the only ones who appreciate faith-learning integration, as it is so often called. But often enough people do have doubts, even Christians. Many of my students worry that if they are too serious about their faith, it will undermine their ability to function well as scientists or practitioners of psychology. In particular they seem to doubt the truth of descriptions (or prescriptions) offered by Christians that are not shared by everyone. Their tendency is to look for some more neutral description of the domain or some common set of practices that can be widely shared. Jim Skillen, a former colleague of mine (potential conflict of interest revealed), would have them rethink their qualms about working out their faith in their psychology. He would also like to encourage and challenge those of us who are a bit older as well. He agrees with my atheist friend that faith expressed in scholarship and service is a public good, one that can be of benefit to others with different views and practices.

In the target article Skillen addresses the political conceptualization of how we form associations and gain access to public goods and domains in ways that allow us all, whatever our religious convictions or practices, to participate as fully and freely as possible in the society. He argues for a principled pluralism; that is, he argues for pluralism because it is the right thing to do (for others and ourselves), not because it will provide prudential protection for our own (at risk) views or increase the probability of our being pragmatically successful. It may well be that such a pluralism provides the best chance for our own flourishing, but his argument wants its basis to be principled, not only pragmatic. The pluralism he argues for seems to be an outgrowth of a Christian view and practice of justice and freedom: He calls on psychologists who are Christians to work to develop protections and encouragements for a diverse array of approaches to various forms of practice (e.g., research, therapy, teaching, consulting). Negatively, he suggests that monopolies are not good. The examples that he works out are those of military chaplains (protests and encourages diversity) and public education (protects and encourages uniformity). As he notes, the irony for Protestant Christians is the extent to which our forebears tried to maintain a monopoly on education, which led to the secularizing reaction that Skillen thinks is less just and free than it could be. He suggests that the chaplaincy program provides a better model to emulate.

As I hope my description of Skillen’s project has made clear so far, I am in deep sympathy with his concerns. But I have several questions. First, are the chaplaincy and education models parallel? So far as I know, chaplains never have to work as an integrated unit with a common purpose, as is the case for clini-
directions, toward greater justice, greater clarity, greater truthfulness, and greater peace. In light of this theoretical perspective, perhaps the most interesting part of Skillen’s call to action is that psychologists should encourage and defend the values of diversity and freedom in the present political context, which so often stresses uniformity and control.

My third and final question comes from an appreciative observation. As a social psychologist, I applaud Skillen’s recognition—so often missed by social psychologists themselves—that we are social-cultural-institutional creatures and creators. We must move beyond individualism, consumerism, and all other reductions of human life that flatten and distort our ability to work together for common goods. I like very much his point that we should focus not only on differences among different faith traditions, but also on what is similar. As indicated earlier, I believe our similarity lies in the fact that we all answer to values; in fact, I think we are all motivated to realize values. Values are not personal or social preferences, attitudes, or even needs. Neither are they biological biases or properties of individuated objects and events. Rather they are the longing of the whole cosmos for shalom, righteousness, love, and justice. All of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, whether we are scientists, practitioners, teachers, consultants or something else, participate in this longing for goodness to flourish. Shamefully, though, all of us also try to short circuit the demands placed on us. The question is whether we will be faithful to God’s call to do what needs to be done to move toward these values. By virtue of God’s grace, Christians have realized that they can act out of gratitude and in hope, and with the deep confidence and humility they provide, to be values-realizing agents. The acid test, I suspect is whether, as Christians, we can take our eyes off our own wants and rights, and look first for the wants and rights of others, even those with whom we differ deeply, knowing that God has called them too, to care for the earth and his image-bearers. So my final question is this: Can we bring ourselves to worry less about having our own (Christian) voices heard, and give ourselves to caring more creatively and compassionately about giving voice to other communities and perspectives that deserve to be in the conversation, and from which we could learn?

**Bert H. Hodges** received his Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Vanderbilt University and is Professor of Psychology, Gordon College, Wenham, MA 01984. He has been a Visiting Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the University of Southampton. His research is mostly focused on developing and applying an ecological account of values in perception-action studies, social psychology, and language studies, and has received support from the National Science Foundation. Email: bert.hodges@gordon.edu.

### References


### A Response to James Skillen: A Call for a Biblical Psychology

Kalman J. Kaplan
University of Illinois in Chicago College of Medicine

Let me begin by stating how honored I am to be asked to write this brief essay in response to James Skillen's excellent article, “Christian Counseling in the Public Square: Principled Pluralism for the Common Good.” Let me also state that I write this as a Biblical Jew and not as a Christian, which will perhaps enable me to take a far more radical Biblical stance than Dr. Skillen has taken. And perhaps, it will give a different lens through which to view this problem.

Dr. Skillen issues an eloquent plea for equal treatment for Christian psychologists-counselors (and indeed psychologists/counselors of all faiths) with secular psychologists/ counselors. I have no disagreement with Dr. Skillen and endorse strongly what he advocates: side by side religious and secular psychologies, with equal treatment under the law.

However, I would go much further than this and urge the active confrontation of religious and secular values and outlooks within the field of psychology/counseling. To do this, however, I would focus on what I think is the key issue in modern mental health: the confrontation between the worldviews of Athens and Jerusalem. This is an argument with old roots in Jewish and Christian thinking and also in some modern philosophical thinking as well (cf. Arnold, 1932; Boman, 1960; Barrett, 1962; Shestov, 1966; Snell, 1982). To do justice to this approach, however, I would suggest strongly, that the Biblical view emerg-
ing from Jerusalem be de-situated from its theological context and taken into the realm of psychology. This would involve viewing Biblical master stories as psychiatric case studies and comparing these Biblical master stories (common to Jews and Christians and the general public alike) with those emanating from Greek mythology.

Fifty years ago, Dr. Eric Wellisch, medical director of Grayford Child Guidance Clinic in England, bravely called for a Biblical psychology, arguing that: the very word “psyche” is Greek. The central psychoanalytic concept of the formation of character and neurosis is shaped after the Greek Oedipus myth. It is undoubtedly true that the Greek thinkers possessed an understanding of the human mind which, in some respects, is unsurpassed to the present day, and that the trilogy of Sophocles still presents us with the most challenging problems. But stirring as these problems are, they were not solved in the tragedy of Oedipus. In ancient Greek philosophy, only a heroic fight for the solution but no real solution is possible. Ancient Greek philosophy has not the vision of salvation.

No positive use has been made, so far, of the leading ideas of Biblical belief in the attempts of modern psychology to formulate basic findings and theories. But there is no reason why the Bible should not prove at least if not more fruitful than the concepts of Greek or Eastern religious experience... Psychology and theology are at the crossroads. The atheistic and pantheistic aspects of modern psychology lead to dangerous conclusions. The non-biological aspect of theology is doomed to lead to frustration...There is need for a Biblical psychology. (Wellisch, 1954, p.115)

In other words, Wellisch is arguing that so-called secular psychology is not secular at all, but is in reality based on a classical Greek mythic-religious system of thought, one which is much more tragic and hopeless than that emanating from the Biblical world. The head of the Greek pantheon, Zeus, is as much a deity as is the Biblical God (Yahweh, HaShem), but one which provides insecure rather than secure parenting. Wellisch is putting his finger on a profound paradox. How can a psychology based on a tragic world vision assuming that people cannot change, possibly expect people to change?

This small essay builds on Wellisch’s clarion call and proposes a Biblical reformulation of mental health with regard to the following ten topics: 1) God, nature and creation, 2) man and woman, 3) obedience versus disobedience, 4) fathers and sons, 5) mothers and daughters, 6) sibling rivalry and its resolution, 7) self and other: cycle versus development, 8) body and soul, 9) freedom, life and suicide, and finally 10) a tragic versus hopeful outlook on life. I am specifically developing a program in this regard on religion, spirituality and mental health. It is housed at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, and is funded by the John Templeton Foundation (see www.rshm.org).

Given my space limitations, I summarize our program as follows.

**Overview of God (gods), nature and creation**

Nature precedes the gods in the Greek version, but God precedes nature in the Biblical account. The differences in the respective orderings are not just chronological, but logical and psychological as well. The biblical creation stories do not subordinate man to nature as in the Greek accounts, nor do they focus on an oedipal conflict between father and son or antagonism between man and woman.

**Self and other; Cycle versus development**

Greek thought seems to see self and other as fundamentally opposed, while Biblical thought sees them as working in harmony. The legend of Narcissus is prototypical. Narcissus is totally self-involved, and idealizes his own face in the brook, not realizing that it represents his own reflection. A psychotic juxtaposition rips Narcissus apart, and he commits suicide. In the Biblical story, God calls on Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh of their wickedness. However, Jonah does not want to go and runs away. Ultimately, Jonah learns the message of teshuvah, repentance or return and divine mercy, and that he can reach out to another without losing himself.

Greek thought seems to see life as a cycle while Biblical thought sees genuine linear development. Initially Narcissus is totally self-involved. He then cycles to the opposite extreme, falling hopelessly in love with his own reflection. Ultimately, Narcissus recognizes the face in the brook is his own and commits suicide. Jonah does not cycle but is protected in his regression to overcome the dualism between self and other. He runs away in confusion. The story could thus end in Jonah’s suicide, but it doesn’t - God intervenes as a protective parent, until Jonah overcomes his confusion and shows healthy development. This same pattern repeats itself. God again intervenes, this time engaging Jonah in a mature dialogue to teach him the message of teshuvah and divine mercy.

**Man and woman**

The difference between the Greek and Biblical accounts of the first woman can be seen through com-
paring the story of Prometheus and Pandora with that of Adam and Eve. Pandora is described as a curse to man in retaliation for Prometheus stealing fire for man. Eve is described as a blessing to man and as a helpmeet opposite (ezer kenegdo).

**Obedience and disobedience**
The question of obedience versus disobedience then depends who one's god is. If it is Zeus, one should and indeed must rebel; if it is the Biblical God in contrast, perhaps one should obey. In Greek mythology, Zeus cannot be trusted. Prometheus must rebel against him to help human beings. In the Creation narratives, Prometheus steals fire for man, who is then punished by Zeus with the woman Pandora. In Biblical thinking, in contrast, God can be trusted and indeed must be trusted. According to Jewish Midrash, He has willingly provided Adam the tools to invent fire. Thus the serpent's equation of disobedience with freedom is erroneous. In the Greek flood narrative, Prometheus must steal the blueprint of the ark for man from the withholding Zeus. In the Biblical flood narrative, in contrast, God has willingly given the blueprint of the ark to the obedient Noah, described as “one who walks with God.”

**Fathers and sons**
The biblical story of the Akedah - Abraham's binding of Isaac – provides an alternative to the Greek legend of Oedipus to understand the relationship between fathers and sons. The Akedah narrative suggests an unambivalent resolution of the father-son relationship that is based on a covenant of love and shared purpose between father and son rather than a compromise between the parental wish to possess the child completely or even to kill him and the desire not to do so.

**Mothers and daughters**
The Biblical story of Ruth - provides an alternative to the Greek legend of Electra to understand the relationship between mothers and daughters. The Ruth narrative suggests an unambivalent resolution of the mother-daughter relationship that is based on a covenant of love and shared purpose between mother and daughter rather than a compromise based on threats of abandonment and enmeshment.

**Sibling rivalry and its resolution**
The Hebrew Bible offers a plan to resolve family conflict by employing the father's blessing. Originally the source of the sibling conflict, the blessing may work to achieve some level of reconciliation between his sons, as in Jacob's blessings to all his sons. Greek literature offers no such balm; never developing the idea that a father should bless his children. The result is that conflict in the families grew more angry and nasty in each succeeding generation until the families self-destruct, as did the family of Oedipus.

**Body and soul**
Plato sees the relationship between body (soma) and soul (psyche) as conflicted and unfortunate. The soul is compelled to view reality not directly, but only through the prison bars of the body. Biblical thought, in comparison, views the human body and soul as both sacred (both referred to as nefesh), both created by God. They can and must function in harmony to fulfill God's purpose in the world.

**Freedom, life and suicide**
To the Greeks, freedom is a struggle against the control of others, and suicide is an effort to establish some sense of control over one's own life. For the stoics of Greece and Rome, suicide represents a high form of creativity. Further, almost twenty suicides abound in the surviving 17 tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. Biblical thought, in contrast, sees freedom as a central feature of its foundation narratives. Freedom can be achieved only in the acceptance of the realities of man's relationship with God. In Biblical thought, life itself is the essence of creativity, and suicide only destroys this opportunity. There are comparatively few stories of suicide in the Old and New Testaments (seven in all) and many stories of suicide-prevention.

**A tragic versus hopeful outlook on life**
The Classical Greek view is deterministic and the essence of the tragic vision of man; the Biblical view is intrinsically open to the possibility of change and transformation and lies beneath the idea of genuine psychotherapy. The Greek view of tragedy is contrasted with the Biblical views of hope essential to therapy in three critical contrasts: the ability to overcome a dysfunctional family, the efficacy of prayer, and resiliency with regard to misfortune.

**Conclusion**
This essay, then, takes a more radical stance that that proposed by James Skillen. We argue that there is no neutral ground here, and we have attempted to point to the dependence of modern psychology and psychiatry on Greek thought, and have offered ten imperatives, indeed commandments, for a Biblical Psychology. 1) Belief in God frees man from enslavement by nature. 2) Regression in the service of development can overcome the oppositional view of self and other. 3) Woman is not an impediment but a partner to man. 4) Depending on the authority figure, obedience can be more freeing than disobedience. 5) The father is a support rather than a block to his son's development.
6) The mother is a support rather than a block to her daughter’s development. 7) Parental blessing and a sense of purpose can overcome sibling rivalry. 8) The body is not the prison of the soul but is integrated with it. 9) Freedom can be found in life and not in suicide and death. 10) Life is not tragic but hopeful, and people can and do change.

The radical conception that God created nature and is thus able to change what seems to be immutable natural laws is incompatible with that much more deterministic view that nature creates the gods and in fact governs them. Freud correctly understood that the latter deterministic alternative was innately tied to an oedipal conflict. “Earth and Sky foretold that Cronus would lose his rule to his own son” (Apollodorus, 1.1). Freud had no ultimate faith in the transformative powers of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and thus was not able to use Biblical master stories as a basis for psychoanalysis. “Like Sisyphus pushing his rock, Oedipus and Laius must contend forever. At one point in the cycle the father must be slain by the son, at another, that of the return of the repressed, the father returns, the return is only illusion, for the cycle will begin again” (Yerushalmi, 1991, p. 95). That ever-repeating cycle represents Freud’s tragic and ultimately Greek understanding of the psychological processes intrinsic to a deterministic universe.

May contemporary psychology recover an understanding of the Biblical message of freedom necessary to overcome the deterministic and tragic view in the classical Greek world view and in the oedipal configuration (Kaplan, Schwartz & Markus-Kaplan 1984; Kaplan & Schwartz, 2008). This should be done in a non-theological way. The Biblical foundation stories shine in comparison with Greek foundation stories. If we offer them as alternative master stories, it seems to me that we avoid the conundrum of “separation of synagogue/church and state” (also see Kaplan & Schwartz, 2006/2008; Schwartz & Kaplan, 2004, 2007). Then truly, the words of the prophet Malachi will ring out:

And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,  
And the heart of the children to their fathers...

What could be better than that?

Kalman J. Kaplan, Ph.D., is Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois in Chicago College of Medicine. He also serves as Director of a new Online Program in Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation where he is developing a Biblical Approach to Mental Health (see www.rsmh.org). He received a B.A. in Mathematics from Northwestern University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Psychology at The University of Illinois, Urbana. Dr. Kaplan adds, “I am the proud father of Daniel Kaplan and proud father-in-law of Reva Nelson, and have two wonderful grandsons named Levi and Isaiah.” His email address is KalKap@aol.com.

References

The Need for Ecumenical, Denominational and Empirically-Supported Christian Psychotherapy Approaches in Public Settings
P. Scott Richards  
Brigham Young University

James Skillen has written an important and broad-ranging article about the place of Christian counseling in public settings. I will focus my brief comments on what I regard as some of the implications of the fol-
lowing statement:

You ought to be able to conduct your counseling and psychiatric practices in a thoroughly Christian manner within a public or semi-public accrediting system that provides public-legal protection and equal access for a diverse range of professional and disciplinary approaches. You should not have to stuff your practice into a private box if it is distinctively Christian any more than another professional should have to stuff her practice into a private box because it is too Freudian, or too behavioristic, or too atheistic.

I agree with Skillen that Christian psychologists have the right to practice a distinctively Christian psychotherapy approach in public settings—as long as they do so in an ecumenically and multiculturally sensitive manner. In most public settings, psychotherapists will encounter clients from a diversity of religious, racial, cultural, and lifestyle backgrounds. There is widespread professional agreement, including ethical guidelines to this effect, concerning the importance of respecting clients’ values and working within their belief systems (APA, 2002; Tjeltveit, 1999). In my view, therefore, Christian psychotherapists not only need to understand how to apply their Christian approach in an explicit or denominationally specific manner with Christian clients who share their beliefs, they also need to be capable of practicing in an implicit or ecumenically sensitive manner with clients from diverse Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, and non-religious traditions (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Tan, 1996). An ecumenical approach can be helpful during the early stages of therapy with all clients and over the entire course of therapy with clients whose beliefs differ appreciably from the therapist’s (Richards & Bergin, 2005).

The foundations of an ecumenical therapy approach are attitudes and skills that are required of all effective multicultural counselors and psychotherapists (e.g., Sue & Sue, 1990), but an ecumenical approach goes beyond multicultural approaches in its emphasis on specific attitudes and skills required for working sensitively with the religious and spiritual dimensions of clients lives. As Allen Bergin and I wrote elsewhere: Therapists with good ecumenical skills: (1) are aware of their own religious heritage and values and are sensitive to how they could impact their work with clients from different spiritual traditions; (2) are capable of communicating understanding and respect to clients who have spiritual beliefs that are different from their own; (3) understand how their own spiritual beliefs could bias their clinical judgment; (4) are sensitive to circumstances (e.g., value conflicts) that could dictate referral of a religious client to a therapist with more religious expertise; (5) seek knowledge about their clients’ religious beliefs and traditions; (6) avoid making assumptions about clients based on religious affiliation alone but seek to understand each client’s unique spiritual worldview and beliefs; (7) understand how to sensitively handle value and belief conflicts that arise during therapy; (8) make efforts to establish respectful and trusting relationships with professionals and leaders in their clients’ religious communities; (9) seek to understand the spiritual resources in their clients lives and encourage their clients to draw upon these resources in their efforts to cope, heal, and change; and (10) use religious and spiritual interventions that are in harmony with their clients spiritual beliefs when it appears such interventions could be helpful to their clients (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 157).

Psychotherapists can develop such skills by engaging in activities that help increase their understanding of and empathy for a diversity of religious and spiritual traditions; for example, reading books and taking classes about the world religions, attending religious services of various religious traditions, becoming familiar with the sacred writings of the various world religions, and attending workshops about different spiritually-oriented psychotherapy approaches.

Having emphasized the importance of applying Christian psychotherapy approaches in public settings in a multicultural and an ecumenical manner, I would like to close by once again affirming my agreement with Skillen’s view that there is a need for distinctively Christian psychotherapy approaches in the public domain. According to demographic statistics, there are approximately 260 million Christians in North America, which is close to 85% of the population (Barrett & Johnson, 2002). This is not, of course, to suggest a uniformity of belief among Christians because there are numerous divisions within Christianity. Nevertheless, psychotherapists in public settings are much more likely to encounter a client from some Christian denomination or sub-tradition than they are clients from any other religious or non-religious tradition. The values and beliefs of Christian clients typically conflict in major ways with those assumed by most mainstream secular psychotherapy traditions, which are grounded in the naturalistic-atheistic worldview (Bergin, 1980). Christian psychotherapy approaches can provide a more culturally sensitive treatment framework for Christian clients, particularly for those who are devout.
The relatively small amount of outcome research to date on Christian approaches suggests that they are as effective, and sometimes more effective, than secular ones (McCullough, 1999; Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007; Worthington & Sandage, 2001). Although this is encouraging, the number of well-designed outcome studies in this domain remains embarrassingly small. In order to achieve the kind of equality and influence for Christian psychotherapy approaches that Skillen envisions, I believe that a greater number of rigorously designed empirical outcome studies must be done in this domain. As the practices and claims of Christian psychotherapists are submitted to such scrutiny, I believe that their credibility, acceptance, and distinctive influence within public settings and within the mainstream psychotherapy profession will continue to increase.

P. Scott Richards is a Professor of Counseling Psychology at Brigham Young University. He received his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology in 1988 from the University of Minnesota. He is the senior, co-author of the book, A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy, which was published in 1997 and in 2005 (2nd ed.) by the American Psychological Association (APA). Dr. Richards has published journal articles on the topics of religion and mental health, spiritual issues in psychotherapy, and spirituality and eating disorders. During the 2008-2009 academic year, thanks to funding from the John Templeton Foundation, he enjoyed serving as a visiting senior scholar for the HealthCare Chaplaincy in New York City. He can be contacted at scott_richards@byu.edu or 801-422-4868.

References

Political Realities Underlying Skillen’s Principled Pluralism
James M. Siwy
Richmont Graduate University

James Skillen eloquently presents a reasonable argument for pluralism in the standards and regulations of professional organizations related to counseling and the study of psychology. He apparently wants to pave the way for “a distinctively Christian development of psychologically related professions in the American public square.” Thus, he is saying that if we are going to take the trouble to propose and elaborate a “Christian psychology,” let us make sure that there will be freedom to implement it in American society.

What objection could there be to such a proposal? In presenting his argument, Skillen seems to imply that someone would be against the idea. Such an opponent can be imagined, but does s/he actually exist? What would enhance this abstract essay would be concrete examples of specific issues that necessitated it. Are there factions within professional organizations, e.g. the American Psychological Association (APA), who wish to bar any counseling or psychotherapy that is explicitly Christian or based on any other particular faith? Surely, within the context of contemporary “culture wars” there are individuals or even groups that are seeking to silence or marginalize a Christian voice in the mental health professions. There are always “hot topics” that bring such politics to the surface. It would be helpful to identify them.

Skillen touches on potential controversial issues at the end of his paper, but does not develop them. For example, what if a Christian counselor disapproved of homosexual practice? Should such an opinion be declared, as if required as part of an informed consent to treatment? Or would such a biblically based attitude be contrary to established professional ethics and thereby be disallowed and, by extension, such a counselor be sanctioned or have a license revoked?
Would the counselor be protected in Skillen's pluralistic system? Would some rules or values trump others is such a system? For example, in light of the trend toward “evidence based” therapies, would a “distinctively Christian” approach be allowed only if its effectiveness were supported by the “data?” Or could an evaluating/licensing body require specific training for any given approach, such that Christian counseling would be acceptable if the practitioner could demonstrate proper training credentials in Christian counseling? Consider how this might intrude upon a counseling session. For example, if I were to pray with a patient, must I be able to cite research that shows the efficacy of prayer in psychotherapy? Or must I have credentials demonstrating competence in the use of prayer in therapy? These questions may seem farfetched, but do they represent the potential circumstances that motivated Skillen to offer his proposal?

One would hope that freedom of religion would prevent such regulations. Also, the notion that every therapeutic technique should require empirical support would seem beyond the intent of even the most zealous advocates of evidence based therapies. However, I know of at least two former psychologists who have resigned from their licensed status so that they could practice counseling without the constraints of APA oversight undergirded by the secular government. Perhaps Skillen is arguing for a system that would spare such conscientious believers from feeling compelled to take that route.

I respect the choices that those ex-psychologists have made. However, I personally feel called to remain within the profession, as part of God’s “divine conspiracy” (Willard, 1998) to bring His kingdom into this professional realm. I sense the author's support of my career choice. The value of being a licensed psychologist as a Christian works both ways. That is, I have learned an enormous amount of knowledge and skills from secular colleagues. In return, I hope that I have been an effective influence and witness as a believer. An inevitable price to pay has been rejection and distrust from people on both sides, nonbelievers and Christians. Skillen's proposal would serve to protect me and fellow Christian professionals from the vindictiveness of a minority of secular colleagues who might make efforts to obstruct our participation in the profession.

Skillen's comparison of the chaplaincy program and public education is informative. To what extent are the chaplains regulated? Are they allowed to evangelize? If not, is this not a significant restriction of their Christian calling? In a pluralistic counseling system, would therapists be permitted to evangelize? This is an important issue, recently highlighted by Williams’ (2008) strong critique of Christian counselors not being sufficiently “missional.”

It is clear that the chaplaincy program is unusual in its encouragement and funding by government. One can imagine secularists reading Skillen's paper and saying, “He has alerted us to a major breech in the wall between church and state. We must scrap the chaplaincy program or, at the least, homogenize it as we have so vigilantly done to public schools.” Subsequent rules might ensue such that prayer with a soldier would be permitted only if its object would not be specified beyond “to whom it may concern!” At best, the policy might become “don’t ask, don’t tell,” thus allowing an underground of religious activity.

One comment that Skillen made about the scope of freedom in the private sector in the context of government regulation may have to be revised by recent events. He noted that automobile makers have the freedom to produce any kind of car they want within certain standards. Many would call that a pre-2009 remark.

In general, my comments are meant as inquiries into the concrete political realities of Skillen's proposal. I agree with what he has to say. He is eloquent in liberating religious faith and life from the ghetto of private activity alone. He exhorts us: Christians should be as concerned about public justice as we are about every other sphere of our lives because we believe that governments exist by the grace of God rather than that the Christian religion exists by the grace of governments.

I would go further to say that counseling and psychotherapy are exquisite activities that deserve vigilant protection in a society that increasingly intrudes on the freedom and privacy of the individual. There have to be places where we can confide with a person of our choosing without the fear that anyone or any governing body will interfere. The opportunity to have such sacred personal encounters is increasingly eroded by interests seeking greater control, often in the name of security or public welfare. Skillen's proposal lands on the side of preserving safe places where people can freely meet one another, regardless of personal beliefs. He is to be commended for his efforts.

James M. Siwy is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Roswell, GA. He obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of Florida. He earned an A.B. in psychology and social relations at Harvard College. He serves as adjunct faculty at Richmont Graduate University in Atlanta, GA. His work encompasses soul care and psychological assessment of adults and adolescents, with specializations in individual and group psychotherapies, personality assessment, and mood disorders. His address is 390 North Pond Trail,
Confessional and Structural Pluralism for Christian Psychology Majors: A Response to James Skillen
Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen
Eastern University

In the interests of full disclosure, I should begin by saying that I serve on the board of the Center for Public Justice, of which James Skillen is the founding and immediate past president. So, as a neo-Calvinist with similar theological and political sympathies, I am in substantial agreement both with his general framework and its applications to Christian counseling. In terms of general framework, I agree with Skillen, first, that the Enlightenment myth of neutral, fact-based rationality is just that -- in his words, that "there is no neutrality in either [the] personal realm of practice or in the public-legal realm of the commons." As Saint Augustine famously reminded us, all human beings are created with a yearning for transcendence, and G.K Chesterton observed many centuries later that when a man does not believe in God, he does not as a result believe in nothing; he believes in anything. Hence the artificial split between objective "facts" and subjective "values" -- and the related assumption that "secular" scientists and practitioners are by definition professionally superior to faith-clinging theists -- just will not wash. There are no completely un-theorized facts in science or social science, just as there is no such thing as completely non-directive psychotherapy.

However, both Skillen and I would reject the opposite, postmodern conclusion that this necessarily leads to mutually-unintelligible communities of discourse --Christian, Buddhist, atheist, Muslim, etc.-- who can do nothing more than compete for hegemony through the practice of interest-group politics. Although Skillen does not develop this point in his essay (see Skillen, 1990 for an in-depth treatment of same), we are all aware that there are some who do argue for "Christian political hegemony" in America, with all that this implies for exclusively "Christian" standards in education, government, science, art, and the professions. Leaving aside the question of who would decide what counts as "Christian" in each of these spheres, including psychological theory and practice (a point to which I will return later), I note, secondly, my agreement with Skillen's alternative vision -- that of structural and confessional pluralism.

Structural pluralism works on the assumption that it is the task of government to see that justice is done (certainly) to individuals -- but at the same time to the various human "spheres" (or activities, or social institutions) that are built into creation -- including families, religious institutions, markets and professions, as well as scientific and artistic endeavors. The idea here is twofold: first, that these "civil institutions" (as they are often called today) have rights and responsibilities that are more than just the sum of the transient whims of the individuals populating them -- or, alternately, of interest groups lobbying for or against them -- and second, that no one sphere should be allowed to dictate or override the rights and responsibilities of any other. Thus, for example, there are limits on the degree to which "market principles" should dictate the shape of education (or therapy), on the degree to which governments (or the church) can tell scientists (or army chaplains) how to do their jobs, or the degree to which family ties (or money) should influence politics -- and so on.

Confessional pluralism works on the assumption that (as the undergraduates in my own university have learned to put it), "Justice does not mean 'just us.'" Skillen has done a good job of reminding readers of the biblical basis for this public justice ideal -- including the parable of the wheat and the tares, and his statement that "it is precisely as Christians who believe in Christ as the way, the truth and the life that we recognize that we live by his grace alone and that no one lives by our grace. As long as it is still today and until Christ comes again, we should be living in conformity to the will of the one who give rains and sunshine to the just and unjust alike and who calls us to serve our neighbors in the way that God serves us." What this means in practice is that Christian therapists, educators, artists, social service agencies, etc. should be free to do their work within an overtly confessional framework, as long as they have met the professional and legal standards (which themselves are at times needful of change) that apply to their spheres of activity -- but that persons working within other worldviews should have equal protection to do the same. "Christian reconstructionists" to the contrary, it is not the task of Christians to re-establish a theocracy in America or anywhere else -- let alone one which re-appropriates (for example) the civil and ritual laws of the Old Testament!

Skillen has also done a good job of arguing that American government (whether federal, state, or local) has an inconsistent record of supporting confessional pluralism. Why, for example, should the Armed Forces...
Forces chaplaincy model (in which equal funding is given to chaplains of different confessions under a common umbrella of military standards) not become the model for education? If other Western nations can give public funding to well-qualified schools of different confessional stripes without turning into monolithic theocracies or obscurantist anti-science lobbies, why cannot we? As it stands, Christian colleges and universities in the U.S.A. are free to operate confessionally, as long as they meet the standards of their regional accrediting agencies -- but they must do so pretty much completely by raising their money privately. Granted, there are religious people in America of all stripes who do not want more government funding for their schools. They rightly suspect that local, state, and federal governments don't always respect structural pluralism either, and that the government who pays the piper will call the educational tune, ending up by diluting the very confessional basis on which the school or university was originally built.

The question of government funding for confessional schools and other agencies is thus a controversial one, both for the religious and the (so-called) irreligious among us. But I will set that issue aside for wiser heads to deal with. I want instead to point out that Christian colleges and universities who deal primarily with regional accrediting agencies in the U.S.A. are actually encouraged to clarify and enact their confessional missions, while also being mandated to adhere to the intellectual standards and best practices of disciplines and professions that they teach. In the past decade or so, this has meant not only that my own institution has clarified its overall mission as a Christian liberal arts university, but that each of its departments have been instructed to craft mission statements specific to the discipline being taught. This, by the way, was not an exercise that was welcomed by everyone. Skillen has (rightly, in my view) asserted that “our religion, on biblical terms, is a way of life and not merely a way of private worship.” Yet there is still a (thankfully diminishing) percentage of Christian professors who view the relationship of faith and learning simply in pietistic terms -- e.g., being kind to students, doing devotions at the start of class, being extra diligent in carrying their professional responsibilities -- but who are unwilling (and/or ill-prepared) to view their discipline through the lens of a Christian worldview that includes a well-thought-out biblical theology of creation, fall, redemption, and future hope. (At my own university, we now try to bridge this gap by giving every new faculty member a one-course release in order to attend a Faculty Faith and Learning Seminar, taught by various senior faculty members and administrators.) However, my own department welcomed the challenge of crafting a psychology mission statement in terms of a Christian worldview, and it is with reference to the results of that exercise that I finish my response to Skillen’s paper.

We began by citing the mission statement of the University as a whole, which includes commitments to scholarship and teaching, to Scripture, to the church, to evangelism, to social justice, to the local and global community, and finally, to practicing within the university community the values of caring and compassion, justice and integrity, competence and affirmation. We then laid out the foundational Christian control beliefs within which we aimed to teach and practice psychology. Thus, our disciplinary confessional statement begins:

We affirm that the central calling of our department is to aim for excellence in teaching and research, consistent with the best past and present exemplars in our discipline. We do not, however, undertake such a task uncritically, for we reject the assumptions of metaphysical naturalism and the autonomy of reason that characterize much of mainstream psychology, and the assumptions of individualism and moral relativism that accompany much of applied psychology. We affirm that while the Bible cannot be treated as a psychology textbook, nevertheless it contains a God-revealed worldview, which provides foundational assumptions about the nature of personhood, and foundational principles for social life. By means of these we judge existing theories in psychology and strive to craft better theories.

Our second concern was to reject the common dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, acknowledging that all human beings are made in the image of God, all are called and enabled to unfold the riches of creation (Gen 1:26-28) in God-honoring ways, even as all (Christians included) perform such tasks imperfectly:

We reject the dualistic assumption that one’s life as a scholar or a professional is separate from or only marginally relevant to one’s calling as a Christian, and affirm that a well-developed worldview should inform our Christian graduates’ professional activities as a whole. Because we affirm the working of God’s common grace in all human beings, we believe that psychology can and should inform theology and church practice. In reciprocal manner, however, systematic and practical theology must be allowed to inform psychological theory and practice. At the same time, because we affirm the finiteness and fallleness of all human beings, we reject
utopian theories about individual and social life, whether these originate in the discipline at large, or among Christians within it. We practice allegiance to theories and methods with a healthy sense of tentativeness, knowing that we live “between the times” and that ultimately it is only God in Jesus Christ who will restore societal and individual health in a new heaven and earth.

Having laid a biblical-theological foundation for our disciplinary mission statement, we concluded by making concrete connections back to the university’s mission statement:

We are committed to preparing graduates for confident service to the academy, the church universal, and the local and global community, knowing that our eschatological hope both calls and empowers us to erect signposts pointing to God’s restored rule over all things. We are committed to the prophets’ calls for justice, particularly to marginalized groups, and call upon our students to tithe their professional expertise in the service of this goal. We are also committed to Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations, but emphasize the need to contextualize such efforts with cross-cultural sensitivity, and to recognize the inappropriateness of treating either the classroom or the counseling session primarily as a forum for evangelism. Finally, while recognizing our own potential for sin and error, we are committed to the task of being caring role-models and mentors to our students, as individuals and as cohorts, with regard to all the commitments outlined above.

James Skillen has spent the bulk of his paper outlining the significance of structural and confessional pluralism for psychology as a profession, with only passing treatment of its implications for the education of psychology students. Hence I have shared the process by which psychologists in one Christian university have clarified how they aim to do just that. And we don’t mind at all if other Christians in academic psychology would like to appropriate the fruits of our labors: we agree that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Ph.D., Northwestern University, is a social and cross-cultural psychologist and chair of the psychology department at Eastern University. Her research interests also include the history and philosophy of science and the psychology of gender. Her books include The Person in Psychology (Eerdmans 1985), Gender and Grace (IVP 1990), My Brother’s Keeper (IVP 2002) and, most recently, A Sword Between the Sexes? C. S. Lewis and the Gender Debate (Brazos, Spring 2010). She can be reached at mvanleeu@eastern.edu, or Dept. of Psychology, Eastern University, St. Davids PA 19087.

**Reference**


**A Radical Alternative to Principled Pluralism**

Stephen D. Viars

*Faith Baptist Church and Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries*

Several emphases of Dr. Skillen’s article resonate deeply in my life and ministry experience. First is his concern for Christian counseling to have a more enhanced position of influence in the public square. Too often the church as an institution and Christian people as individuals are decidedly absent from public life.

I believe Christianity in America is suffering from double marginalization. The previous generation (or more) of followers of Christ, especially those with evangelical or fundamentalist leanings, often seemed to practice a sort of *separation on steroids*. The world was a “philosophy to be hated” not a “body of people to be loved.” Interestingly enough, at the same time, our society was becoming increasingly secularized and disinterested in (and sometimes antagonistic to) the place of people of faith in public life. In other words, the church separated itself from culture, and the world was more than happy to finish the job. I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Skillen that Christian Counseling can/should play a useful role in public life and perhaps even lead the way in helping Christians and churches be more engaged in serving the communities in which they live.

I also agree with Dr. Skillen in his observation about the fundamental unfairness in the world of education between the treatment of public and religious schools. As a pastor of a church with a private Christian school for pre-school – 12th grade students, I have always believed that education is primarily the responsibility of the parents. Therefore the funding should follow the parents’ choices whether it is public, private, or home schooling. The monopoly public schools enjoy in taxpayer support is patently unfair because a certain world and life view (dare I say—religion?) is preferred to the wrongful exclusion of other educational approaches.

Where Dr. Skillen and I differ is in the proposed solution. He argues that we should work for
principled pluralism where secular/governmental accredit-ing/licensing agencies allow for the existence of Christian principles and where Medicare and health insurance companies reimburse Christian counseling in the same way they support other approaches. In other words, we should expect (demand?) equal treatment when it comes to the core issues of certification and reimbursement. On what biblical grounds would we have such an expectation, and how effective do we really believe such an approach will be?

I would like to offer a rather radical alternative. Let us forget the world's approval and funding in order to penetrate our culture with a counseling model, certification process, and funding approach that is distinctively and thoroughly Christian.

Followers of Christ are most concerned about glorifying God by introducing others to Jesus and using the context of life struggles to help Christians mature in their faith. Christian counseling is a marvelous way to do ministry in our communities. However, the concern to receive certification and/or funding from the world could actually sidetrack us from our primary mission.

First, consider the matter of funding. This discussion would go away if the support piece were removed. Why does the church of Jesus Christ not train a group of qualified believers and then provide competent and compassionate counseling services to the community free of charge?

Compare counseling to evangelism. Should not our approach to sanctification (counseling) be consistent with our approach to justification (evangelism/outreach)? On what biblical grounds could we possibly argue otherwise? Yet, what church or Christian group would be worried about reimbursements from the world to fund the proclamation of the gospel?

Some (many?) will argue that the notion of a local church offering competent and well respected Christian counseling services to hurting people in their community for free is impossible. Not so. Our church has been following this model in our town for over 30 years. Our counseling center staff of twenty persons, including five pastors with doctorates already earned or in preparation, three medical doctors, a licensed psychologist who functions as a biblical counselor, an educator who specializes in working with special needs children, and several other highly trained laypersons, work in our church's community-based biblical counseling center each Monday. We offer 80-100 hours of biblical counseling to members of our community each week free of charge. The issue of how we are treated by the world's reimbursement system is irrelevant because the ministry is supported solely by the church. Counselees who have been well-served often provide financial gifts to support the ongoing work of the center, but that is completely voluntary.

Then there is the issue of certification and licensure. The same argument applies. Would the church seek secular licensure for its evangelists? Then why would we do so for our counselors?

The primary stamp of approval and oversight for any Christian's counsel should be sought from the elders of his/her church. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament demonstrates that God is mediating His plan and program in and through the local church. Since counseling is inherently theological, counselors should submit themselves and their model to careful scrutiny by those who are called, gifted, and trained to lead the congregation in theological matters. The elders should also examine the counselor's character and lifestyle on a regular basis.

At Faith, we also recognize the value of outside supervision and oversight. That is why each of our counseling center staff-members has completed the certification process with the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors. This rigorous process includes educational requirements, the satisfactory completion of comprehensive exams in both theology and biblical counseling, and a supervised internship. All of this is done under the authority and guidance of the counselor's local church.

The question then becomes, especially in light of Dr. Skillen's very valid concerns; “Has Faith's approach resulted in significant community penetration?” Our answer is: “Absolutely.” We are finding almost endless counseling opportunities in our local judicial system, law enforcement, public education, media, politics, and many other areas of public life. Our community based Christian counseling center is recognized and respected as, in the words of several local leaders, “a significant community asset.” Compare that to Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

As an example, please consider conversations I have had with various community leaders in the last month. One discussion involved a juvenile justice judge who publicly lauded the Christian counseling services churches like ours provide to troubled people from her court. She made it clear that while she could not mandate such services, she could certainly recommend them. She wanted everyone at the meeting to know that “pastoral counseling has always been an accepted treatment form in my court.” She also told the group that she admired our church because we were able to “accomplish things quickly without the hassle of red tape.” She also recently secured a federal grant to assemble a resource guide describing all the faith based counseling and support ministries provided by
local churches in our community. When the project is completed, she will distribute the guide to people and families that appear in her court and encourage them to consider using the services that faith-based organizations provide. She will also encourage other government leaders and social service providers to use the resource guides in a similar way.

During that same week I attended a meeting hosted by one of the largest and most respected social service providers in our community. One of the many programs they offer provides assistance to mothers and couples who have lost custody of their infants because of drug abuse or other family problems. The purpose of the meeting was to enlist the help of local churches to provide faith-based mentors to their clients. The fact that we provide comprehensive Christian counseling training for our laypersons was viewed by this organization as a beneficial characteristic for the mentors they were seeking.

Also this month, we have been contacted by our local Habitat for Humanity to provide mentors for their future clients. The challenge they face is that many people who are living in substandard housing in our community have financial lives that are in such disarray that they do not meet Habitat’s minimum qualifications for participation. Their organization has asked us to provide Christian counselors who can mentor such persons in biblical principles of finance until they are able to meet the standards necessary to begin constructing their Habitat house.

I regularly speak with our mayor about programs our church is developing to reach the at-risk children of our community. He even endorsed a program we recently held to raise $240,000 to construct a professional grade skate park for the youth of our community. Trained counselors are on site to monitor the kids’ behavior and also build redemptive relationships with them. Some might say this is a strange way to do biblical counseling. Perhaps. But at least count, 23 of those young people have given their lives to Christ. Our mayor told me a few weeks ago how thankful he was for this ministry being available for our community’s at-risk youth.

Our sheriff is also wide-open to Christian counseling being done in the jail. We are free to hold Bible studies or individual counseling sessions with men and women who are incarcerated. Some of the new people who have attended our worship services in the last month have just recently been released from jail.

The same is true of disaster relief. For years now we have served as an emergency shelter during floods, snowstorms, and other local and regional disasters. The Red Cross knows that we can provide staff members who have training and experience working with people in crisis. This relationship has matured to the point that I was asked to serve on the board of directors and now actually serve as president of the board. The group has asked that I always open our meetings in prayer and I am more than happy to do so. The point is that Christian counseling takes a variety of forms.

More examples could be given, but perhaps that is enough to demonstrate that community penetration and influence is truly achievable, not just as something that is discussed but something that is actually done. In that sense, Dr. Skillen and I share a very similar burden and vision.

On the other hand, are there times when our lack of licensure hinders us? Yes, but rarely. There are times, for example, when we have been told by workers in our local welfare department that even though some of their clients would prefer faith-based counseling, the law does not currently provide that as an option that they can accept. If Dr. Skillen is successful in his endeavors, it would admittedly enhance our desire to impact our community for Christ. However, I am convinced that the best and fastest way to achieve that end is not by expecting or demanding a greater level of fairness in accreditation and reimbursement. The world can keep its approval and its money—the church needs neither.

What we want is access to hurting people. When the church of Jesus Christ funds the services, trains the counselors, and seeks accreditation with an outside entity that values the gospel, community penetration becomes a powerful and effective reality.

Stephen D. Viars, D.Min., Westminster Theological Seminary, is the Senior Pastor at Faith Baptist Church, 5526 State Rd 26 E, Lafayette, IN 47905. His email address is sviars@fbclafayette.org. See also the ministry website, www.faithlafayette.org/.
Dialogue on Christian Psychology: Author’s Response

Genuine Public Pluralism and the Establishment of Justice

James W. Skillen
The Center for Public Justice

Those who responded to my essay provided real encouragement and critical help. I am grateful for that. I hope their comments will also prove useful to many readers. It is a privilege to be invited to respond to them. The most important challenges and questions posed by the commentators appear to me to fall into three categories, and my response is organized in that way rather than in a serial response to each one separately. Most broadly, these three categories of responses will make it possible for me to clarify my assumption that a genuine public pluralism is essential to the establishment of justice.

Diverse Vocations and Faith Commitments
It was not the aim of my essay to say much at all about what should constitute the work of counseling, psychological research, or teaching in any of the related fields. I am not trained in psychology and therefore have relatively little to offer those of you who are. What I was assuming, however, even if I did not state it directly, is that there are significant differences in the arts of counseling, research, writing, and teaching, as well as in the viewpoints and approaches of those who practice those arts.

For example, I welcome and agree with Kalman Kaplan’s admonition that there should be “active confrontation of religious and secular values and outlooks within the field of psychology/counseling.” However, the way a counselor and a teacher do that may be different because a counseling session is different from a classroom. Moreover, the way professors in a Christian college develop a course may be different from the way those same professors might do so if they were teaching at a state university, but I would certainly not argue that Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim professors in a state university should conform to a supposedly “secular” standard and suppress their deepest convictions and views of the subject matter. Nor would I take Kaplan’s admonition to contradict Bert Hodges’ plea for Christian psychologists to become more concerned that the voices of “other communities and perspectives” are heard and not focus only on “having our own voices heard.”

My argument was primarily about public justice for all those who teach, and counsel, and do research from distinctive points of view, not about how the professionals (of any faith) in these fields should go about doing what they do. I did not wish to suggest, as Anna Berardi and Nancy Thurston seemed to think, that a single “separate Christian psychology” should be developed or authorized. My point was that if those involved in various psychological professions have distinctive approaches and points of view, they should not be excluded from public recognition because their point of view is considered sectarian or not “secular” enough. If public pluralism were properly established, it would recognize viewpoint diversity; it would not crown one way as the Christian way. Within the counseling and academic fields, there would undoubtedly continue to be different “Christian” approaches, just as there are different kinds of Christian colleges, not the Christian college to which all Christians must conform.

The fact that I focused on principled public pluralism should also not be taken to mean, as Jaleel Abdul-Adil seemed to think, that I was tending toward “an over-reliance on government.” The point is that government has its job, which should not include the right to give privilege to a “secular” approach to psychology and to discriminate against “religious” approaches because they are religious. My appeal for change in government policy is to open up the public arena, not to become over-reliant on government.

All of this presupposes that there are important distinctions among different kinds of institutional responsibility such as government, a counseling center, an academic institution, and churches, synagogues, and mosques. Consequently, even though I was urging that Christians should have the same freedom that others have to pursue their vocations, I was not implying that everything “Christian” should be supervised by churches, as Stephen Viars advocates when he says that “the primary stamp of approval and oversight for any Christian’s counsel should be sought from the elders of his/her church.” That may be the way some Christians want to organize themselves, but that is
not what I was recommending. Just as I would distinguish the responsibility of a college from that of a church, so I would distinguish the work of counseling from that of a church or a college. This is not to say that all connections among such institutions and vocations should be cut off; a church might start a counseling center or refer those seeking counsel to a particular center, just as many churches have founded colleges and lower schools. But the question of the accountability of those who teach or counsel or govern a church should be answered in keeping with their distinct vocations and responsibilities.

The point just made touches on the question of how “ecumenical” Christians should be in their work. Scott Richards makes a distinction between a Christian approach and an ecumenically sensitive approach to counseling and suggests that the Christian approach might be fine for Christian clients but another approach would be needed for non-Christian clients. That is not the kind of distinction I would draw, though I recognize that the way a Christian (or a person of any faith) communicates in different settings will require sensitivity to the persons being served. But a Christian approach to anything should not, in my view, be defined in sociological terms as either sectarian (closed off) or ecumenical (open). In the realm of psychology, the questions about human identity, family relationships, distress, perception, constructive vs. destructive behavior, social adjustment, and so forth are universal. However, it is precisely the different convictions and commitments by which we live, coupled with our different interpretations of human feelings, behaviors, and ways of life, that often lead to different approaches to counseling, research, and teaching. But that does not mean Christian counseling has meaning only in a closed sociological environment. I do not understand, for example, why the description Richards offers in a quotation from Allen Bergin about half way through his response should characterize an ecumenical but not a Christian approach to counseling. The distinction he draws is opaque to me.

Given both the diversity of arts (counseling, teaching, advocacy, etc.) and the diversity of viewpoints in practicing those arts, I am somewhat uncomfortable for another reason with Hodges’ use of the undifferentiated term “values” and “values as a whole.” I believe humans are norm-responsive creatures and thereby “valuers,” yet different responsibilities in different relationships and organizational settings call up distinguishable obligatory norms and values. Moreover, in the political arena where all citizens should be trying to nurture common civic values, there are often fundamental disagreements over the meaning of “justice,” “freedom,” and “civic duty.” I do not think there are any “values in general.” Rather, there are struggles over, and sometimes agreements about, political, educational, economic, and family norms or standards that we value. My wish is that Christians and people of other faiths would work harder to find common ground in the political arena, clarify their differences, and learn to live together. But it is precisely disagreements over fundamental matters that expose value differences in the public square.

Finally, I am convinced that at its deepest, integrative level, human life entails religious or religiously equivalent commitments and convictions. This is why I think it is such a mistake to believe that public policy and accrediting standards for services such as psychological counseling can be neutral or non-religious and that religious convictions may therefore be confined to a private sphere. That may seem just from one point of view, but it appears unjust to me. James Siwy is correct to judge that I believe there is opposition to the argument for public pluralism, and I thought that the comments I made about the governance of public schooling demonstrated the historical truth of such opposition. He implies, however, that there may not be any opposition to pluralism out there. I will leave it to others to agree or disagree with Siwy on this matter in the realm of counseling, teaching, and research in psychology. But I can attest that almost everywhere I have been—on university campuses, speaking with counselors and pastors, and arguing with public policymakers—the typical response is that the place for fundamental viewpoint diversity is in the private realm (and should be privately funded), not in public life, where a supposedly rational, secular consensus should rule and monopolize the public funding. That goes hand in hand with the dominant assumption that religion and religious convictions belong in private. Yet that overlooks the religiously deep (and non-neutral character) of the supposedly “neutral, secular” presuppositions that sustain the dominant view.

**Principled Pluralism**

The argument that government, as a matter of principle, should give equal treatment in public life to a diversity of schools, houses of worship, approaches to counseling, etc., led Abdul-Adil to think that I was advocating a society “where ‘differences’ are considered ‘equal’ (or even ‘equivalent’).” But depending on what one means by “are considered” I may disagree. Let me explain. From a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or secularist point of view, one might well judge that the convictions and viewpoints held by others are mistaken and therefore not equal. I am not arguing that all religious ways of life are of the same value or are equal in truth value. Yet the obligation of government, in my view, is precisely to give equal public-legal treatment to all citizens, not only because that is what public justice
requires, but also because recognition of the limited, differentiated responsibility of government means that government is not acknowledged to be the ultimate judge or arbiter of all truth—true faith, true scholarship, and true insights in counseling. The idea of toleration may contain within itself the assumption that government is competent to know what is right in all arenas of human responsibility but it decides (for the sake of peace perhaps) to tolerate those whom it judges to be mistaken or outside the mainstream consensus. Principled pluralism represents a big step beyond toleration. It assumes that government is not competent to make the judgments that parents, scientists, artists, psychological counselors, and ecclesiastical officials should make. That is why government should uphold equal treatment as a matter of public-legal principle.

Abdul-Adil says I am right to remind readers “that government has no divine authority.” To the contrary, however, I believe that government is divinely authorized, just as I believe that human vocations in education, family life, agriculture, and other fields are divinely authorized because of how God created human beings and commissioned them for work and service. The argument for principled pluralism is that in a world in which humans bear real responsibilities and God sends rain and sunshine on the just and unjust alike, it is not right for a government to treat the community of citizens as if it were a community of common faith. That does not mean citizens should be denied the right to voice their convictions about the origin and authorization of government. They should be free to do so. Some Americans believe that government is authorized solely by the will of the people. Some believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the ultimate authority over governments. Some believe that America’s god authorized the American republican experiment even if citizens are the ones who authorized its government. Theological and other arguments should flow freely in an open society. But government should be constituted to withstand capture by the human authorities of one faith who want to use that power to compel allegiance (and taxes) to one faith within the political community.

The other side of that coin, which I am quick to admit, is that there is nothing neutral about the pluralist view of government’s task that I am advocating. My argument arises from the conviction that humans, regardless of faith, have been authorized by God to govern and that they owe ultimate accountability to the true God, whether or not they believe that to be the case. Moreover, I believe that as long as God withholds final judgment of the world, no human authority—whether ecclesiastical, economic, or political has the right to claim a special divine appointment orunction to rule over others on behalf of God. Precisely this kind of restrained government with an obligation to do justice to all citizens, is, I believe, divinely authorized on biblical terms. No citizen, however, should be compelled by government’s authority to confess or acknowledge this or any other view about God’s relation to government. My view (and not mine alone) is that government is authorized to govern in accord with God’s patience and mercy and that people of any faith, including the one I hold, should not attempt to write into public law their own confessional viewpoint. That would be to try to create a community of faith from a community of citizens.

William Hathaway writes that there should be no “sterilization of practice contexts” in the mental health field to preclude “religiously explicit forms of professional practice.” Yet he seems to believe that because such professionals “operate in a publicly granted and regulated fiduciary space,” it is “unlikely that licensing boards could be so constituted that every professional could be reviewed or evaluated, if necessary, by a board made of people of ‘similar’ faith, whatever that might mean.” Hathaway is perhaps still assuming that public regulatory bodies and licensing boards should have a rather exhaustive responsibility for mental health care. This is a matter that needs to be argued through by mental health professionals of Christian and other faiths. But I would challenge that assumption. My hypothesis is that a government-authorized regulatory board could start with the recognition that its job is to assure just treatment of all, not to provide mental health care. It could then recognize a diverse range of accrediting agencies (or licensing boards) that would make sure that every professional is adequately trained and subject to peer review. But the training, peer review, and licensing could be offered by different professional groups whether Freudian, religiously ecumenical, Jewish, Muslim, or something else insofar as such groups want to organize themselves for that purpose. For public authorities this would mean something like upholding basic engineering standards that allow for a wide variety of types of buildings and bridges to be built. Government is public protector, not chief engineer. Government or government-appointed officials should not be recognized as having a monopoly on psychological or mental health judgments. In part, my starting assumption (which is certainly open to argument) is that government should not have a monopoly in the mental health field as if it is the chief authority over, and direct provider of, mental health care, any more than government should have an educational monopoly to direct all tax-collected funding for education to only those schools it owns and operates. Government can establish public-protection parameters within which a diversity of mental health professionals can carry out their responsibilities.
The Military Chaplaincy Program as Illustration

Many questions about the argument for structural and confessional pluralism arose from my comparative example of the military chaplaincy program. I hope I can clarify matters.

The chaplaincy program, I argued, illustrates how a single, government-run program can be internally pluralistic. That was the sole point of the illustration. I recognize the difficulty of the military finding chaplains to address the needs of every different kind of believer. I also realize that the program, as now structured, will not satisfy every believer, as Hathaway makes clear in his case. But those are problems within a system that nevertheless welcomes diverse religious institutions, on an equal-treatment basis, to send chaplains of their own faith to serve military personnel. Insofar as possible, we should work to try to correct problems and overcome inadequacies that do exist. But my aim was not to try to address all those concerns. In the system as it has been established, a chaplain of one faith is not appointed to serve people of all faiths, though a Catholic soldier would not be prohibited from seeking council from a Jewish rabbi if he wanted to do so. It is actually quite impressive how many chaplains of different faiths come to serve those who seek out their pastoral care without the government trying to prescribe who may serve whom according to some kind of government-defined measurement of faith standards.

The point of the illustration was not to comment on everything that is good and bad about the current chaplaincy programs, whether in the military or in hospitals and elsewhere. Undoubtedly many improvements can be made and we, of different faiths, should be contending for constructive reforms. The comparison with schooling was to show that a government-run program that deals with diversity of faiths (including people of no traditional faith) need not impose a single government representative (or institution) to be all things to all people. While the chaplains are employed by the military to serve military personnel, they are representatives of their own faith communities and subject to those authorities with regard to the pastoral and liturgical services they render. In this case, the military actually welcomes, on an equal-treatment basis, chaplains of diverse faiths to serve military personnel of diverse faiths. Two different institutions (the government’s military and diverse religious bodies) cooperate in a venture over which neither has sole sovereignty.

Siwy and Hodges ask: Are the chaplains regulated? Are there any restrictions on them in terms of evangelization, etc.? Is there not a difference between the chaplaincy and education models? These questions take us beyond the point of the illustration, but let me try to respond briefly.

Yes, chaplains are regulated both by the military and by religious bodies. The chaplaincy program is a specific, cooperative venture in a unique set of circumstances. Of course, this means that there will be different limitations than in a non-military setting such as schooling or counseling. Yet there are limitations in every setting. Religious leaders in a town would probably be limited in carrying out their evangelistic missions if they tried to do so in a manner that involved constant harassment of neighbors through uninvited phone calls and knocks on doors. It would not be a matter of religious discrimination, in my view, for a town council to pass an ordinance prohibiting all religious representatives, salespeople, and everyone else from disturbing the peace. It may, indeed, be appropriate in a military setting to ask Christian chaplains not to spend their time trying to evangelize non-Christians, but I do not think there should be any limitation on chaplains of any faith speaking with someone of another faith (or of no faith) who seeks them out. Psychotherapy presents a different setting and a different kind of relationship between therapist and client. It may call for a different set of public-protection limitations than would be appropriate between teacher and student, or between chaplain and soldier.

I do not agree with Hodges that “chaplains never have to work as an integrated unit with a common purpose, as is the case for clinicians, scientists, and other psychological practitioners.” Chaplains do have to work hand in hand with a common purpose to meet the needs of military personnel whom they serve. Their cooperation is greater than that of a ministerial alliance in a city. Yet their cooperation in handling logistics, locations and timing of services, movement of troops, assignments of chaplains, and sharing of insights and agonies, do go hand in hand with relative autonomy for each chaplain who serves primarily those whose faith he or she shares. The clinical situation may be different from that of the chaplaincy program in many respects, but if a major difference is due to regulatory rules that do not recognize the legitimacy of religious viewpoint diversity, even where such views are directly relevant to therapy, then I would say the system should be changed, much as I argued that equal-treatment pluralism in public education needs to be established. But here again, I leave to psychologists and psychology professors the matters for which they, and not I, have professional expertise. Genuine public pluralism should be a dimension of establishing justice, not instituting unjust enclosures and restrictions that benefit some groups over others or deal improperly with religious and viewpoint differences.

The main point of the chaplaincy illustration is to show that it is entirely possible for government to recognize and give equal treatment to a diversity
of non-government service providers within a single publicly authorized and funded program. What shape that pluralism should take in schooling, counseling, chaplaincies, the arts, and many other areas, has to be worked out by those involved. And that is why I urged psychology professionals, in their civic capacity as well as in their professional capacities, to engage in helping to shape public law and standards. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen outlined one effort that her department at Eastern University is making to exercise its Christian responsibility, recognizing full well that it functions in a framework of accrediting associations and other public obligations that affect its work and that it bears obligations to a broader public and not only to students at Eastern.

Kaplan's work is noteworthy in this regard because he is drawing on a distinctive tradition of faith that is not shared by everyone and that could well be shunned by those who hold the cards of a supposedly secular, neutral consensus. Yet he is working to show the general applicability of his research and insights rather than trying only to convince a closed group of people who share his faith and approach to psychology. My message is that the common terrain of human experience, including psychological experience, connects us with everyone. At the same time, our different views of what that “common terrain” means require that we not hide our diverse faiths from one another or accept the suppression of our ways of life because a sacred/secular, private/public dualism dominates, allowing room for viewpoint diversity only in private life. Working from distinctive points of view can be perfectly compatible with working for the common good and for the health of one’s profession in general. How to do that in psychology and counseling as well as in education, politics, and other areas of life is more and more urgent now, it seems to me, in a shrinking world that puts everyone increasingly in touch with everyone else while also making us mindful of our great differences in viewpoint and religious commitment.
The Holy Scriptures inform the task of soul care at many levels beyond mere instruction on morality. They also serve to form identity and worldview, and to provide the narrative through which we should understand our own lives. The Gospel of Matthew is a rich literary-theological work that orients believers’ lives around the grand story of God’s revelation in Christ. Through this story we gain a new family identity, a new hope for the coming eschatological kingdom, and an inspiring vision for Christian endurance as we await Christ’s return. This article reflects on the themes of family identity, eschatological hope, and the Christian virtue of endurance in the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose is to show how the theology of Matthew can and should inform our soul care by reorienting our lives according to these key ideas. This paper also contrasts this biblical view with contemporary alternatives in Positive Psychology and hope therapy.

Christian Psychology and the Gospel of Matthew

The church father Tertullian – always interesting; sometimes overbearing – is well-known to us in part because of his many clever and poetic turns of phrase. One such famous saying was a question: *Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?* - What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?

By this question Tertullian was not asking something political, but was arguing something philosophical and theological. He was staunchly opposed to letting any Greek philosophy and culture have a place in informing Christian understanding and theology. He was concerned by what he saw in contemporary theologians who often took up the language and philosophy of Athens to describe and explain the teachings of Scripture. Thankfully, in my opinion, Tertullian’s view was eventually beaten out (generally) by the likes of Augustine, who, like many before and after him, sought to “plunder the Egyptians” and gain what insights could be gleaned from cultures outside of the Bible, while remaining centered in Holy Scripture.

Many today would ask with the same sort of skepticism as Tertullian’s, “What has Christian Psychology to do with Matthew?” Indeed, I think this question might be asked with skepticism by a number of different groups. From modern secular psychologists, trained in behavioral modification techniques and the latest research on neural pathways, I think we would find a skepticism that a 2000 year old sectarian religious document written in Greek (such as Matthew) could offer real help to the modern man or woman living under the strains of our times. On the other side, many who do believe in the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the continuing relevance of Matthew would equally scoff at the suggestion that this book has any interface at all with the field of “Christian Psychology.”

I want to suggest that even as Tertullian was wrong, so too would an opinion that the worlds of Matthew and Christian Psychology should never meet. Instead, there is much that can be learned from this 1st century document about 21st century soul care. As a student of the Gospels and one who has been involved in much counseling both as a pastor and professor, I approach this essay with both professional and personal interest. I believe firmly that the Scriptures have much to say in forming our vision and practice for soul care. My goal in this paper is to present three ways in which a careful reading of Matthew informs our soul care. Along the way I will make reference to ways in which these observations might relate to practical counseling as well as some current trends in psychology, particularly the newer field of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Hope.

Family Identity

It did not take modern psychology such as Family Systems Theory to help humans see that our family of origin – genetically and environmentally – has a huge impact on who we are, including our mental well-being. I am regularly cognizant of this myself, as the father of six children whom I am trying to raise in an intentional and wise way, yet seeing that no matter what I say to the opposite, they are turning out to be much like me – which is not always good!

I would imagine that for most counselors and psychologists today one of the first steps is to inquire about a counselee’s family situation. This habit or posture comes from recognition in much of psychology about the deep and abiding ways in which one’s upbringing consciously and unconsciously shapes the whole person.
In light of this common modern approach, it is interesting to note that in Matthew an important theme of Jesus’ teaching proves to be family identity. In the last couple of decades, one of the newer areas of New Testament studies has been what is called “social-scientific criticism” (e.g., Elliott, 1993; Pilch & Malina, 1998). Social-scientific criticism is a subset of historico-critical methods that examines the biblical documents from the perspective of social scientific studies such as economics, group-identity theory, and social relations. This is a somewhat different approach than traditional historical-criticism, and when social questions are asked of the text, some interesting observations arise. One rather well known idea that comes out of social scientific inquiry is the idea of honor and shame. The basic idea is that in ancient Near Eastern cultures — much like in many African and Middle Eastern cultures today — much of society and culture is built around the commodity of honor. Everyone in society has a place in the hierarchical pecking order; everyone is in a cultural and economic system of patronage and benefactors; everyone has people above them to whom they owe honor and patronage (except for the emperor) and those below them who owe them honor and patronage. At the core of this is the idea that one does not ever shame or dishonor those above you; such is a great cultural offense. The leaders’ honor is everything. In the first-century Mediterranean world, both Jewish and Greco-Roman, this was the kind of honor-shame, patron-benefactor culture that was up and running.

Integral to all of this is one’s family. This works out in a couple of ways. One’s family — of which each member is a part by corporate solidarity — determines one’s place in society, and where he or she is in the cultural pecking order. Thus, one’s corporate family’s identity determines one’s social place in life in drastic ways. Similarly, each person has a place within the pecking order of his or her own family. It is hard for most of us who have been brought up in mobile, melting pot America to appreciate this, but for most societies, including today, one’s family identity is very important. Everyone knows their place in the family and the relationships are thick and intertwined, with extended families living and working together. The breakdown of this kind of social structure in the modern period — especially in western European civilizations — is certainly one of the contributing factors, in my opinion, to greater mental illness and lack of culture adhesiveness. One often feels very much alone in modern society; something that would be unheard of in more family-based cultures.

Now the point for us as it relates to Matthew is this. One of the themes that comes out of a careful reading of Matthew is that Jesus cares about and radically redefines one’s family identity and status. The first hint of this is found very near the beginning of the Gospel in the words of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:8-9). When approached by the Jewish religious leaders, John rebukes them with these sharp words — “Don’t claim to me that you are the children of Abraham. Instead, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. If not, God can easily raise up children for Abraham from these stones.” This is an amazing statement that cuts right at the heart of both Jewish religious identity and family identity. This will prove to be a banner that flies over all of the First Gospel. Continually the people of God — that is, who is in God’s family — are redefined radically as having nothing to do with Jewish descent (which is everything to a Jew) and instead as being a matter of faith-response to Jesus. There are many passages throughout Matthew that speak of this same truth, and it is one of the particularly emphatic contributions of Matthew to early Christianity (e.g., Matt. 8:10-13).

One of the ways this comes out in Matthew is by his regular use of “sons of” language. As I have mentioned above, one’s family identity is a function of the father’s role in culture. Thus, to speak of being the “son of” someone is to speak of one’s character or identity (cf. Carson, 1995, p. 28). So, in Matthew, Jesus will often call people to himself and give them a “sonship” (and we might rightly add ‘daughtership’ title). For example, in the Beatitudes, those who, following the way of Jesus, are pure in heart are called now the “sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Similarly, in Matt. 5:45, Jesus exhorts his hearers to follow his reading of the Law and obey his teaching, and thereby be “sons of your Father who is in heaven.” In Matt. 9:15, Jesus cryptically refers to himself as the “bridegroom” and his disciples as the “sons of the bridegroom” when explaining why they do not fast while John’s disciples do. Obviously “sons of the bridegroom” does not make much sense in our current language, and thus most translations take it as “wedding guests” or “attendants of the bridegroom,” but this misses the point — in this language Jesus is demarcating his disciples as having their identity in him, calling them his “sons.” In Matt. 13:38, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, we have a strong contrast presented between the “sons of the kingdom” (the seed) and the “sons of the evil one” (the tares). Again, the idea of identity and nature is the point. And like the negative “sons of the evil one” here, we also have several other examples where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for being “sons of those who murdered the prophets” (Matt. 23:31) who make their disciples “sons of hell” (Matt. 23:15).

Another very obvious way in which family identity is redefined by Jesus is in the many passages in which he speaks specifically in the language of family. The most striking example of this is in Matt.12:46-50 when Jesus’ distraught mother and brothers come to
him, wanting to speak to him – presumably about his seemingly erratic and absurd behavior (having recently left the family business to become a charismatic, wilderness-preaching prophet). Jesus’ response is culture-overturning: “Who is my mother and my brothers? And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” Could there be a more radical redefinition of family identity than this?

Not dissimilar is the claim that Jesus makes upon his disciples, calling them away from their fathers (and even wives, as we know in the case of Peter, who has a mother-in-law) and their fathers’ businesses, as in the case of Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matt. 4:18-22). In chapter 10, when sending out his newly-minted disciples, he instructs them that on account of him, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (Matt. 10:21). And on top of all of this, we regularly see in Matthew that Jesus instructs his rag-tag band of disciples – made up of tax-collectors, harlots, fishermen, political revolutionaries, etc. – to call each other and to treat each other as “brothers” and sisters (e.g., Matt. 5:22-24; 7:4; 18:15-22, 35).

Related closely to this and to the “sons of” theme in Matthew is the “God as Father” motif. The theme of the Fatherhood of God is actually not one usually demarcated by commentators as a particular emphasis in Matthew, but I am suggesting that it should be. Matthew refers to God as “Father” 44 times compared to only four times in Mark and 17 in Luke. Only John refers to God as Father more often than Matthew. Moreover, only Matthew among the Synoptics refers to God as Father nearly as often as he uses “God” (Mowery, 1988, p. 24; see also Mowery, 1997).

The point of these observations to alert us to the significance of this theme: For Jesus to call his disciples away from their own families, to call them all brothers and sisters, to call them “sons of the Father,” to tell his disciples that they have God as their Father (in heaven) – all of this gives the disciples of Jesus a new and radical family identity.

Now what does this have to do with our counseling? I think there are some significant implications of this, many of which are yet to be explored. A few that come to mind immediately are these. First, we should speak to our counselees about the reality and importance of family identity in the Bible, helping them see that this is a biblical category and part of the world as God has made it. This element of our self-identity is not just a function of modern psychobabble, but is indeed something the Scriptures address.

Also, I think we can strive to help people, especially those with broken and damaging family backgrounds, to embrace a new-found identity in Christ and to have God as their heavenly Father. It may seem a bit cliché or even trite to speak about having God as one’s father in replacement for an abusive or absent father, but I think Holy Scripture seek to address this real soul need with its emphasis on Father language for God in the teachings of Jesus.

At a broader level, we can also tie this family identity idea into the greater reality of worldview, especially as it relates to the eschatologically-redefined people of God. Tying in to what Kevin Vanhoozer has written and lectured about, we need to get a worldview that sees our lives (and our identities) as part of the theodrama of Scripture (see especially, Vanhoozer, 2005). There is not space in this paper to unpack how Matthew contributes to this same idea, but suffice it to say that I find much good in Professor Vanhoozer’s ideas, and I believe Matthew is making a similar appeal — for his hearers to understand their lives in light of the Grand Story of Scripture, God’s redeeming work in the world. This is an important aspect of the First Gospel. This relates to the key idea of Wisdom — something Jesus speaks about and portrays in Matthew — and to Eschatology, the focal point of all of the New Testament. And it is to this issue we now turn.

Eschatological Hope

Several years ago the renowned scholar Richard Bauckham and his colleague Trevor Hart wrote a fascinating little book called Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium. The thesis of this volume is that at the turn of the 21st-century, when the assorted utopias of the twentieth century have failed, the Christian hope for God’s future in the world needs to be rediscovered. Their stated goal is to “re-source Christian hope” (Bauckham & Hart, 1999, p. xi) by considering anew the major images of eschatology, while arguing for the centrality of imagination in their interpretation. It is worth our while to briefly review what they argue in this book.

First, Bauckham and Hart (1999) offer an especially insightful analysis of the state of mind (and heart) of modern Western civilization. They survey the upsurge of utopian visions in the early twentieth century spawned from the Enlightenment and show how they have inevitably declined into pervasive hopelessness and pessimism in this “post-modern” era. The myth of progress in the 19th and 20th centuries that dominated the minds of those “liberated” from the tyranny of belief in God has proved to be just that – a myth. In its place, postmodern philosophy offers only skepticism, meaninglessness, and therefore, hopelessness. The problem is that a worldview without the biblical God lacks transcendence. To quote Bauckham

Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium

Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart

The thesis of this volume is that at the turn of the 21st-century, when the assorted utopias of the twentieth century have failed, the Christian hope for God’s future in the world needs to be rediscovered. Their stated goal is to “re-source Christian hope” (Bauckham & Hart, 1999, p. xi) by considering anew the major images of eschatology, while arguing for the centrality of imagination in their interpretation. It is worth our while to briefly review what they argue in this book.

First, Bauckham and Hart (1999) offer an especially insightful analysis of the state of mind (and heart) of modern Western civilization. They survey the upsurge of utopian visions in the early twentieth century spawned from the Enlightenment and show how they have inevitably declined into pervasive hopelessness and pessimism in this “post-modern” era. The myth of progress in the 19th and 20th centuries that dominated the minds of those “liberated” from the tyranny of belief in God has proved to be just that – a myth. In its place, postmodern philosophy offers only skepticism, meaninglessness, and therefore, hopelessness. The problem is that a worldview without the biblical God lacks transcendence. To quote Bauckham
By mistakenly investing its faith in a glorious future which would grow naturally out of the conditions and potentialities of the present, therefore, the myth [of the modernist Enlightenment] pointed to a meaningfulness which did not and could never exist... Its hope proved to be a false hope and so it had come to an end, for false hopes inculcate only despair (p. 49).

Or as they say in more imaginative language, however laudable and good in themselves many of the achievements of humankind may be, rearranging the deck-chairs on the Titanic and calling it a new way forward, a new world order, or whatever, will not actually melt the iceberg of finitude on which our dreams and hopes seem bound to run aground (p. 68).

Following this analysis, the authors move into a fascinating discussion of the nature of imagination, language, and hope. Building upon the work of George Steiner and others, they discuss our human need for hope and imagination, as reflected in our language. Deftly, they pull together a spectrum of ideas, touching on art, cyberspace, how narrative functions, the unethical nature of postmodern imagination, mental health without hope, and the genre of fantasy literature. If this is not impressive enough, along the way, they throw in astute critiques of Marx and Bultmann.

Central to this section of the book and crucial to their entire thesis is the discussion of the nature of imagination. They argue for a distinction between something being merely imaginary versus being imaginative. Imagination (related to the imaginative) functions pervasively throughout our human existence, whether it be in how we remember the past or think about the future. The imagination should not be looked down upon, but rather, it is essential to living in this world, not the least for the Christian.

I mention this book not only to heartily recommend it as a beneficial read, but also to preface one of the most important facets of Matthew's theological picture, and that is eschatological hope. This is such a weighty and far-reaching topic that it is difficult to know where to begin. Let me simply launch out by stating that if there is anything that can be said to be a unifying theme of all of the theology of the New Testament, it is the forward-looking hope of the consummation of God's kingdom through Jesus the Christ. The coming kingdom of God is the main thrust of all of the teachers of the New Testament, from Jesus onward. One of the very few things that could said to be a consensus in New Testament scholarship is that Jesus' ministry was about the coming kingdom of

God. I would argue that the same case can be made for the rest of the New Testament quite strongly. As Karl Barth (trans. 1933, p. 314) writes in his commentary on the letter to the Romans: "Christianity that is not entirely and altogether eschatology has entirely and altogether nothing to do with Christ."

Now we understand post-Pentecost that this kingdom that comes from heaven to earth (hence the Lord's Prayer) is - to use the common speech on this matter - "already but not yet." It has been inaugurated through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, but not yet consummated. Thus, our entire experience as Christians is one of living between two worlds, or better, during the overlap of two ages - the old era of sin and death and decay that is indeed passing away, and the new eschatological age in which all is made new, even creation itself (see, for example, Romans 8:18-25).

Such is the perspective of Jesus and the New Testament authors, and therefore, to be a Christian is precisely to "live as a person for whom God's future shapes the present" (Bauckham & Hart, 1999, p. 83). That is, to be a person of hope. Indeed, at a number of points, the New Testament defines faith very much in terms of hope - sure hope - such as in Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not [yet] seen" (ESV).

When we turn to the narrative and teachings of Jesus in Matthew, we find that, as in the rest of the New Testament - and at times even more so - everything is eschatologically-oriented. The First Gospel is a thoroughly forward-looking book and a literary tapestry woven from an eschatological worldview.

This is communicated from the very opening words of the book - "the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." These words and the genealogy that follows place Matthew firmly within the scope of the whole Bible's story-line, tying him into the Abrahamic and Davidic promises. The subsequent two opening chapters of Matthew continue in the same vein, with a series of fulfillment quotations from Scripture ("thus was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet...") that argue that all that God has been doing in the world is now finding its consummation in One Man, the anointed One, Jesus of Nazareth. And the fulfillment that this Christ, the Son of David, is accomplishing is nothing less than the final, universe-wide deliverance from bondage, the return from exile. Or to use the language of the prophets: the new exodus and the new creation. The eschatological thrust of Matthew continues unabated in the following chapters. A clearly Elijah-like prophet appears in the wilderness, preaching the imminent coming of God's kingdom, and then Jesus immediately proceeds to do the same. Throughout the subsequent
narrative, over and over again, Jesus is portrayed as the One through whom the consummation of all things is coming. This is communicated through Jesus’ actions—such as typologically repeating the Exodus through miraculous water-crossings and wilderness feedings (chapters 14-15)—as well as his words—such as promises concerning the time of the “new genesis” in which he and his disciples shall sit on royal thrones reigning over God’s people on a renewed earth (19:16-30).

One of the most striking ways in which the eschatological focus of Matthew comes out is in the five major teaching blocks that Matthew gives us. It has long been recognized that Matthew is the “teaching Gospel,” giving us a lot of Jesus’ teachings compared to the other Gospels. This is one of the reasons why it has always been so beloved and well-used in the Church’s history. Matthew organizes much of the teaching of Jesus into five major discourses, each of which ends with the statement, “and when Jesus had finished saying these things.” These teaching blocks each have a theme: The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) gives a picture of the kingdom of heaven; the missionary discourse (Matt. 10) gives instructions for Jesus’ disciples as they go out; the parables discourse (Matt. 13) explains the kingdom of heaven through a series of images and stories; the ecclesiological discourse (Matt. 18) details instructions for the new people of God as they live in community; and the eschatological discourse (Matt. 24-25) paints a picture of the consummation of God’s work in the world at the second coming of the Christ.

The important thing to point out here is that it is not only the “eschatological” discourse which is eschatological in nature, but indeed, each of these major discourses is thoroughly future-hope-oriented as well. For example, the Sermon on the Mount begins with the famous Beatitudes which portray the lifestyle and heart attitude of the “blessed ones” as they await the coming kingdom of heaven, a way of living that will only be truly possible and fulfilled in the new creation. And the Sermon ends with a series of three future-oriented parables that each portrays a coming day of judgment and separation. Likewise, in the missionary discourse, the bulk of the instructions concern the persecutions to come and the great promises of reward in the eschaton for those who remain faithful witnesses. Similarly, the parabolic discourse is structured in such a way that the main emphasis becomes clear—there is a final day coming where all will be made known and the good will be separated from the bad—whether they be types of soil, wheat or tares, good or bad fish. The fourth or ecclesiological discourse also speaks of future, heavenly realities, exhorting the Christian community to live in forgiveness and reconciliation as they await the coming kingdom. And of course, the final, climactic discourse in Matthew is exclusively focused on the “end times” or eschatological realities.

My point again is that when we read Matthew we cannot avoid sensing that his overall message is one of future orientation. The whole book leans forward. And this Gospel famously ends with a commission (the “Great Commission”) and a strong word of hope—that Jesus will be with them until the end of the ages. We can say about the Gospel of Matthew what Jürgen Moltmann (trans. 1993) says about New Testament Christianity overall: “From first to last, not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionary and transforming the present” (p. 16).

To return to the point of Bauckham and Hart’s (1999) book, then, to be a Christian is to be one whose worldview and life and hope are thus future-oriented. Matthew’s Gospel provides much data and exhortation toward this eschatological hope perspective.

Now we may ask as we did under the previous point: What has this to do with Christian psychology and counseling? The answer is manifold and thick and a resounding “Much indeed!” The most fascinating part of my research for this paper was becoming conversant with the burgeoning field of “Positive Psychology.” Positive Psychology proves to be a great interlocutor as we consider how to apply Christian eschatological hope to our daily counseling practice.

Positive Psychology is a relatively new branch of psychological research although the matters it addresses have always been a subject of human thought and desire—human well-being and happiness and what it means to live a good and satisfying life (eudaimonia, to use Aristotle’s word). Indeed, up until the 1970’s in psychology, optimism was viewed as a deficiency, a sign of immaturity and naïveté. One can think of Voltaire’s ever-optimistic Dr. Pangloss from his satirical work Candide, Porter’s Pollyanna, and Freud’s analysis of religion as an optimistic illusion (Carr, 2004, p. 76).

In Freud’s (1928) Future of an Illusion, he “argued that the optimistic belief in a benevolent father-like God who would reward us in the afterlife if we controlled our aggressive and sexual instincts, was an illusion essential for civilization” (Carr, 2004, p. 76). The problem, according to Freud, was that this future hope-based denial of natural sexual and aggressive instincts was actually harmful. The goal of psychoanalysis, then, was to help people learn to balance their need to fulfill these desires and still act in a socially acceptable way, attaining a psychological maturity apart from religion (Carr, 2004, p. 77). This, of course, sets the whole course of modern psychology on its trajectory of focusing on remedying deficiencies and managing disabilities. Positive Psychology is a reaction to this, focusing instead on the enhancement of happiness
and well-being. And the research that has already been amassed is impressive. Study after study has found that a generally positive, hopeful, or optimistic outlook has significant psychological and physiological benefits – something that general proverbial wisdom has known all along. Thus, to quote Alan Carr (2004), one of the leading psychologists in this field:

Optimism and hope correlate negatively with measures of current psychopathology generally, and current depression in particular. Optimism and hope are predictive of physical and mental health. . . Optimistic people are healthier and happier. Their immune systems work better. They cope better with stress using more effective coping strategies such as reappraisal and problem solving. They also actively avoid stressful life events and form better social support networks around themselves. They have healthier lifestyles which prevent them from developing illness or if they do develop illness they adhere to medical advice better and follow through with behaviour patterns that promote recovery. Optimism in early adulthood predicts health in later adulthood over periods of up to 35 years. . . Conversely, pessimism is a key feature of depression and anxiety (pp. 97-98).

Who would not want this for their counselee and for themselves? The question is: How do we resource it? Positive Psychology’s answer is that we need to train our clients with a variety of techniques that are drawn from cognitive-behavior therapy, solution-focused therapy, and narrative therapy, based on a theory of hope. Rick Snyder’s understanding of hope is one of the sources for a theory of hope that results in Hope Therapy (Carr, 2004). For Snyder, hope is defined as involving two main components – the ability to plan pathways to desired goals despite obstacles; and the agency or motivation to use these pathways. Hope is the sum of these two. “Hope therapy [then] aims to help clients formulate clear goals, produce numerous pathways to these, motivate them to pursue their goals and reframe obstacles as challenges to be overcome” (Carr, p. 92).

What are we as Christians to make of Positive Psychology and its relation to biblical hope? Well, as I have hinted already, there is much good in this. Who would not want their counselee to have more satisfying, productive, happy lives? In fact, much of the discussion in Positive Psychology touches on the ideas of Wisdom and Virtue, going back to Aristotle. This is something to applaud because these are thoroughly biblical categories as well – both wisdom and virtue. Moreover, certainly the techniques of Hope Therapy often work for today’s man or woman. I would suggest this is a function of the fact that all good in the world is a result of God’s common grace. Or we might say that Hope Therapy works at least in part because it is a refraction of the ‘True Truth’ of God and our human need for hope as he has made us.

But for all the good that can be found in Positive Psychology and particularly, Hope Therapy, I must raise some points of concern and reasons why these approaches are ultimately deficient. Biblically, authentic hope – or we can say, faith in God’s future for us – cannot be understood in the weaker sense of the word that we find up and running in Positive Psychology. That is, ‘hope’ in English has a semantic range that includes “sure confidence,” but often for us means nothing more than “optimism” or even “wishful thinking;” e.g., “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” This is indeed the more ancient Greek sense of “hope,” something more akin to optimism. But biblically, hope is something much more: it is God-centered; it is trust in God, as we see in both the Old and New Testaments (cf. especially the Psalms and Paul’s writings). Thus, as the Christian psychologist Fraser Watts (2000) observes:

Authentic hope is not just a matter of holding optimistic propositional beliefs about the future. Neither is it simply a matter of a wish or desire about the future that fails to engage with what is actually likely to happen (pp. 56-57),

Or, as Bauckham and Hart (1999) state:

Christian hope is not naive, but takes the reality of evil in the world seriously. It “refuses the premature consolation that pre-empt s grief, the facile optimism which cannot recognize evil for what it is” (p. 42). In contrast, Positive Psychology’s hope is mere optimism that is ultimately unfounded and naive.

Additionally, Positive Psychology and Hope Therapy are ultimately deficient because of the limit of their imminence. That is, even the best of hope therapy’s techniques are designed to set and accomplish imminent goals. But for all the good that comes from this, it will not satisfy the human soul’s need for transcendence, for something that goes beyond the grave and this fallen world as we know it. The real evil of this fallen world in the death of a child, a cancer-ridden spouse, and a chemically-based schizophrenia cannot be satisfactorily answered with imminent goals to be obtained; they need a universe-wide, transcendent answer of the hope of a renewed and restored creation itself.

Moreover, Positive Psychology is not able to resource Christian duty or to provide a sufficient framework for the “moral cosmology” or moral worldview of our lives. As Sir John Polkinghorne (2003) observes:
Hope based on inaugurated eschatology “is the foundation of a moral view that supports and enables the costly demands of fidelity and duty” (p. 48). Examples of the costly demand for duty include loyalty to an aging parent or handicapped child.

Hope can sustain the acceptance of such limitation by delivering us from the tyranny of the present [emphasis mine], the feeling of need to grab as much as as much as we can before all opportunity passes away forever. We are enabled to live our lives not in the spirit of carpe diem but sub specie aeternitatis (in the light of eternity). (Polkinghorne, p. 49)

Thus we may observe that it is only a future-oriented hope beyond this present age that can sufficiently resource virtuous duty toward others, itself a very positive psychological experience. We may get even more practical: How should all of this about Christian eschatological hope (as seen in Matthew and throughout the Old Testament) affect our daily counseling?

Simply, we need to have a strong grammar of hope in our counseling, seeing our goal as very much including a re-education of our counselees toward an eschatologically-focused, new-creation-hoping understanding of Christianity. In broader culture and even in the Church, we have become ignorant as to the central role that hope plays—or should play—in what it means to be a person of faith. Janet Soskice comments that “even in the churches today there is a tendency to represent hope as if it were psychological mood. ‘Lack of faith and charity can be treated by prayer, but lack of hope is treated with antidepressants’” (as quoted in Polkinghorne, 2003). I am not commenting here on the validity or widespread use of antidepressants—something I am not opposed to in principle—but on the fact that we tend to misdiagnose hopelessness as if it has nothing to do with faith, when indeed it is very much at the heart of what it means to believe.

The biblical content of the eschatological nature of the New Testament and Christian teaching must play a central role in how we approach counseling and the kind of language we regularly use. Not, of course, in a “Take two verses and call me in the morning” way (to borrow a seminar title from Emlet [2008]), but at the core of our own worldview in such a way that it seeps out into all of our concepts and language. A great place to start in educating ourselves in this way is Eric Johnson’s (2007) recent book, in addition to further work he is doing on the issue of eschatology in our understanding.

Part of this education should be coming to understand that God’s redemption in Christ is not one of simply rescue from this world, but instead the restoration of creation itself, including us as marred image-bearers of God.7 Also part of this re-education of our counselees should be to help them begin to have a forward-looking faith more than a backward-looking one. We cannot and we should not diminish the role of the Cross in our theology, worship, and daily living. But, we must also not forget the Cross is ultimately meaningless if it were not for the Resurrection and Ascension. The Cross is a backward-look; the Resurrection invites a forward one, pointing us toward the great hope of the New Creation itself.

Another element of the re-education of our counselees is that we need to help them see that Christianity is about so much more than us as individuals, but is first and foremost about God’s redeeming and restoring work in the world. I have observed over the years—and this became especially apparent by contrast when we lived in the UK—that the Pietistic tradition, of which Evangelicalism is very much a part, can ironically end up promoting the rampant individualism of modern Western civilization, all the while it is trying to be God-centered. That is, in our right desire to make Christianity not just a culture-wide “justification by decency” (as F. F. Bruce [1958, p. 336] labeled English Christianity at times), but instead a true, heart-felt, life-transforming faith, we unfortunately often end up twisting all of this into a very self-centered affair. But I can testify from personal experience that it is terribly freeing and soul-liberating to realize that Christianity is not primarily or exclusively about me, but about what God is doing in redeeming the world, including the privilege of me getting to be involved in this kingdom work through faith in Christ.

The Christian Virtue of Endurance

And this leads us to the final discussion of how Matthew informs our soul care: through the notion of the Christian virtue of endurance.

One thing that has struck me in recent years as I have pondered Christian psychology and counseling is how there does not seem to be much discussion of the virtue of endurance. At least this is true in my experience with more popularized psychology, Christian or not. Maybe this is not as true in your professional practice, but the counselors who do speak much about endurance are probably the exception that proves the rule. What I mean is that in counseling we are obviously focused on “fixing” the problem, whether we see its root as exclusively one of sin that needs to be repented of or as purely chemical and thus in need of medical attention, or as for most of us, somewhere in between those extremes. This emphasis on “fixing” the problem that has brought the counselee to our office or living room couch is completely understandable and not a wrong goal. However, I wonder whether part of our frustration—and even more the frustration of our clients—is that we have lost the important note
in our counseling that many things must simply be endured in this fallen world and that such endurance is indeed a virtue (and thus pleasing to God and something that can be developed through practice). This is not to make trite the trial and pain of the situations our counselees are facing, but to suggest that there will often be benefit in including the notion of endurance in our overall counseling content.

The connection with Matthew on this score is quite profound. The idea of trials and troubles for Jesus’ disciples in this world is a strong Matthean theme. For example, although up to this point in the story of Matthew there has been no mention of suffering, the Beatitudes in chapter 5 conclude with an emphasis on the reality of persecution for those who follow Christ in this world (Matt. 5:10-11). This continues and is amplified throughout the narrative with much discussion of the suffering that Jesus’ disciples will face, as in Matthew 10, with Jesus’ many predictions of his own coming suffering, and with the prediction of trials and persecutions before the end of all things comes (Matt. 24-25). There is also much talk from the lips of Jesus about the high personal cost of following him, such as the saying that “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man [and therefore his disciples as well] has nowhere to lay his head” (8:20), and the model of the disciples leaving everything to follow Jesus.

But the suffering of the Christian life is not just persecution and difficulty that comes from following Christ, but is also part of the general suffering of living in a fallen and decaying world; suffering that is common to all people. One example from Matthew is that of divorce. Divorce causes great suffering today, as it did in the ancient world as well, with especially devastating economic and social effects on the woman. Jesus teaches in Matthew 19 that the reality of divorce and its difficulties is a function of the fallen world and thus God does allow divorce (and even remarriage) in some cases. But his point is that this is not how things are supposed to be; the allowance of divorce from Deuteronomy is because of the Fall, but from the beginning, in Genesis, we see that man and woman are never meant to be separated once joined together (Gen. 19:1-9). Things are not as they should be in this fallen world.

Going beyond Matthew, we may observe how many of the passages that speak of hope in the New Testament also connect this directly with endurance. For example, we may note how Heb 11-12 is a list of people who endured because of hope. Likewise, listen to the words of Romans 5:2-5:

Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we boast even in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and this hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. [author's translation]

So too Romans 8:24-25 speaks of creation itself groaning under the weight of sin, awaiting with hope its own redemption, along with the redemption of those adopted as the sons of God.

And this brings home to our hearts again the central focus of the New Testament: the eschatological hope of a new Genesis/new Creation when all will be made right. The biblical emphasis on God-centered forward-looking endurance connects us to this central and essential New Testament reality of eschatological hope.

Now when it comes to how this connects with current psychological theory and practice, we can observe that once again Positive Psychology often gets some of this right. That is, for those within Positive Psychology who draw upon the riches of the ancient Virtue tradition, there is even explicit discussion at times of the need for perseverance. This is considered a virtue under the broader category of the virtue of Courage.8

This is a good thing that I applaud. But as with Positive Psychology overall, I may again suggest that without the vision and hope for God’s eschatological future on earth, there is no way to truly and enduringly re-source the perseverance that is needed to live in this world without giving up. Positive thinking techniques will not suffice.

Indeed, if I can push this a bit further, at times the short-term benefits of positive thinking and hope in this world can actually be a detriment to true long-term hope which requires endurance. What I mean is this: To find the true, Christian hope that we speak of here often means that our other hopes in this world are not fulfilled, but instead turn into disappointments; that the hopes of this world turn out to be circus peanuts when we were really longing for a Thanksgiving meal.

Even a classical Jungian psychologist such as James Hillman (1964) has seen this, at least in part. He argues that hope or optimism must itself die and be sacrificed for personal psychological progress to be made. Speaking on the issue of suicide, the ultimate end of hopelessness, Hillman (as quoted in Watts, 2000) sees in this a time of opportunity.

To be weak and without hope . . . . is often a highly positive condition at the beginning of [psycho-]analysis. It does not feel positive...
. . . . But death is going on and a transformation is probable. An analyst may encourage his patient to experience these events, to welcome them, even to treasure them – for some get better by getting worse. If he starts to hope with the patient to ‘get rid of’ them he has begun to repress in a medical way.’ (p. 59)

This is quite amazing to hear from a non-Christian perspective. Fraser Watts (2000) astutely comments on this:

The task of the therapist, as Hillman sees it, is to be “with” patients in their moments of hopelessness, and that is surely also sometimes the task of the Christian pastor. Hopelessness cannot always be cured, and perhaps should not be. Out of the collapse of optimism, a new hope can be rebuilt that does not depend on optimism. (p. 59)

God will indeed often crush our hopes and bring our desires to disappointments so that the necessary death to self might occur; that we might come to have a hope centered in him and not ourselves. Countless Christian testimonies include this element in their story – how before they could see God, he needed to take away some other hope. For example, a student of mine at the seminary recently told me about how his hopes to be a professional violist were dashed when he developed tendonitis that required surgery and put this dream to an end. The end result of this was his coming to faith in Christ. The point is that, once again, Positive Psychology will not be able to ultimately do what Christian Eschatology can – enable us to endure and persevere until the end.

Now how does this apply directly to our counseling practice? Very similar to what I argued above, we need to add in or re-balance our language with our counselees to include the grammar of endurance and perseverance. If our focus becomes exclusively or too heavily weighted only toward ‘fixing’ problems rather than looking to God with faithful endurance, we may short-circuit what God is doing in their lives and find ourselves fighting against God. A vision for endurance needs to be an important part of our counseling.

Conclusion
To return to our modified version of Tertullian’s question – “What does modern psychology have to do with the Gospel of Matthew?” – we may answer a resounding ‘Much’ or at least we should answer that in our daily counseling theory and practice. I rejoice in the vision of many in Christian psychology such as the Society for Christian Psychology today that our theory and practice be based on the wisdom of God as revealed in Scripture. I have suggested in this paper that at the core of the Bible’s witness is a worldview that gives the new people of God – those in Christ – a new family identity and a radical eschatological hope that is not just “pie-in-the-sky” wishful thinking, but is the end of the story of God’s grand work in the world, and is the story that we are caught up in as well. Let me exhort you, even as I exhort myself, to make this comprehensive vision the foundation of all that you do in your ministry to broken and Fall-bruised souls.

Notes
1One may also observe that Jesus celebrates the important Passover meal with his disciples, not his biological family.
2For discussion of this theme as well as its relation to other theological themes in Matthew, see Pennington (2007).
3I would refer also to the excellent material by Kevin Vanhoozer (in press) presented at the same conference as this paper. In one session, he addressed the issue of Christians finding our identity through our union with Christ as the way to solve our congenital status anxiety defect.
4See also my review of the book in Pennington (2002).
5For discussion of the intertextual meaning of this verse and how the book of Genesis informs Matthew, see Pennington (2008).
6This language of “moral cosmology” comes from William Schweiker (2000). He means by it “the beliefs and valuations, often tacit in culture, about how human beings orient themselves rightfully and meaningfully in the texture of the physical cosmos” (p. 126).
7A great, succinct explanation of the idea of redemption as restoration of the creation order and mandate is Wolters (2005).
8See for example the chart of virtues in Carr (2004, p. 52), as well as the discussion of virtue in several of the essays in Linley and Joseph (2004).

Jonathan T. Pennington, Ph.D., University of St. Andrews, is Assistant Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of a number of Greek and Hebrew resources as well as several books and articles on the Gospels. This article is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Psychology in Schaumburg, Illinois, in September 2008. I am thankful to the organizers of the conference for inviting me, a New Testament scholar, to participate in this important gathering of professional counselors. I am also grateful for the positive feedback given by the attendees and for the formatting work done by my teaching assistant, Brian Davidson. Email address: jpennington@southern.edu.
References


Identifying Character Strengths and Virtue as the Efficacious Component of the Therapist’s Person

Donald A. Russell

Providence Theological Seminary

Therapeutic potency of the therapist’s person may be accurately and helpfully understood as activation of the therapist’s character strengths and virtues. Although personal attributes are understood to be crucial to therapist effectiveness, a vocabulary has been lacking to meaningfully discuss and measure this personal dimension of therapist effectiveness. The construct of virtues within the Church provides a useful language and solution for this dilemma. The development of Positive Psychology offers a useful classification system and offers a useful elaboration and further detailing of virtues and character strengths. Some observations and implications based on preliminary, exploratory research of Christian therapists’ use of their character strengths in their clinical practice are discussed. This includes character’s contribution to alliance-building, therapeutic effect, and ethical adherence. Cultivation of character is discussed, including its relationship to one’s spiritual life. Proposals are made for counselor-training programs to include intentional development of character strengths and virtue.

Psychology’s Current Understanding of Therapist Potency

There is a broad-based consensus that effectiveness in psychotherapy practice is due in large part to personal attributes of the practitioner (Evans, 1992; Frank, 1973; McConnaughy, 1987; Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1995). Therapists from virtually every theoretical perspective attest that the quality of the therapist’s person is an effective curative factor in the therapeutic dyad. Jerome Frank (1973) made this clear in his landmark work, *Persuasion and Healing*: “Although the therapist’s training and his class position relative to that of his patient affect the therapeutic relationship, personal characteristics and attitudes of the therapist and patient may well be more important” (p. 183). Frank developed a strong case not only for the existence of interpersonal persuasion in the therapeutic relationship, but also advocated for its use in therapy.

Carl Rogers (1961) developed this perspective further. Of particular importance were his oft-referenced necessary conditions for therapeutic change. Rogers framed those conditions of genuineness, acceptance, and empathy as attitudes of the therapist. At times, Rogers termed these as qualities of the therapist (Raskin & Rogers, 1995). Other writers have revisited this theme more recently (Herman, 1993; Lambert, 1992; Miller et al. 1995). Lambert (1992) estimated that the quality of the therapeutic relationship fostered by the therapist accounts for 30% of the positive out-
come in psychotherapy.

George and Cristiani (1995) name a set of personal characteristics that they believe contribute to effectiveness as a counselor. These characteristics include openness to, and acceptance of one’s own experiences; self-awareness; awareness of one’s own beliefs and values; open-mindedness; capacity to take risks; capacity to develop warm and deep relationships; genuineness and authenticity; capacity to accept personal responsibility for one’s own actions; realistic levels of aspiration; curiosity about personality and human behavior; possession of a sense of humor; and intuition. George and Cristiani used the term personal traits; however, the proximity of these traits to character strengths is clear. McConnaughy (1987) summarized this with the comment, “It is the character [italics added] and interpersonal style of the therapist” (p. 303) that contributes to therapeutic competence. Particularly, “flexibility, genuineness, respectfulness and ability to deal effectively with affect” are therapist variables that contribute to effectiveness according to McConnaughy (p. 309).

Implications for Therapist Training

The process of training psychotherapists is perhaps the arena where the lack of a clear understanding of character and virtue is most evident and problematic. A survey of counseling textbooks reveals general agreement that competence to practice includes not only skill and knowledge, but also the presence of positive personal attributes (Corey, Corey & Callahan, 2003; Evans, 1992; George & Cristiani, 1995). The question of whether this personal competence should be possessed by an applicant upon entrance into training, or cultivated during training, has not been answered with consensus. Further, the question of whether the lack of this personal competence should prevent graduation or licensure is not settled.

In the opinion of Johnson and Campbell (2002), “Not all applicants to the profession possess the necessary character and fitness attributes that would enable them to effectively and safely serve the public and the broader profession” (p. 46). They also found, however, that many directors of professional psychology programs did not have confidence that their screening processes for admission were effective in this regard. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) provides some criteria for counselor-trainee selection and admission criteria. Among them is consideration of “each applicant’s potential success in forming effective interpersonal relationships in individual and small-group contexts” and “each applicant’s openness to self-examination and personal and professional self-development” (CACREP, 2000, Sect V, I, 2, 5). Unfortunately, CACREP does not operationalize these selection and admission criteria.

Likewise, in the training process, there is a little agreement on how to best accomplish the cultivation of these attributes, and uncertainty over whether it is within the mandate of training programs to form this part of the professional-in-training. Lamb, Cochran and Jackson (1991) recommended that the evaluative domains addressed by counselor-educators include “personal functioning (e.g., awareness of self, use of supervision, management of personal stress)” (p. 291). This agrees with CACREP standards related to the ongoing assessment of students in training that should include assessment of the students’ personal development (CACREP, 2000). Unfortunately, there is a lack of literature on the evaluation of trainees during the training process in the area of their personal characteristics (Corey et al. 2003; Hensley et al. 2003).

The Church’s Seven Virtues

Of course, character and virtue were not discovered in 20th century psychotherapy! The Church has a well-developed and rich tradition of virtue. The following discussion will, for the sake of space, focus on the conception of virtue developed by Aquinas.

In Aquinas’ thinking, people are capable of becoming many things, but called to become one thing. Human beings are summoned to be a friend of God. This is not an automatic process. It is a process that requires the development and practice of special habits which Aquinas called virtues. This pursuit of the one calling from among the many possible “becomings” requires a single-hearted focus. It requires attaching to certain things and detaching from other things, and it requires the fostering of a special and particular direction in one’s life (cf. Roberts, 1997a, 1997b). According to Aquinas, the virtues work to restrict or diminish possibilities by steering one away from some possibilities and toward other, preferred possibilities. Through this narrowing down of possibilities, the person becomes increasingly familiar with the good, which is the task of the moral life (Wadell, 1992).

The virtues have two effects on the person who participates in them in this way. First, they change the person. A habit, says Aquinas, represents a modificaton of a subject (Wadell, 1992). They are transformative because through them persons take on qualities and characteristics they did not previously have. The self is changed. Second, virtues change the person in a particular and special way. The person who participates in virtues is changed toward the fulfillment of one’s intended potential - friendship with God. Virtues are the middle term between who a person is right now and who that person is called to be.

Aquinas described seven virtues in his Summa
The virtue of charity, which also perfects the will, concerns the love and friendship which unites the human being to God. For the Christian moral life, the virtue of charity held a special relationship with all the other virtues. It was the mother of the virtues. As a mother gives birth to a child, charity gives birth to all genuinely virtuous behavior. This is so because, for Aquinas, charity is not only a particular kind of behavior, but also constitutes a particular kind of life (Wadell, 1992). Each other virtue comes to life as an expression of the intimacy one has with God. Aquinas argued that when God infuses charity into the person, He infuses all of the other moral virtues as well.

Among the cardinal virtues, the most important is prudence, according to Aquinas. Prudence is right judgment about what needs to be done. It supplies discernment and wisdom to matters that require skill in fathoming how “good” can be done. Prudence strives to figure how one must act in order to be successful in our desire to do good. If prudence is the ability to know what needs to be done, justice is doing what needs to be done in the way that it needs to be done. Justice is right action.

Finally, the cardinal virtues of temperance and courage are related. These virtues focus on the emotions such as fear and timidity that make the doing of good difficult. To have courage is to persevere in times of hardship for the sake of what we love and do not want to lose (Wadell, 1992). Temperance “tamps” on one’s emotions either up or down. Too little emotion makes one listless and apathetic. Too much emotion makes one impetuous. Either extreme prevents virtuous action. “Temperance shapes the emotions into their most appropriate expression, using them to empower virtuous behavior instead of obstructing it” (Wadell, 133).

Current Research in Character Strengths and Virtues
Positive psychology is a new field and movement within secular psychology. Positive psychology represents a shift from the obsession of psychology with pathology towards also studying human flourishing and the cultivation of positive qualities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). At the personal psychological level, it investigates valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the level of overall personality functioning, it investigates positive individual traits. At the group level, it is interested in civic virtues and institutions that move individuals toward being better citizens or better members of an organization.

Tan (2006), in his review of this emerging field, has called it a refreshing movement. But he also has cautioned against a psychology that attempts positive functioning without Christ as the meaningful center. Tan joins with Crabb (2004) in advocating a cautious pursuit of happiness that acknowledges that genuine joy comes from relationship with God. Positive psy-
character strengths and virtues from a variety of philosophical and religious traditions as opposed to extrapolating from psychological theory. From this, Peterson and Seligman have proposed six core virtues as being universal across cultures and time. The six core virtues identified are wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

These six virtues correspond acceptably with those of Aquinas. Courage, justice, and temperance appear on both lists. Humanity corresponds with charity; transcendence with faith and hope; and wisdom and knowledge with prudence. Of course, the mechanisms for establishing the theological virtues are described quite differently by each proposal. A virtue might be expressed or manifested in a number of different strengths. Peterson and Seligman (2004) proposed 24 strengths of character. These character strengths represent 24 different ways to express six different virtues. Wisdom and knowledge may be expressed through the character strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective. Courage may be expressed through bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. Humanity may be expressed through strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence. Justice may be expressed through citizenship, fairness, and leadership. Temperance may be expressed through forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-regulation. Transcendence may be expressed through appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman).

Preliminary Analysis of Character Strengths and Virtues of Christian Counselors

The present organization of strengths into virtue groupings was done on the basis of natural affinities, e.g., curiosity is an instance of the virtue of wisdom because it is related to knowledge and its use. Peterson and Seligman (2004) acknowledge that the grouping of the strengths within the six virtues is tentative and open to revision. To advance research of character strengths and virtues, Peterson and Seligman in collaboration with the Values in Action (VIA) Institute developed the VIA Inventory of Strengths as a means of measuring character strengths and virtues that are believed to contribute to a life well-lived. This is a 240 item web-based “face-valid self-report questionnaire that used five point Likert-style items to measure the degree to which respondents endorse items reflecting various strengths of character that comprise the VIA classification” (Peterson & Park, 2004, p. 440).

A preliminary, exploratory analysis of character strengths and virtues of practicing Christian counselors was conducted stemming from a larger analysis of practicing counselors in Canada. The larger research used the VIA Inventory of Strengths. Approximately 1000 counselors were invited to take the survey and received in return a brief description of their top-scored character strengths. Fifteen participants were then invited to complete a one-half hour telephone interview regarding their use of their top strength in relation to their clinical work. A full discussion of this larger research project can be found in Russell (2006).

Among the fifteen interviewees, seven voluntarily self-identified as Christian in the interview. Six preliminary observations are based on the semi-structured interviews with these seven Christian counselors. These will be presented then discussed in more detail below.

1. Christian therapists have an accurate self-perception of their highest strengths. The interviewees were asked whether they concurred with the identification of their highest character strength. Each Christian therapist in this sample expressed strong agreement with their highest strength score. In some cases, this was simple self-knowledge. In other cases, respondents reported a process of confirmation from clients. For example, one respondent with the high-scored strength of honesty reported:

   “I feel and I’ve actually heard feedback from clients that there’s a respect that’s gained because of that honesty. Clients have told me, ‘you’re the first one that actually told me the truth, and I believe you.’”

This observation may reflect self-knowledge gained through professional training or through Christian discipleship, or both.

2. Christian therapists perceive the character development of their professional preparation as mostly vague and unintentional. About half the respondents could not recall explicit attention to character development in their professional training. A few others recognized the process upon careful reflection during the interview. One respondent reflected out loud on character
Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology

development in training as follows:
“Prudence and self-regulation would have been. Well, prudence would have certainly been taken to law, with a prudent decision-making and prudent decision-making in ethics as well as what is good for oneself as a counselor. And that would also connect to self-regulation then.”

3. Christian therapists use their character strengths in their clinical practice to build a therapeutic relationship. A strong theme that emerged from these interviews was that Christian therapists believe their character strengths enhance their capacity to effect a therapeutic alliance. The strengths activated varied as did the specific mechanisms described by the respondents. However, the common theme was that the strength under discussion facilitated the therapeutic alliance. For example a therapist who scored highly in the strength of fairness described the contribution as follows:
“It brings on trust very, very quickly with my clients. That is one of the things that I’ve noticed, and I’ve also noticed that with my sense of fairness with them they are very free to share with me whatever is happening. They’re not afraid to suggest anything to me that they might like to do.”

In another example, a respondent described the relationship between her character strength and empathy. An illustrative comment follows below.
“It’s much easier for me to put myself also in their shoes, so not only do I have increased empathy for the people because I treat them fairly, but it’s also easy to see the same things they’re going through happening to me and to my family, so in some ways, it also breaks down that barrier of protection that I’m different from them, or I’m the teacher and they’re the people to be taught.”

Each Christian counselor recognized that their character strength facilitated a therapeutic alliance. The mechanism described by the counselors varied however.

4. Many Christian therapists use their character strengths to facilitate therapeutic goals. Some Christian therapists believe that their character strengths produce a therapeutic effect. For example, one participant who scored highly in the strength of fairness described the impact of his fairness as follows:
“I think the effect that it has on abusers is actually not to be angry anymore. I think that would be the main thing: that it shocks them. And my clients then feel safe enough to put their anger down, and then talk about and to be who they really want to be, even though they have not accepted it. It’s that shock of acceptance.”

A respondent with a strength of curiosity described the therapeutic impact as follows:
“I think a good therapist acts as a mirror or a lens for them, so that asks them the right kind of questions and lead into their own truths rather than imposing our own views of truth onto their lives. I think that to do that is spiritually disempowering….I think that my gifts work out very well in helping lead people to their own needs, to their own truths.”

In addition to alliance-building, apparently, some Christian therapists believe that their character strengths are themselves therapeutic. The way in which this therapeutic end is accomplished differs according to the therapist’s high-scored strength.

5. Character strengths are experienced by Christian therapists as intrinsic attributes intentionally cultivated. Respondents explained in a variety of ways why and how they believed they had developed the strengths of character identified in the VIA Inventory of Strengths. For some, it was clearly connected to their faith. One therapist with a high score in the strength of gratitude described her motivation for being grateful as follows:
“I have a very, very sound faith…. I am a believer in Jesus Christ. I believe that all of my background, all of the things that I’ve experienced are there to help me grow as a person, and that I am not a selfish individual, that I am a person placed on this earth to help other people.”

This therapist apparently relates her previous life experiences to the cultivation of her character strengths through the mediating term of Ephesians 2:10, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (NRSV).

A therapist who scored highly in the strength of honesty described her motivation as follows:
“It’s a part of who I am, an important quality that I value… It’s something that I was taught, probably, definitely primarily in growing up, so it’s a quality I value in that way too. It has to do with personal integrity, my love of the truth. Because I think that that is the key to healing actually, understanding the truth.”

Evidently, this therapist considers the strength of character to be an intrinsic part of who she is, and also that it is a part of her self that she has deliberately associated with and cultivated (Roberts, 1997b). The therapist elaborated that she understood this intentional cultivation to be part of her spiritual development:
“A parallel education that I have always done along with my clinical professional development has been spiritual development, and that to me is where I develop values, like honesty, compassion, wisdom, those types of things. So that has been on-going and intensive alongside my professional development. In fact I think it’s more important than my professional development in lots of ways.”

Some respondents identify also, however, that they have made conscious choices to use the experiences and opportunities positively. For example, a respondent with a high score in the strength of gratitude described her consent to the shaping of these experiences as follows:

“Well, it’s a soul-felt appreciation for the situation that I’m in….. It’s really part of who I am now, it’s not something that has always been there, but I’m growing, and it is still growing…. having chosen to be in the moment, being fully open to whatever is happening….and just that acceptance of whatever is going to be will be and I will be totally present to it, opening myself to it.”

It appears that some Christian therapists understand that these strengths of character are potential parts of the self. These counselors identify that experiences in their personal and professional life provide opportunities that activate growth in character, but those opportunities must be consented to for the character development to take place.

6. Some Christian counselors believe their character strengths make them more ethical practitioners. In a variety of ways, counselors identified that their strengths of character made their practice more ethical. In some cases it prevented discrimination. A respondent with a strength of fairness described it as follows:

“I just turn to myself and feel grateful for the fact that there is someone new coming into my life, and ask for help in being whatever help I can be with this person….and if there were the possibility of any negative vibes that I might get from the person, it helps me to dispel them and me to be totally present for who they are, even though there might be something about what the person is doing that I don’t approve of.”

In another case, a respondent reported that her character strength of honesty helped her fulfill the virtue ethic of veracity (Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996). She described the relationship in the following way.

“Even if the truth is a difficult one, like for example, ‘if you tell me your feeling at this level of anger and hatred towards this person, there could be a safety issue and we’re going to have to talk to somebody else’. Or, you know, ‘I’m taking notes on this in my file that could be accessed by your lawyer’. So, and I’m just kind of straight forward and honest in that way.”

A respondent with a strength of fairness described how it helped him practice only within his scope of competence.

“And for me, that’s part of my strength of being fair with them and also telling them what my limitations are as far as if I am counseling them as to what I feel perhaps they may need to go elsewhere or whatever. Maybe I can’t supply that particular thing, and to me that is part of fairness.”

These counselors reported that their character strengths contributed to some very key ethical areas: respect for diversity, non-discrimination and monitoring one’s effectiveness. This relationship between character strengths and ethical practice has great significance for the profession of counseling. It reflects the Meara et al. (1996) assertion that true ethical practice requires adherence to ethical principles and also to virtue ethics which focuses on character traits of the counselor and non-obligatory ideals to which professionals aspire. Character strengths and virtues may provide a vocabulary and context for more thorough discussions about virtue ethics in counselor training programs.

Discussion
It is certainly encouraging to discover Christian therapists know their character strengths! Of course, there was no particular reason to believe that one would be blind to one’s own character strengths. On the contrary, believers are both commanded (Mt 7:1-5; Ps 139:23-24; 1Cor 11:28) and assumed (Ps 42:5-7; Prov 20:27; Rom 2:19) to be growing in self-knowledge through their Christian life. The normal Christian life is shaped by two simultaneous and interdependent movements of discovery: discovery of God and discovery of self. For example, Calvin’s opening words of his The Institutes of the Christian Religion: “There is no deep knowing of God without a deep knowing of self and no deep knowing of self without a deep knowing of God” (1536, 1995, p. 15), and Thomas a Kempis’ (1993) observation: “a humble self-knowledge is a surer way to God than a search after deep learning” (p. 20).

It appears that there is a lack of intentional and explicit character development in at least some counselor-training programs. This finding reflects other literature in this area (Evans, 1992; Hensley et al., 2003; Johnson & Campbell, 2002, 2004). This deficiency is troubling, since the nature of the profession of coun-
seling is such that it requires both professional and personal competence (Hensley et al., 2003, Lamadue & Duffey, 1999). Furthermore, the broad consensus that the therapist’s personal attributes play a significant role in the therapeutic change process would suggest that explicit attention to character development in the training process would be valuable. Important developmental outcomes are best addressed explicitly so as to better provide an opportunity for students’ informed consent and a pedagogical space for the growth to take place. Furthermore, intentional character development in the counselor-training curriculum would better prepare the therapist to appropriately teach about character. As Fowers (2000) notes, “[W]e learn about how to be virtuous by receiving guidance and encouragement from others who know more about virtue” (p. 115).

It is possible, of course that themes of character development were addressed in the training programs of these respondents, but the respondents interviewed simply did not recall due to time elapsed since their end of studies. The apparent lack of attention to character development may also reflect the theoretical orientation of the training programs. For example, a training program oriented towards a client-centered helping style may be more likely to make this theme explicit in their training while a training program with a cognitive-behavioral orientation may place less emphasis on character development.

It is significant that this sample of Christian counselors believe their character strengthens facilitate a therapeutic alliance. This observation is reflective of the relational mandate of life in Christ. As believers grow in Christ, they more strongly and clearly communicate the *imago dei*. This must include a high capability for relationship, as the Godhead Himself is in relationship. While this relationality may be expressed as a need or drive as articulated by some (Crabb, 1987, 1997), it may be more accurately expressed as a capacity to foster or create relationship. This observation is reflective of the rich philosophical tradition of the past concerning character and virtue. Aristotle, for example, in Books VIII and IX of *Nicomachean Ethics* asserts a close relationship between virtuous activity and friendship. Happiness, for Aristotle is virtuous activity and virtuous activity is inevitably inter-personal (Aristotle, 2000). This observation clarifies and strengthens the necessity of incorporating character development explicitly into counselor-training programs.

This finding also has significance in light of the recent re-emphasis on the quality of the therapeutic relationship as one of the most significant common factors in therapeutic effectiveness (Hubble, Duncan & Miller, 1999, Lambert, 1992, Miller, et al., 1995). Hubble et al. asserted that the therapeutic relationship is second only to client and extra-therapeutic factors in accounting for client improvement in therapy. Batchelor and Horvath (1999) wrote that the therapeutic relationship itself is chiefly influenced by the counselor’s facilitative attitudes and interventions including understanding and involvement, warmth and friendliness, and, most significantly, empathy. This serves to emphasize the wisdom of incorporating character development explicitly into counselor-training programs.

The report by some Christian counselors that their character strengths are not only alliance-building, but also therapeutic is noteworthy. This finding resonates with a strong conviction held by many Christian theorists that the availability of redemptive energy from the therapist is the curative force in Christian helping (Altius, 2001; Crabb, 1997). The Christian therapist’s union with Christ (Rom. 6:5, 1Cor. 6:17, 1Pet. 1:8) makes healing power available in the context of the therapeutic relationship. This finding resonates also with Existential-Humanistic theory which asserts that the quality of the counselor’s presence predicts the effectiveness of the therapy.

The therapists’ descriptions of their process of character strength development are confirming of theory and instructive for training programs. Although their descriptions varied, some common themes emerged. The descriptions provided by this small sample of Christian therapists seem to reflect the doctrine of the believer’s union with Christ. It seems that these therapists are accessing Christ’s indwelling presence and strengthening their identity in Christ through the practice of the character strengths. These Christian counselors describe this accessing as a process of consenting with opportunities presented to grow in character. They describe the strengths as latent, requiring consenting participation in their development. Interestingly, this decisional relationship to the development of strengths resembles Aquinas’ thinking of the believer’s mandate to choose from among the possible selves that she can become.

Some therapists consciously linked their consenting to character development to their spiritual growth journey. This suggests that the consenting is impelled by a calling from without to become a better person. This description supports the concept that the cultivation of character strengths and virtue is a grace of God that requires one’s participation. It also resonates with Scripture’s perspective on character and hardship. “Whenever trouble comes your way,” James counsels us, “let it be an opportunity for joy for when your faith is tested your endurance has an opportunity to grow... when your endurance has is fully developed you will be strong in character and ready for anything” (Jas. 1:2-4, NLT). Likewise, Paul identifies tribulation as
a raw ingredient in building proven character (Rom. 5:4).

For others, the consenting is not explicitly spiritual. In these cases, the therapist’s commitment to use opportunities for growth is driven by a sense of integrity or faithfulness to the self. There is a desire to grow to become a particular kind of person, but the impetus appears to be more internal (the kind of person I want to become) rather than external (the kind of person the Lord wants me to become). This understanding fits more closely with Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) understanding that any of these character strengths are cultivatable through self-effort.

This small sample of practicing Christian therapists report that character is important in the clinical work and the cultivation of character could be more of a priority in counselor-training programs. This preliminary, exploratory research indicates that programs would be improved by seeking and implementing strategies for awareness of cultivation of character and virtue by their trainees.

Summary
Psychotherapeutic theory has long asserted that beyond skill and knowledge there is a way of being that is therapeutic. Character and character strengths may offer the most helpful and clear way of thinking and talking about that preferred way of being. Small-scale exploratory research confirms the role character strengths play in making a contribution to alliance-building, therapeutic effect, and ethical adherence.

Scripture, of course, shares this perspective and goes further by providing a more compelling motivation than mere therapeutic effectiveness. Scripture reminds us that “people judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1Sam. 16:7, NLT). God is interested in the heart of a person where character resides. Character strengths are also dimensions of Christ-likeness. Christ offers us a portrait of fully-formed character. He is “a superlative personal agent, having a well-developed self and personality, and a flawless, virtuous character, all demonstrated through his actions in the course of his story” (Johnson, 2007).

So, as the therapist enacts character strengths in her therapeutic work, she is at the same time incarnating Christ to her client. It behooves practicing therapists to be intentional about cultivating their character as a means of increasing therapeutic effectiveness and as a form of worship.

Christian counseling training programs would do well to go beyond merely listing necessary qualities of therapists (cf. Corey et al., 2003; George & Cristiani, 1995) for trainees. Instead, this list of preferred attributes should be explicitly linked to character strengths and virtue, and ultimately linked to the character of God Himself incarnated in the Son. To have effective personal attributes as a therapist is to have the character of Christ.

The cultivation of character in Christian therapists is a dynamic interaction between the individual and his environment. Character is learned in the straightforward manner of teaching and modeling in the family and through mentors. Character is also developed through consenting to the refining process represented by life events including adversity. Saint Aquinas calls us to choose from among the various possible selves we might be and choose Virtue. Intentionally choosing to be good at every therapeutic opportunity builds virtue and character. Of course, Aquinas also reminds us that this is a work of grace, so that we might not boast.

Character matters! It behooves Christian practitioners and those that train them to use the vocabulary of the Church in speaking about the personal attributes of the professional helper. It is also crucial for practitioners to display and act in virtuous ways in their practice for the sake of effectiveness and worship.

References

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Donald A. Russell, Department of Counseling, Providence Theological Seminary, Otterburne, MB CANADA R0A 1G0. E-mail: don.russell@prov.ca

Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology


Interview with C. Stephen Evans: Humanizers versus Limiters of Science, the Role of Philosophical Assumptions in Psychology and Reasons for Dualism

C. Stephen Evans

Baylor University

Michael A. Cantrell

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

MAC: By my count, you have written four books and over twenty articles on issues in psychology. Let us get started by talking about your first book, *Despair: A Moment or a Way of Life?* (Evans, 1971). That was three years before you received your doctorate at Yale University. Why not tell us when you wrote the book and what it is about.

CSE: Well, I wrote the book between 1968 and 1970. The first draft of the book was actually done as a senior honors thesis in college. I was not thinking of the book so much as related to psychology as related to a sort of quest for meaning. Existentialism was sort of in its heyday on college campuses, and I was interacting with Sartre, Camus, Dostoevsky, and others. It was the first time I had really encountered their thought, and the book was a response to them and also an attempt to ask in what ways reading them could be helpful both to Christians and to non-Christians. It seemed to me that there is a sense in which Christianity is the answer to the questions of “What is life all about? Why are we here?” I wrote the first draft as an undergraduate, but it was not like I completed the final book as an undergraduate. It was good enough that InterVarsity noticed it and sent it out for review. They said you probably need to re-work it, and that is what I did. The first year to year and half that I was in graduate school, when I was not working on graduate coursework, my “fun” work was re-writing that book.

MAC: So, how did your interests in the existentialists develop into broader psychological topics?

CSE: I guess I always had a sense as a philosopher that I was primarily interested in the self. So I think that that interest was there from the beginning. It was not like it came out of the existentialists; it was more like I was interested in the existentialists because they were addressing questions about the self that I found interesting. I actually began a doctoral dissertation on the concept of the self in Gabriel Marcel, a French existentialist writer. But I aborted that after working on it for two months because Marcel was too unsystematic and unfocused, too elusive as a writer.

MAC: In your second book, *Preserving the Person: A Look at the Human Sciences* (Evans, 1985), you investigate the “attack on the person” carried out by Freud, Skinner, Durkheim, and others. What was the motivating concern for you writing the book?

CSE: Well, that book is a little dated now. The psychology of Skinner is no longer the dominant type of psychology—and Freud was never that popular among academic psychologists, although he has had a tremendous impact on Western culture generally. But in the seventies, when I was thinking about those issues, behaviorism was still dominant in psychology. And in the other social sciences, there were what I would call “objectivizing” approaches that basically wanted to study human beings as if we were objects—figure out how to tinker with us and push our buttons and fix us. I thought that these kinds of approaches just were not doing justice to human subjectivity. The seminal idea of *Preserving the Person* emerged from my thinking about the existential psychologists like Rollo May who were reacting against behaviorism and saying that we have to do psychology in a different way. But then I noticed that there were other people who said no, May’s kind of work just is not psychology; be scientific (they would say) be objectivizing, but then let us draw a limit or a boundary to what science can do. So I came up with the distinction between what I call “limiters of science” and “humanizers of science.” The limiters of science basically said that science is mechanistic and reductionistic, but that is fine as long...
as we recognize the limits of science. The others, the humanizers of science, say, “No we need to reform the way science is done.” That idea, the clash between humanizers and limiters, I found to be very fruitful—not only for understanding the various approaches made by Christians who were responding to the crisis of reductionism, but for making sense of what different secular thinkers were trying to do. I had a conversation once with Nick Capaldi, a non-Christian philosopher (who is now a theist). He told me that Preserving the Person was the best book on the human sciences that he had ever read!

And you know, I think even though some of the psychologists and other thinkers discussed in Preserving the Person are no longer the center of discussion, the issue the book raises—the issue of how do we respond to reductionistic accounts of the self, how do we do justice to what we might call human subjectivity or human agency while still allowing scientific study of the human being—is still very important.

In the book, I took a fairly neutral approach to answering this question. I said that both the humanizer of science and the limiter of science have important things to say for themselves, and I still think that is true. The two approaches have different strengths and different weaknesses. Last year, I was in Scotland, and I got to spend a lot of time talking with Malcolm Jeeves, who is a very distinguished psychologist and neuroscientist. Jeeves, to me, is a kind of paradigm of the limiter of science. The difficulty for the humanizer of science is the issue of how to keep the science rigorous. By and large, I think that psychologists who work directly with people, clinical psychologists, tend toward the humanizer of science approach while research psychologists tend toward the limiter of science approach. It may be that different approaches are appropriate for different kinds of problems—and maybe both are legitimate.

**MAC:** So how would you characterize the role played by philosophical assumptions in psychology?

**CSE:** This is a very important issue, I think. By and large, most psychologists who are trained in research-oriented programs absorb the view of psychology that you get in the typical Introduction to Psychology textbook, that is, that psychology is a science, that it became a science by differentiating itself from philosophy, and that it became differentiated from philosophy when it became focused on empirical data and evidence. This attitude is very much part of the DNA of many psychologists. They do not realize that their work is informed by philosophical assumptions; they have a sort of Joe Friday, “just the facts, ma’am” approach. Part of my work has been to argue that this attitude exemplifies a naive philosophy of science. I have tried to help psychologists see the way in which philosophical assumptions are present and are shaping what they are doing as psychologists already. It is not so much that you ought to be thinking about philosophical questions, it is more that you are doing philosophy, and you have been all along, just as you have been speaking prose all your life without realizing it.

How do these philosophical assumptions come into the picture? Well, often they come into the picture in the way that psychologists define their concepts. Also, in my book, Wisdom and Humanness in Psychology (Evans, 1996b), I argue that when psychologists interpret empirical research, particularly when they try to assess when correlation should be interpreted in terms of cause and effect—that there is an important role here for a narrative understanding. A narrative understanding is necessary for understanding human behavior. Psychologists in fact operate on philosophical assumptions all the time; I argue just that they need to be more explicit about this.

**MAC:** What are some examples of the way in which psychologists operate on philosophical assumptions without even knowing it?

**CSE:** A classic example of this can be found in sociology. In Emile Durkheim’s classic study of suicide, he defines suicide as any action a person takes that the person knows will result in that person’s death. Well, on that view, a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his buddies is committing suicide. You can go out and collect your statistics, but you have to recognize that the research you are doing is not going to capture what most of us mean in ordinary life when we talk about suicide, because an important part of suicide in ordinary life is that there is an intention. The soldier who jumps on that grenade does not intend his own death—he intends to save his buddies. And if, by some miracle, his body armor saves him, he will be happy! He will not say, darn it, I tried to commit suicide and it did not work! So, intentions are a big part. And as soon as you talk about intent, you talk about the meaning of an act. But to understand meanings, you are already in the realm of philosophy.

Another example might be the concept of aggression. How do you define aggressive behavior? I want to argue that aggression has to be defined in terms of someone who is using force in an unjustified or unwarranted way. So right away, in order to talk about aggression, you have to talk about when it is justified to use force. You are in the realm of ethics. You are asking normative questions. I do not think any “value-free” or “value-neutral” conception of aggression is viable.
Psychology used to be oriented negatively, concerned with researching pathology, what makes us bad or dysfunctional. One of the things I like that has happened in psychology in the last 10-15 years is that there is more and more study of positive things like friendship, gratitude, hope, and courage. Obviously it makes a big difference how we conceptualize all of these things. I think good psychological work will go hand-in-hand with philosophical reflection.

The reason behaviorism died was that behaviorism tried to assume that we could observe and explain by simply looking at bodily movements. But in fact, it is action that counts and actions are defined not simply by bodily movements, but by meaning and intentions and how agents understand. That is not to say that the agents always have the best understanding of what they are doing, but even when we correct an agent's understanding about that agent's behavior, we still must do so by using a framework of meaning.

Many readers were distressed when *Wisdom and Humanness in Psychology* appeared. Some of the more empirical psychologists, whom I had great respect for—people like David Myers and Malcolm Jeeves—took me to be attacking them. They took me to be saying that psychology should not be an empirical science; that is a definite misunderstanding of the book. I was trying to say that psychology has multiple dimensions, and empirical research is very important; but I wanted that empirical research to be done in a more philosophically self-conscious way. It was not an attack on empirical research in any way. In fact, I think many of the more humanistic psychologists need a good dose of hard-headed empirical research. They need to check their armchair speculations by going out and making some empirical observations.

**MAC:** In *Preserving the Person,* you say that “in a theistic universe, personal categories are not mere surface phenomena, late fortuitous arrivals on the evolutionary scene. If God exists, then the universe itself is personal to its very core. In such a universe, belief in the personhood of human beings makes good sense.” Do you think that Christians are in a better position than others to understand the nature of human personhood?

**CSE:** A theme of a lot of my work is that we need to steer a middle course between reductionism and self-deification. In my view, the biblical view of the self is well-balanced. On one hand, we are creatures made from dust; we are animals. But the balance is that we are special animals, we are made in the image of God and have a special role. When we lose our Christian roots, there is a tendency to go to one of those two extremes: either to move in the direction of reductionism as in B. F. Skinner’s (1971) *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* or to move in the direction of self-deification where we become the center of the universe, where we invent morality and we are godlike creators and our freedom is unlimited.

It seems to me that Christians have an advantage of staying away from both of those errors. The way that Kierkegaard would put it, in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1980), is that we should be able to avoid self-deification or going off into infinity, because we are creatures, and we stand before God as finite, limited creatures. But on the other hand, we should be able to avoid reductionism because we stand before a God for whom all things are possible. God is the source of possibility and possibility is what pulls us away from reductionism.

**MAC:** Would you argue that what you call the “mystery of personhood” is apologetically useful?

**CSE:** In my book, *Why Believe?* (Evans, 1996a) I have a chapter where I look at aspects of the self that do not really make sense if you think of human beings purely as the product of a blind, mechanistic universe. Those aspects include human freedom. And of course, many mechanists deny human freedom, but I would argue that it is very hard existentially to do that. As we live our lives, we necessarily assume a kind of practical faith that when we are faced with a choice, we really do have a choice. We do not try to predict what we are going to do; we try to decide what we should do. So freedom is an important part of the story.

I think that our yearnings for eternity, for some good that transcends the natural goods of the universe—the sort of thing that C. S. Lewis talks about in *Surprised by Joy*—that is another part of the story. Obviously the naturalist can say that yearning is an illusion, it is a desire for something that does not exist. But if it is a fundamental human need, we ought at least to ask the question, could the fact that we human beings have this fundamental need say something important about where we came from? This is not an anti-evolution argument. The argument could go like this: if we are in some way the product of a natural evolutionary process, and we have all of these characteristics that cannot be explained by blind matter in motion, then what does that suggest about the natural world itself? The natural world itself should be understood as the expression of a purpose. Like most apologetic arguments, I do not believe that these arguments are knock-down, drag-out proofs that are going to grab the unbeliever by the throat and say, “Look at this argument, this is going to make you believe.” That is not the way arguments work. I see them as what I call “natural signs,” clues, pointers, things that
God has placed in us and in the world, and if we are attentive and want to see God, they point us toward God. I think that is the way that God wants us to come to him. He does not want to drag us by force; he wants us to respond to him in a way that respects our autonomy.

MAC: In *Wisdom and Humanness in Psychology*, you called for the development of a distinctively Christian psychology, a psychology that would reflect distinctively Christian convictions and values. What convictions and values do you see as a distinctive part of Christian psychology?

CSE: I think partly it would be a matter of bringing to bear Christian views about the value of persons and the nature of persons. We often have discussions about self-interest. We have a certain picture of the self, a kind of hedonistic picture where happiness is just a matter of being filled up with pleasant experiences. And by the way—this is a footnote—in spite of all the good things going on in positive psychology, I think some of the research on happiness is an exception because there is a tendency to define happiness in terms of subjective sensations or subjective states. As a matter of fact, many people who live very happy lives and who say that they live very happy lives may be people who have not always had lots of pleasant experiences; many of them will have had a lot of anxiety and hardship and things like that.

Not only do we bring to bear the value of persons, but the nature of persons so that we will see what should be valued for enriching life. I would want to say that someone who is happy has devoted himself or herself to helping others, to taking care of the poor, giving sacrificially, giving up “pleasure” for the sake of doing what he or she thinks of as right or noble, even if it is hard. Imagine a person who teaches in the inner city, in a public school that is really tough. Every day she comes home beaten down and feeling like she should quit. But, in some ways, if you asked me, “Is what she’s doing contributing to her well-being?”—well, if you have a Christian understanding of what well-being consists in, then it is. If you think of well-being as, “She has a lot of money and she feels good and she has a lot of time to enjoy herself and go to the gym,” then she does not have very much well-being. But if you think of well-being in terms of, “Is she becoming the kind of person that God wants her to be, the kind of person that in eternity she will be glad that she became?”—this is what I mean by a “distinctively Christian” conception of psychology, of selfhood, happiness, wellbeing, and the soul.

I think also that Christian conceptions about freedom are important, on the one hand, recognizing the importance of freedom and its realities, that we have a kind of responsibility, but also the limits—we are embodied, historical, finite creatures, so our freedom is greatly limited. It is not that we’re creating ourselves out of thin air.

Another important thing is the relationship between the self and the community. I think that much contemporary psychology is still very individualistic, influenced as it is by our Western culture. Just as a psychology that came out of Africa might be very different than a psychology that came out of North America or Europe, so perhaps a Christian psychology would be different from a psychology that came out of a secular mindset where there is a strong tendency to overvalue individual autonomy and to undervalue family and community relationships.

Ultimately, I think that Christians should not be afraid to ask questions about death and what happens after death. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a lot of interest in parapsychology. William James was interested in psychics and mediums and that was probably all rightly discredited, but I think that it is striking to think about how important it is that we are all going to die as human beings. So that is another area where I think distinctively Christian convictions and values can be brought to bear.

MAC: Do you see progress being made in the development of Christian psychology today?

CSE: I have had some disagreements with my good friend, Eric Johnson, over this. Eric has been campaigning hard for the development of Christian psychology—and I applaud him for it. But Eric has developed Christian psychology as a project that is to be distinguished from what earlier was called the project of “integrating” psychology and Christian faith, psychology and theology. I do not myself see the project of Christian psychology as a rival to or a replacement for integration—at least if integration is properly understood. Now, it makes a big difference what is being integrated. If one is talking about integrating psychology and theology as two academic disciplines, there are problems with that view. For one thing, theology is something that needs to be integrated with Christian faith just as much as psychology does! But for another, people like Eric say, then psychology and theology are going to be integrated, but psychology itself seems to be secular. So, you have an essentially secular discipline that is somehow going to be connected to theology, but that seems problematic because the major assumptions of secular psychology are not brought into question.

Let me say that that is not the way that I think of the project of integration. I think that the best prac-
titioners of integration—certainly my mentor, Arthur Holmes, never thought of it that way. As I understood it, integration is a matter of making something integral or whole—in this context, one’s own personal faith as a Christian in what one does as a scholar. So it is a matter of bringing wholeness to my life as a Christian and my life as a psychologist or philosopher or anything else. So integration in that sense is not bringing together two disciplines—psychology and theology—it is rather allowing my core convictions and commitments and values as a Christian to shape my life, to have an impact on the work I do as a psychologist. My own view is that when my Christian faith is integrated into what I do as a psychologist, one of the outcomes of that would be a Christian psychology.

Now, there are different kinds of Christian psychology. There is Christian psychology that is explicitly Christian, that wears its Christianity on its sleeve and shows the flag. I think there is Christian psychology that is only implicitly Christian—where your Christian convictions and values do shape the way you are doing psychology, but you do not advertise that because perhaps you are trying to get published in secular journals. You want to have an impact on the field, and it would be counter-productive to say, “Hey guess where I got all these ideas?—they came from my Christian faith;” that would be off-putting to non-Christians. I think there is also value in a kind of limiter of science view for someone whose Christian psychology is basically not that different from what secular psychologists are doing. But this is what this person is called to do as a Christian, and it still reflects his or her Christian faith.

Christian psychology as I understand it is a many-splendored thing that comes in different forms. What I want is a Christian psychology that can be practiced in the context of a Christian college, where explicitly Christian views are going to be welcomed, but I would also like to develop a Christian psychology that can be practiced in a secular university, where someone is going to have to be a bit indirect in terms of how this gets expressed. So I am still myself arguing for what I think of as the idea of integrating faith and learning, and I see Christian psychology not as a rival to the project of integration, but as a way of expressing that.

MAC: Do you think that we are in a better position today than we were twenty years ago in terms of the development of Christian psychology?

CSE: In some ways, we are. I think we still face grave problems, especially in psychology. Scholarly work is always done in particular communities and in particular contexts. We are naive if we think that contexts do not shape what we do and what we can do.

I want to have a plea for more appreciation of that fact within the Christian community. The situation of a Christian psychologist who is practicing in a church-based clinic is miles away from a Christian psychologist who is doing research at Ohio State University, or some other secular, land-grant state school. We need to have an appreciation for the fact that these different contexts are going to have an impact on the way in which our Christian faith can be expressed. We need to be not only tolerant but appreciative of what we can do for each other in those situations. I would be reluctant to see Christian psychology put forward as an ideal instead of the kind of stuff that gets done in secular universities.

Ideally, I would also like to see a kind of self-consciousness on the part of psychologists, a recognition that values and faith commitments enter into the way that psychology is done, where Christianity then might be welcomed as part of the conversation. But I am not naive enough to think that that is going to happen anytime soon, especially given the self-understanding of psychologists as scientists. It is very telling, if you look at what has been happening in psychology in the last ten years, more and more psychologists are detaching themselves from social science divisions and becoming a part of the divisions of natural science. More and more of the prestige in psychology departments goes to neurophysiologists. The social psychologists and clinical psychologists are kind of lowered in prestige, which shows that psychologists have an awful lot of desire to be scientists.

MAC: What kind of pressure will a psychologist who is concerned to do his or her work as a Christian face? Would you say that there is perhaps a kind of Kierkegaardian tension that Christian psychologists is likely to be faced with?

CSE: I would echo what I said about community and context here, but in a slightly different way. You might ask, “Why do not Christians just pull out of secular psychology departments and do their own thing. After all, the Church has a great history—we have Augustine, we have Pascal, we have Kierkegaard.” The answer to that, I think, is that psychology as an academic discipline is an important sphere of human endeavor. I would be reluctant—I would be sorry—if Christians just abandoned this sphere of human endeavor. Suppose that Christians just abandoned medicine or physics or law. These are all important spheres of human activity. And I am not a triumphalist here—I have no hope or desire for Christians to take over the university and suddenly make psychology Christian. But I think that it is important that there be Christian voices.

And if that is to be the case, then we have to rec-
Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology

CSE: First of all, Kierkegaard offers a kind of general view of the self. The self is a kind of synthesis of contrasting elements—finitude with infinitude, necessity with possibility. He understands that human selves are a work-in-progress; I am involved in making myself the person I become, and I do this always in relationship to others. One of the stereotypes of Kierkegaard that I have worked hard to dispel is the idea that Kierkegaard is an individualist in the sense of celebrating the lonely, isolated, autonomous individual. That is not true—Kierkegaard is well aware that we all are who we are by virtue of the relationships we have with others. He is interested in helping individuals develop a relation to God which would in some way relativize those human relationships. So, with the help of God, perhaps there would be times that I would be able to stand up to the crowd or to my friends’ pressure. The second area I think is very helpful is his concept of the stages on life’s way: aesthetic existence, ethical existence, and religious existence are extremely valuable. There you have Kierkegaard not only as a personality theorist, but also as a developmental psychologist.

I think Kierkegaard also helps us to see the limits of psychology. One of the things I think he is right about is the idea that sin cannot be adequately understood within the limits of psychology alone. He thinks that sin is a theological concept that requires a dogmatic conceptual framework. There is a lot in Kierkegaard that psychologists can benefit from.

MAC: Kierkegaard was a dualist. Would you consider yourself a kind of dualist as well?

CSE: I am definitely a dualist. This is a change. If someone read my book, Preserving the Person, you would see that that book is neutral on this question. Many of the limiters of science I discussed were non-reductive monists. I think in the last 25 years, there has been a helter-skelter rush in the Christian community, particularly in the evangelical community, away from two thousand years of Christian tradition on this point toward a kind of monism, which is often called non-reductive physicalism. I think this is a big mistake. I will not have time to fully explain all the reasons, but partly I think it is a misreading of Scripture. It is true that the Bible emphasizes unity, that there is a kind of wholeness of body and soul. But it is not a holism of a non-reductive materialist sort where I am my body. It is rather a kind of holism in which I am a self; I’m a bodily self, but I’m still a self. Being a self is not reducible to being a body. My identity is not exhausted by my body. The non-reductive materialists think they can hold on to this, but I do not think they can, and there are all kinds of reasons. One is I think ultimately it is difficult for them to make sense of freedom. Second, I think ultimately non-reductive materialists cannot make sense of what happens at death.

Sometimes people say that dualists depreciate the body. Well, that is a matter of failing to recognize that there are very different kinds of dualism. Platonic dualism does depreciate the body, but a metaphysical dualism of body and soul does not necessarily have to depreciate the body.

Someone else will raise an objection to dualism based on the resurrection of the body. Actually, I think that dualism is crucial for making sense of the resurrection. Whatever else one is going to say about the resurrected body, it is not identical with this body. This body is going to die, and over time it is going to decompose and be eaten by worms. So what makes my resurrected body my body? The answer is: because it is animated by me, by my self, by my soul. My soul is just my self. It is me understood in a certain way. It is important to say that I—my self—am not reducible to or identical to my body. Now, this does not mean that there is not a profound unity between the self and the body. In fact, the body is the form in which my self exists. There is a very intimate union. If I were going to draw a picture of my soul, I would draw a picture of my body. The body is the soul's outward expression.
It is very important that we not identify the soul and the body. Why have Christians done this? Partly I think it is bad biblical scholarship. I am not a biblical scholar, but that is my view. Partly, it is a kind of intimidation by the zeitgeist. The zeitgeist is materialistic, and we want to be materialistic, too. There is a great irony here, if you look at the philosophy of the mind-body problem. For materialist philosophers, human being have got to be merely physical beings; even though materialism is the majority view among non-Christian philosophers, the interesting thing is that lots of non-Christian materialist philosophers have a really hard time trying to figure out how materialism could possibly be true. They have a lot of trouble explaining consciousness, self-consciousness, freedom, and the fact that my thoughts have properties like intentionality—that they can be “about” other things. Brain states do not seem to have intentionality. It looks sort of interesting that Christians are jumping on the materialist bandwagon, when even the materialists themselves are almost in despair over their materialism. So I think it is a huge mistake.

There are also theological problems that arise when dualism is rejected. If we are not dualists in our anthropology or view of the self, then what happens to Jesus between his death and resurrection? Does he cease to exist? It sounds crazy to say that there was a point in time that the second person of the Trinity ceased to exist. But if he exists between his death and his resurrection, then what exists? It can’t be his body! The body is in the tomb—it is dead. I don’t see any way of making sense of Christ’s own resurrection without postulating an intermediate existence. And I think exactly the same is true for us.

I think that Christians should go for some sort of Thomistic dualism or perhaps a version of Cartesian Dualism. In one of my articles in Christian Scholars Review (Evans, 2005), I argue that a lot of the scientific findings that non-reductive physicalists think supports their view is completely compatible with dualism, perhaps makes more sense of the science than materialism can. So I do not think there are any scientific reasons for preferring materialism to dualism—but it has to be the right kind of dualism.

C. Stephen Evans (CSE) is University Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Baylor University in Waco, TX. A leading scholar of Soren Kierkegaard, he is also the author of numerous works in ethics, psychology, and the philosophy of religion. He may be contacted at C_Stephen_Evans@baylor.edu.

Michael A. Cantrell (MAC) recently received the Ph.D. in philosophy at Baylor University and is currently studying law in the William H. Bowen School of Law at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He may be contacted at Michael.Cantrell@gmx.com.

References
Review of McMinn and Campbell (2007) and McMinn (2008)

Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Approach and Sin, Grace, & Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm.

Bryan N. Maier, Edification Book Review Editor, Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, PA

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

Featured Review


Reviewed by Eric L. Johnson, Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

Many observers have noted that after a number of seminal works on integration were written in the 1970’s, the integration movement went into a long period of intellectual malaise, with very little new creative work being produced. Aside from a few interesting articles, and Jones & Butman’s (1991) very significant Modern Psychotherapies (and a few other exceptions), it seemed as if those original works were definitive, and integrationists simply assumed the validity of the integration paradigm and went about their integration.

However, things have changed dramatically in the past seven years, as a result of the impressive contributions of people like Steve Sandage (together with his former seminary colleague, LeRon Shults), Mark Yarhouse (and his coauthors), and the authors of the books that are the focus of this review (among others): Mark McMinn and Clark Campbell. As is well known, McMinn has been a major player in the integration movement for over 20 years, writing, for example, Cognitive Therapy Techniques in Christian Counseling (1991); Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling (1996); and Why Sin Matters (2004) along with many excellent research articles. Starting out at George Fox University, McMinn held the Rech Chair at Wheaton for 10 years, and returned to George Fox in 2006. Clark Campbell was his colleague at George Fox, and has recently become the dean of the Rosemead School of Psychology. Together, the two books under review here are exemplary of what I have called “strong conceptual integration” (Johnson, 2007, p. 89), for they are attempts to ground a well-developed cognitive-behavioral model of therapy (with a relational emphasis) in a foundational Christian teaching: the image of God.

Integrative Psychotherapy

The first five chapters of the McMinn and Campbell (2007) book lay a solid basis for what follows. Chapter 1 presents perhaps the most thorough discussion of the creation-fall-redemption paradigm in an integration book. Christian theologians and philosophers have identified this model as basic to a Christian view of humankind, so this alone makes the book notable. In chapters 2 and 3, the authors examine the contributions of the scientific revolution to the contemporary understanding of the healing of the soul, and provide good summaries of research on common factors in therapy, empirically-supported treatments, and the major models of cognitive therapy. They also offer a sophisticated Christian critique of the pragmatism and relativism that is often assumed in secular cognitive therapies. Chapter 4 contains an overview of the three
domains of human life that are addressed by this model of therapy (functioning, cognitive structure, and relationality). And in chapter 5, there is a useful defense of proper assessment and case conceptualization, long a strength of the cognitive-behavioral approach.

Without question, the most significant accomplishment of this book is the grounding of the entire model in the Judeo-Christian theological construct of the image of God (the imago Dei). The authors take three of the major classical distinctions in the doctrine of the image of God—functional, structural, and relational—and use them as the overarching framework for their model of psychotherapy and counseling. The image of God is commonly understood as the human capacity to resemble God in some core respects. The functional aspect of the imago Dei has historically pertained to the capacity of humans to exercise dominion over the creation as representatives of God on earth, illustrating God’s own lordship over the creation. The structural aspect consists of those traits of mature human beings that they share in common with God, for example, rationality, language use, emotion, volition, consciousness, and so on. The relational aspect has been a more recent addition to the theological discussion. This aspect has to do with the recognition that humans resemble the triune God precisely in their relationality and in their relations with one another.

McMinn and Campbell have organized their model of integrative psychotherapy (IP) around these three aspects of the image of God. Though not very clearly stated (unless I missed it), it would seem that a major implication of this approach is that the goal of IP is to help people become more well-developed images of God.1 This is a momentous stance to take, for this is a radical and coherent Christian reconstruction of psychotherapy and counseling from an integration standpoint. Rather than beginning with modern (or secular) psychology and letting it set the parameters for Christian soul care, and merely tacking on some Christian considerations to what is otherwise a secular model (the defining feature of weak conceptual integration), the authors use a foundational Christian teaching to establish the overarching structure of their model, which then they integrate with research and theory from secular psychology. Though some might question just how important this move is, from a Christian psychology standpoint the order of the organization of one’s model is terribly significant, because it points to what are the primary sources of one’s epistemological authority. It could be argued, in fact, that at least with reference to this conceptual ordering, this model is closer to the Christian psychology approach than any previous example of integration.

How do the authors relate these aspects of the image of God to therapy? With reference to the functional aspect, the authors bring in cognitive-behavioral therapeutic techniques that address the distressing symptoms a client may be experiencing, and they advocate using behavioral techniques (e.g., relaxation training, exposure methods) and cognitive restructuring (e.g., exploration of automatic thoughts, challenging negative thoughts) to alleviate these symptoms. The techniques are used to assist the client in managing himself, his relationships, and his environment, and therefore are considered compatible with the functional aspect of the image of God.

McMinn and Campbell suggest that cognitive schema therapy can be used to aid in the healing of the structural aspect of the image of God. They believe that one way sin has distorted the image of God is by the formation in childhood of intermediate and core beliefs about oneself and the world that do not accurately reflect reality. These deep beliefs are called schemas. “A schema is simply a structure that contains a representation of reality. Schemas are comprised of thoughts, assumptions and beliefs that help us maintain a sense of personal identity in the midst of a complex and ambiguous world, allowing us to simplify and understand our environment.” (p. 247). When maladaptive schemas are activated in the present, they can lead to serious distress, and when chronic, they can lead to significant psychopathology.

Relying on the work of Jeffrey Young and his colleagues at the Schema Therapy Institute, McMinn and Campbell seek to deeply integrate their Christian beliefs with schema theory. For example, while agreeing with other cognitive therapists that maladaptive schemas are often formed in early relational contexts, they point out that such schemas are also deformed by the original sin that afflicts all human beings (p. 265). Indeed, they suggest that the primary reason to work at the deepest cognitive levels is because original sin has compromised people’s deepest beliefs about themselves and their relationships (p. 289). The authors believe that Christian teaching offers healthy beliefs which can positively contribute to one’s wellbeing. For example, they suggest that Paul’s notion of the “new self” could be understood as an example of a schema (p. 267), which contributes to the development of a new identity and new behavioral and cognitive patterns in Christians.

Perhaps the major practical contribution of the book is the authors’ model of “recursive schema activation.” The goal in such therapy is first to reactivate the client’s maladaptive core beliefs in session and second to assist the client in objectifying them—a process they call decentering—so that the client can form healthier core beliefs. The ultimate goal, then, “is not to eliminate maladaptive schemas but to help clients better understand themselves and become healthier by distanc-
ing their true identify from their maladaptive core beliefs” (p. 272, italics the authors’). As a result, they wisely argue that counselors should not aim at a total resolution of the client’s psychopathology, which is often not possible in this life, but rather promote a more realistic approach to one’s life that includes growing self-awareness, the healthy grieving of one’s losses, and developing hope for the future by relying on God’s love in Christ. What is also notable about this orientation is the recognition that such core beliefs are often activated in the context of relationships, so this cognitive therapy approach relies strongly on the value of the therapist-client relationship.

This leads us to the third aspect of the image of God, discussed in the final section of the book. Here the authors make use of contemporary theories of relational therapy, including neo-Freudian, object relations, and family systems. As is well known, this kind of therapy takes longer and is more difficult, because one uses this modality to work with more challenging forms of psychopathology, like personality disorders. Therapy within this orientation focuses on the cultivation and maintenance of an affirming and secure “holding environment,” within which clients can renegotiate their basic relational stance in the world by means of the therapist’s loving, challenging support. When the therapist responds to the counselee’s entrenched mal-adaptive relational patterns (through eliciting maneuvers, testing behavior, and transference, pp. 365-371) in unexpected compassion, support, and sometimes gentle challenge, it fosters capacities in the client to undermine those faulty patterns rooted in prior relational experience. Some have viewed this kind of therapy as a kind of “reparenting.” In addition, the authors also point to the healing effects of a personal relationship with God in Christ (pp. 345, 352).

Another distinctive of their approach is their complex understanding of the spiritual dimension of psychotherapy. They are clearly supportive of the discerning use of spiritual techniques and reflection on God’s involvement in soul healing. However, they are also critical of what they see as Benner’s (and others’) conflation of psychotherapy and spiritual direction. They argue that psychotherapy and spiritual direction are distinct forms of soul care that ought to be carefully distinguished in practice. Psychotherapy concentrates primarily on the human relationship, rather than one’s relationship with God; is more exploratory, more independent of the institution of the Church, and more beholden to “state regulating bodies that grant licenses, establish ethical standards and regulate compliance” (p. 358); and also is less directive than spiritual direction. IP, they write, “is an integrated model of psychotherapy that relies on spiritual practices and Christian metaphysics, but the goals and procedures fit squarely in the realm of psychotherapy and not spiritual direction” (p. 357). A little later in the book, they raise the similar concern of conflating the task of psychotherapy with what they call the more important tasks of the church. On the one hand, they consider psychotherapy to be a peripheral activity in comparison to the church’s mission. But they also do not want to see those in church ministry arrogate to themselves psychotherapy competence and skills that they have not developed, apart from the sophisticated training and supervision that is the standard in the psychotherapy profession today. Christian psychology typically sees psychotherapy and spirituality as necessarily interrelated.

McMinn and Campbell conclude their book with a summary of their model. They believe it is integrative in two ways. It is the integration of a number of psychological theories (most obviously, cognitive, behavioral, and relational), and it is also the integration of a Christian theory of persons, concentrated mainly on the doctrine of the image of God, with contemporary psychological theory and practice. They acknowledge that their model utilizes the three aspects of the image of God for specifically therapeutic purposes (p. 387), but they offer six reasons to believe that IP offers a comprehensive Christian approach: first, because both Christianity and psychology are used to view humans; second, IP covers three domains within which one can address a wide range of psychopathology; third, it addresses behavior, cognition, emotion, and behavior; fourth, it balances the value of scientific research on short-term interventions with the value of long-term therapy that relies on the therapeutic relationship; fifth, it is christocentric, since Christ is the fulfillment of the image of God, which is the focus of the book; and sixth, it can be used with Christian and non-Christian clients. “The IP worldview is unapologetically Christian, and clients ought to be informed of this” (p. 392), but the psychotherapist is not an evangelist, and must strive to be respectful and non-coercive. “If a client expresses interest in learning about or converting to Christianity, it is best to introduce a new relationship in the client’s life—with a pastor or priest, for example—rather than changing the nature of the psychotherapeutic relationship to involve religious education” (p. 392). This makes good sense politically, given current prejudice in the field, but it seems unnecessarily self-restrictive for Christian therapists. Secular therapists would never think to screen their worldview beliefs from the therapeutic setting. Indeed an important part of therapy is offering healthier basic beliefs about life.

Throughout the book, the authors demonstrate a thorough, up-to-date knowledge of the relevant areas of contemporary therapy in their model of cognitive-relational therapy, and it would make an excellent textbook for use in cognitive therapy classes in Christian
therapy programs. Going further, it could be said that the theological organization of the therapy content manifests a kind of Christian beauty, and according to some, beauty is considered to be a criterion of a good theoretical model. Moreover, as mentioned above, it is a major advance in Christian integration theory, for it suggests that Christian theoretical assumptions need to set the agenda for Christian therapy theory, rather than the work of secularists. Similar to some of the best integration books (Jones & Butman, 1991; Yarhouse, Butman, & McRay, 2005; Yarhouse & Sell, 2008), searching questions are raised about the worldview implications of modernism, for example, the relativism and self-deception that has been promoted by secular cognitive-behavioral therapy (p. 205). There is here no mere endorsement and incorporation of secular models of therapy, but a thorough, critical analysis of them from the standpoint of Christian worldview beliefs. There is also a high view of Scripture: “When determining the validity of one’s thoughts, values and assumptions, there is no greater resource for a Christian than Scripture” (p. 207). For example, they question divorce as an option, aside from certain exceptional circumstances (p. 212), and they encourage the use of Christian meditative prayer techniques (p. 232).

Proponents of Christian psychology have reason to be happy with this book, but that does not mean there are no questions to raise about it work. The most serious has to do with the other events of what the Christian philosopher Dooyeweerd called the Christian ground-motive (creation, fall, and redemption). The book obviously concentrates almost all its attention on creation (the imago Dei). But the fall and redemption are also hugely significant to therapy within a Christian worldview. The authors discuss the relevance of the fall and redemption to their model on a couple of occasions (chapter 1 on Christian Foundations and pp. 341-345). However, the bulk of the integration with these latter two events in redemptive history was saved for a follow-up book, Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling, written solely by McMinn. We move next to a consideration of this book.

Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling
McMinn wrote this shorter book, he says in the introduction, because he has believed for a long time that the doctrines of sin and grace are important to Christian counseling, and they belong together. He laments the gulf that has divided biblical counselors and Christian counselors like himself over the former’s perceived emphasis on sin. With unusual humility, he explains his own journey regarding these matters and acknowledges he has grown to appreciate the therapeutic value of Christian teachings on sin through conversations with a former student, Phil Monroe (currently a counseling professor at Biblical Theological Seminary and one of the Society’s bloggers this year). “Too often we integrationists are minimizing both grace and sin because our psychological vocabulary does not allow for these notions. Here we have a good deal to learn from the biblical counselors and the theological tradition they represent” (p. 22). He admits that it is puzzling that integration counselors have written so little about sin, and this book (as well as his earlier one, Why Sin Matters) is an attempt to redress the balance.

McMinn begins by considering the therapeutic value of Christian teaching on sin. He presents a comprehensive view of sin that includes consideration of the basic human condition of original sin that all humans are born with, individual sinful choices that contribute to personal guilt, and the consequences of sin (both one’s own as well as the sins of others), which contribute to much of the suffering with which counselors work (pp. 35-46). He argues that awareness of sin that so pervades human life ought to call forth empathy from the Christian counselor, since all of us are plagued by it.

In his discussion of grace, McMinn argues that our grasp of sin is facilitated by our grasp of grace. He mentions the theological distinction between common grace and special grace. Common grace is the goodness that God gives to all humans commonly (including proper development, science, happiness) and special grace is the goodness that God gives believers through their relationship with Christ. Common grace, he says, is evident in all good counseling models (though the counselor may not be aware of it), whereas Christian counseling is free to incorporate both common and special grace (pp. 53-59). He acknowledges that good non-Christian therapy promotes discovery and recovery, but he also thinks that the fullest recovery is found in the love of God in Christ. As an illustration of his model, McMinn then offers a nuanced contrast between good anger and the sin of anger, but suggests that a grace-based approach will allow for the exploration of anger and will rarely lead to the confrontation of anger directly, preferring to help the counselee be honest and allowing the Holy Spirit to bring conviction where it is needed. The author sees grace as God’s means to draw people out of the hiding that is promoted by sin.

McMinn boldly asserts that, among our barriers to grasping grace, we have to include our native depravity, our resistance to the notion of God’s retributive justice, our penchant for seeking to earn God’s favor, and our lack of appreciating God’s sovereign freedom in bestowing grace (p. 59-68). He rightly criticizes the wrong-headed practice of some Christian counselors who suggest to counselees they may need to forgive God, but he holds out the ideal of Christian counselors who provide a relational context of such grace that it
McMinn points out that sin has been described in various ways (pp. 112-114), which can affect our understanding of human beings and grace. For example, we can refer to sin as a medical problem (the "disease" of alcoholism), or as a crime against the laws of God, or as an act of relational betrayal. Some counselors are committed to only one frame of reference; but all three have biblical roots. Integrationists, he notes, may have underestimated the value of holding people accountable for their sin in their emphasis on grace. With moving transparency, McMinn confides (p. 114) about a missed counseling opportunity long ago, when he worked with someone for six months according to his CBT training and helped promote “healthier self-talk” and apparently alleviated some of the counselee’s emotional turmoil, only to find out later that the man had earlier sexually abused his niece and never mentioned it in the therapy. He wonders if he had been practicing therapy that focused on helping counselees identify and confess their sin, and find freedom in Christ, whether that would have provided a deeper and more productive counseling experience for that man.

In his fall-redemption discussion of contemporary schema-based therapy, McMinn agrees that people’s maladaptive schemas are usually developed through childhood experiences with caregivers, but a Christian approach goes further and recognizes that being “sinned against” tragically contributes to the primordial human problems of original and personal sin and what he calls egoism. A Christian worldview, he argues, holds adults responsible for their actions and responsible to change the underlying sinful schemas that contribute to their actions, by the grace of Christ. Before finishing the chapter, McMinn points to the value of a Christian community for helping to repair faulty schemas. Perhaps this could have been saved for the final chapter, where he deals again with the relational aspect of the image of God. However, McMinn believes that it is ideal and healthy for Christians to be involved in a local church for many reasons—in the present case, because the other members can supportively orient the individual to reality, rather than relying exclusively on a therapist.

Finally, McMinn addresses the relational aspect of the image of God in terms of sin and grace. He opens with the touching story of an eighth-grade daughter’s arrest for shoplifting, and the graceful way he addressed it, after he and his wife Lisa considered their response. He argues that sin affects the relational aspect more than the others, because sin is fundamentally a relationship problem. He concludes the book with a helpful discussion of how grace impacts original sin, personal sins, and the consequences of sin, since all three are involved in human relationships. Humans also need to acknowledge they have done wrong and
harmed others. Confession is healing and cleansing for individuals who take responsibility for their sins, and it can also heal relationships that have been marred by them. McMinn suggests that the grace-filled Christian counselor needs to promote confession in the course of counseling, but will also acknowledge the reality of sin’s horrible consequences in order to help counselees break free of patterns of thinking and relating that they did not necessarily cause. He notes that healing, grace-filled relationships then can be a means of grace for those whose early relationships continue to contaminate present relationships. “Sin,” he says, “is our great obstacle, keeping us far from God and distancing us from one another” (p. 162). Grace, then, is our great need, and God’s grace, McMinn reminds us, is the source of all the good that humans enjoy, including all the soul-healing good that Christian counselors represent and administer.

While this book makes an important contribution to Christian therapy, its greatest feature, in my opinion, is the humble grace it exemplifies, as McMinn admits past mistakes and prejudices and reaches out to those in the biblical counseling movement, saying, “I have learned from you.” Progressive leaders of the biblical counseling movement have the same appreciation for grace, so I am hopeful that there will be a public response in kind.

I might add here that throughout both books, the authors repeatedly demonstrate great skill in their clinical advice and the vignettes they use to illustrate their model. The books teach a sensitive and caring counseling style that exemplifies high levels of skilled craftsmen. I would like to finish the summary of the books with a quote that nicely states the vision McMinn and Campbell have for Christian psychotherapy and counseling:

“This calls us to remember that our greatest hope is found in the transforming power of Christ whose unfathomable love helps free us from all sorts of snares and dangers. Therapy can be part of the sanctification process by helping clients move toward greater awareness of Christ’s sustaining love. This is accomplished in various ways—by providing a safe and accepting environment where clients can sort through their spiritual questions, by affirming God’s redemptive presence in a broken world, by praying for clients outside of the session (and perhaps in the session), by encouraging involvement in a healthy church, and by demonstrating the love and grace of Christ in therapeutic relationship (pp. 269-270).

Questions for Dialogue

I hope it is clear how much I have benefitted from these works, and how much I appreciate the scope of what the authors have accomplished and the spirit they manifest in their writing. The questions I raise in what follows flow from my gratitude to the authors for these two outstanding books and a desire to build on the momentum of their work. Moreover, my view of the value of dialogue in human life entails that such excellent works as these demand an appreciative and detailed response, with the hope that the dialogue will continue, so that God’s multiple callings for the Christian soul-care community are enriched and advanced. Well-done Christian psychology and well-done integration (as well as biblical counseling) are allies, working for the same Lord and on the same team, but we may have different callings and even different perspectives on how to serve God in our day. Both approaches can only be enhanced through listening respectfully, speaking with humility, and learning from one another in love.

Let me begin by pointing to two claims made in passing with which I would quibble. In their discussions of shame and guilt (McMinn & Campbell, 2007, pp. 38-42; McMinn, 2008, pp. 45-47), the authors present a typical approach that favors guilt and rejects shame as a legitimate emotion, because of the latter’s well-documented debilitating nature. According to Tangney and Dearing (2002), guilt is the affective response to one’s transgression—what Christians call a personal sin—and shame is the affective response to a perceived deficit in one’s being—a perception that is assumed to be intrinsically pathological (pp. 119-20). However, original sin is a profound deficit in our created being, and a sense of shame would seem to be an appropriate emotional response to the travesty of our fallen condition, in spite of its pathological co-morbidity. Rather than training people to avoid the emotion of shame, it may ultimately be healthier from a Christian standpoint to train them how to surrender their shame to Christ, who died for it and has taken it away in principle, in order to become increasingly psychologically freed from its harmful effects.

In addition, at one point in Sin, Grace, and Christian Counseling, McMinn referred to our “infinite value,” and he quoted Foster who wrote that a human is an “eternal creature of infinite worth” (p. 48). This is a common, well-intentioned statement of Christians. However, by definition there can be only one being of infinite worth and that is God. All other creatures, including human beings, can only be of finite worth. Hyperbole here risks equating humans with God. Humans are unquestionably of value to God and compared to other creatures, but in comparison to God’s infinite worth, the Bible likens humans to dust and vapor. Both kinds of evaluations are needed for healthy, balanced
Christian self-understanding and self-appraisal.

We turn next to consider issues more integral to their project. McMinn and Campbell acknowledge that their use of the historical teachings of the image of God for the purposes of integrative psychotherapy does not exhaust those teachings (p. 387). The authors focus almost entirely on those aspects of the image of God that all mature humans have in common. There is obvious value in such a “creation-oriented” model of Christian therapy, since it can be applied readily to therapy with non-Christians as well as Christians. Yet throughout the history of the church, another aspect of image-bearing in which only Christians can engage has been identified. For example, the reformed tradition has categorized the three aspects of the image that McMinn and Campbell focus on as the “broad view” of the image—that which all mature humans share—whereas what it terms the “narrow view” of the image pertains to the likeness to God which can only be restored in Christ: righteousness, holiness, faith, and the love of God—that which only believers share. While these redeemed features of the image of God rely on the created capacities discussed under the broad view—indeed, one could say that the gifts of holiness, righteousness, and love entail the proper fulfillment of our functional, structural, and relational likeness to God—most Christian thinkers recognize that the likeness that believers receive through Christ is far more important in the Christian scheme of things than the latter, because without holiness no one can see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

A more comprehensive model of Christian psychotherapy has to include reference to distinctively Christian likeness to God in faith, love, and holiness, in order properly to understand those creational aspects of the image of God, their therapeutic significance, and how Christian psychotherapy can best promote their fulfillment in Christ.

This may not be a serious omission in a Christian book of psychotherapy written to address the therapy needs of non-Christians (a thoroughly legitimate goal in principle, let it be said), but we would not want that worthwhile agenda to limit our understanding of clinical theory and practice with Christians. Without discussing more fully God’s intentions for creational likeness to God to be fulfilled in personal faith and union with Christ in redemption, it may lead in the minds of some readers to a fuzziness regarding the comprehensive, holistic goals of Christian psychotherapy and counseling and the radical therapeutic nature of salvation in Christ. The repair of created likeness to God is important, but even more important is the supernatural transformation known as conformity to Christ (2 Co 3:18), so a consideration of the “narrow view” is really necessary for a full-orbed discussion of the imago Dei. Overall, both of these books should be deeply encouraging to integrationists, Christian psychologists, and biblical counselors, but those who are aware of the relevant biblical and theological literatures know that we in the Christian counseling community are still far from tapping the tremendous and distinctive therapeutic resources there are in the Christian tradition on these issues. If the Christian soul-care community is ever to move out from under the shadow of modernism, it will require taking our own Christian theoretical and practical traditions ever more seriously, and even subjecting their clinical applications to empirical evaluation.

It would also have been helpful if the authors had emphasized more the unity of the person in the course of their discussions. There is an inherent limitation (which they acknowledge) in a model that is grounded upon three separate aspects of human life, because it can continue to foster the kind of fragmented thinking about the soul common in modern psychology. With no overarching metaphysic of the human person, modern psychology often seems like simply a massive collection of disparate research findings or clinical models that focus on discrete parts of the human being, with no way to organize the material into a coherent whole. Humans have functional qualities, cognitive structures, and relational capacities, but these aspects together contribute to constitution of whole persons, and this issue was not much addressed. The comprehensive goal of Christian therapy and counseling is not simply the repair of damaged parts or capacities, but a virtuous person who acts maturely in relation to God and others. Of course the authors believe in this goal—indeed, their addressing of sin shows they view humans as whole persons who are responsible for their actions—but in Christian books on therapy and counseling, especially given our modern context, explicit focus on the holistic endpoint of therapy would be very helpful, even though it would leave less room for more practical matters.

Perhaps the most curious issue concerning these books is why there are two of them. Could not all the relevant material of creation in the image of God, the fallness of sin, and the grace of redemption have been included in a single book titled something like “Integrative Psychotherapy!”? Two books leave one feeling that there was actually less integration than there could have been, at least in the first book. Of course combining both books into one might make the final product too large (though I would not be one to cast stones at such a work!). However, that concern (which editing could address) does not explain why the pie was sliced in the particular way it was. As it is, readers may be left with the impression that it is an assumption of IP that one can address creational dynamics apart from fallen and redemptive dynamics. Is that really the case? If it is, it
would seem to bear some resemblance to the Levels-of-Explanation model of relating the Christian faith and psychology and is also reminiscent of a kind of nature-grace dualism that would seem to be counterproductive to the best and highest aims of Christian integrationists who seek to integrate deeply their faith and their psychology.

In the absence of an explanation for this two-volume dichotomy, perhaps I could be forgiven some speculation. When doing therapy with people who are not Christian, one can still be guided in one’s work with creation concepts like the image of God rather straightforwardly, since all humans are made in God’s image, and presumably most open-minded mainstream psychologists in America would not be offended at that notion being applied to clients or counselees in textbooks. However, being guided by sin and redemption concepts when working with those who are not Christian is more complex and problematic, and is more easily left to be dealt with in a second book which deals with Christian counseling. If this were a reason for the two books, it would be strategic and have merit. I sometimes wonder about all that undergirded the thinking and practice of the prophet Daniel who served so admirably as a wise man/advisor in the Babylonian court, given the religious pressures of Babylon in his day. Moreover, it is precisely such willingness to adapt to the ideological realities of mainstream psychology that has permitted proponents of integration and the Levels-of-Explanation model to exercise positive, God-honoring influence on the field—far more than Christian psychologists or biblical counseling has to this point.

However, if this speculation is correct, it would point to a limitation of the integration paradigm and reveal why it cannot by itself produce a “comprehensive Christian approach,” since its sensibilities and location in the field result in its best work being so deeply structurally affected by considerations of realities that lie outside the Christian tradition and community. The sophisticated and strategic awareness of the larger psychological world beyond the Christian community that has characterized the integration movement at its best has nonetheless simultaneously inhibited its ability to take full advantage of all the rich psychological and therapeutic resources Christians have at their disposal. Such cross-cultural understanding and contextualization may be a fruit of Holy Spirit discernment, given the realities of contemporary psychology, but one must ask whether these exigencies ought to so profoundly constrain the discourse and training of Christians among ourselves.

Perhaps given the authors’ aims, two books were necessary. But one wonders if the intuitions that led to the second book could also lead to a more integral (and comprehensive) model of IP in which the Fall and redemption are given greater weight than creation in a single Christian psychotherapy textbook, as reflects the emphasis of Scripture and the Christian traditions, written especially for use within the Christian community, but also not irrelevant for working discerningly with those outside that community. Perhaps the most comprehensive Christian approach requires the diverse efforts of integrationists, biblical counselors, and Christian psychologists, united in the historic Christian faith and pursuing its practice in their various callings, vantage points, and spheres of activity and influence. God is doing something very good in the Christian counseling community in our day, and the books here being reviewed are some of the evidence.

Note

1For example, in the second book, Sin & Grace, McMinn writes that the “counselor’s task is to help the client better reflect the structural capacities of our creation in God’s image” (p. 142). However, this theme is so important in Christianity, and it would seem to be implicitly so central to the two books, that I would have liked to see it made more explicit.

References


Reviewed by Bryan N. Maier, Associate Professor of Counseling, Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, PA. He can be contacted at bmaier@biblical.edu.
During the last decade, there has been a renewed interest in the topic of forgiveness. Within the psychological world, several books and articles have regularly appeared addressing among other topics: the advantages of forgiveness, the side effects of non-forgiveness, and the use of assessment tools to measure forgiveness as well as various step-by-step formulas for forgiveness. With all of this new information, why another book claiming to help us understand forgiveness better? What more, we might ask Braun, is there to unpack?

Strange as it may sound, one of the greatest weaknesses of contemporary forgiveness writing is the lack of a clearly articulated definition of what constitutes forgiveness. For many, there seems to be an assumption that we all know intuitively what forgiveness is; we just need motivation to do it. Thus the emphasis shifts away from attempts to define forgiveness and toward recognizing its benefits, whether physiological, relational, or spiritual. When a definition of forgiveness is offered, it is usually reduced down to a cognitive reframe, whereby the forgiver progresses from feeling bitter to feeling better as a result of choosing to see some aspect of the situation differently. These cognitive reframes themselves are diverse and often unique to the specific author.

Ultimately, the field has accepted a level of ambivalence and has settled for the assumption that whatever forgiveness is, it is good for you. This definitional ambivalence remains even after the flurry of writing on the subject and still accounts for much of the uncertainty about forgiveness and what it means. It should not be surprising therefore, that if the experts do not speak with one voice, those who read the experts would be equally confused. Hence, the need remains for further unpacking.

One of the prerequisites for productive unpacking is making sure one has the correct suitcase. I believe there are at least four clear signs that Braun has found the right baggage. First, the book claims to give biblical answers on forgiveness. Of course, most in the Christian counseling field would want to claim that their views are biblical so this goal in itself is not that unique. However, there are a large percentage of books on forgiveness, claiming to be written from a Christian perspective, that rarely mention scripture and present their views are biblical so this goal in itself is not that unique to the specific author.

Second, as a result of pursuing biblical answers about forgiveness, Braun takes the controversial and minority position that forgiveness is contingent upon repentance. Thus, Braun does not recognize constructs such as therapeutic forgiveness (forgiveness with the goal of making the victim feel better) and unilateral forgiveness (forgiveness that requires nothing from the offender, much less repentance), even though these ideas are staples in most contemporary forgiveness writing.

Predicting that many will take issue with him, Braun makes a strong case, mostly from Romans 12, that forgiveness without repentance is meaningless, even harmful at times in that forgiving the unrepentant is actually unjust (p. 147). He could have gone further to unpack the difference between revenge and a desire for justice, but at least justice is elevated in value to that of forgiveness, and there is recognition that one cannot invalidate the other. This is a welcome contribution to the whole forgiveness discussion.

Third, Braun holds out God’s forgiveness as the template (Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32). This also is a major contribution. It is puzzling that such passages, clearly presenting divine forgiveness as the model for interpersonal forgiveness, receive such little press in the forgiveness literature. Is forgiveness merely a general activity that both divine and human agents perform or does God have a particular method of forgiving? If he does, how does He do it? Under what conditions, and for what reasons does God grant forgiveness? All these questions become important if we are to forgive “as God, for Christ sake has forgiven us”.

Fourth and finally, as a natural result of his serious attempt to be biblical, Braun restores forensic forgiveness to a primary position in the whole forgiveness discussion. Some recent scholarly work has called into question the value and validity of seeing forgiveness in a primarily forensic perspective. Braun accurately shows that forgiveness in the Bible is almost unrecognizable apart from the heavy forensic and economic aspects. Forgiveness in scripture always has to do with a price being paid. Is there more to forgiveness in scripture than a raw forensic element? Of course there is more, but there is never less.

While Braun’s book clears up some of the issues related to forgiveness, it still shares some of the common weaknesses that plague contemporary forgiveness writers. First, his book is too short (a little over 200 pages). The whole idea that such a complex topic can be “unpacked” in such a short book is a bit reductionist – although Braun does a pretty good job with the questions he chooses to answer. Braun’s introductory quiz and his three more academic appendixes seem to indicate that the author himself clearly recognizes that he is stepping into a minefield. If the questions are indeed complex, can the answers, even biblical ones, ever be that simple or simplistic?
Second, and more importantly, whether it is due to the brevity of the book or the desire to simplify the issue, Braun commits one of the most common errors in contemporary forgiveness literature – he never really defines what forgiveness is, despite devoting more than a whole chapter to constructing a definition. This is understandable (as I mentioned earlier, most forgiveness writers present muddy or vague definitions), but inexcusable. His definition on page 55 consists of only two verbs: pardon and be reconciled. In spite of the fact that Baruns devotes whole paragraphs to concepts like “graciously” and “commitment,” he never really defines what pardon means. Thus, pardon becomes just another synonym for forgive, and does not really add to the definition. One might claim that we all know what pardon means, but that is the whole reason for unpacking terms like forgiveness and pardon in the first place, because we are not yet clear what they mean.

Since being reconciled is the second action item in Braun’s definition, it is pretty important to understand this term also. What does it really mean to be reconciled, especially if the offender and victim never had a relationship in the first place? Does forgiveness require one to establish a relationship where one did not exist such as in the case of Chris Carrier (as told by Brauns)? Yet a few pages later, Braun seems to backtrack and allow for a rape victim to limit the relationship with her offender or even dissolve the relationship in some cases such as an abusive spouse – all under the umbrella of consequences (p. 60).

In the next paragraph (back on p. 55), Brauns muddies the water even more with the statement, “In biblical forgiveness, the forgiving person pays the price for forgiveness.” What price? This statement begs to be unpacked, but it never is. Later Braun seems to confuse conflict resolution with forgiveness. Matthew 18 is not about how to do forgiveness; it is about how to handle interpersonal sin (of which forgiveness is hopefully a part). To make Matthew 18 the template for forgiveness confuses a part with the whole.

Third, since repentance is such a key component of Brauns’ construal of forgiveness, one would expect that this topic would be “unpacked” a little further also. Other than recognizing accurately that repentance is more than an emotion but is more a change of mind or direction, Brauns neglects to go much further than the meanings of the words in the original language. Most already know that “repent” in the Bible means to turn around and go another way, but what does this look like? If the granting of forgiveness is contingent upon repentance, it seems pretty important to be able to recognize it when it is happening.

Fourth and finally, one of the most common selling points for forgiveness given in contemporary forgiveness literature is that it is an antidote for bitterness. Of course, no one wants to be bitter, but can we assume that any uncomfortable feeling we have in response to another’s sin should be labeled bitterness? If this is the case, then these feelings are malignant and should be eliminated as soon as possible. Brauns seems to echo this view in equating bad feelings (bitterness) with the toxic features of mercury. Even a little is bad according to Brauns (p. 154), and therefore needs to be “conquered” or “beaten” (p. 155).

My concern is that there is no room for being legitimately angry or resentful at someone else’s sin. Of course we need to always look in the mirror ourselves and correct what we see, but at the end of the day, “hating that which is evil” is only a natural (not destructive) response to “loving that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). Sometimes the proper response to sin is to be disgusted, angry and embrace a longing for justice. The imprecatory Psalms vividly portray the range of “uncomfortable feelings” one can experience as a result of interpersonal sin.

Overall, these weaknesses are outweighed by the many strengths of Bruans’ book. Taking Scripture seriously, restoring the role of repentance, and making God’s forgiveness the template are all significant upgrades. Brauns’ work really does help us understand forgiveness better from a biblical perspective. Due to the remaining gaps in the forgiveness literature, there is a lot more to be “unpacked” about this very important topic. Brauns has not unpacked everything, but at least he has the right suitcase.


Reviewed by Casey Tiggleman, Richmont Graduate University, Chattanooga, TN. His email address is ctiggleman@richmont.edu

Stephen P. Greggo, department chair and Associate Professor of Pastoral Counseling and Psychology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, uses biblical imagery and colorful metaphors to describe the process of group counseling and to equip leader-guides to nurture community-building and spiritual growth. The words “trekking” and “wholeness” are carefully chosen and grounded in Greggo’s personal experiences, which he describes in chapter 1: “A trek by definition is a journey exacting personal challenge” (p. 16). Trekking together in spiritually-focused groups leads to the kind of experience described as the “ties that bind” in John Fawcett’s hymn (pp. 32-33) and alludes to the biblical term “sojourning.”
The group leader provides guidance and safety through intentional soul-care experiences. Wholeness implies “deeper communion and restored relationships” and “a conventional relationship with God that enables harmony and unity with others” (p. 14). Throughout the book Greggo employs similar word-pictures that enlighten and enhance the reader’s understanding of group process and the role of the group leader.

The book is divided into five sections. In the first two, Greggo establishes a solid foundation with references from psychology, Christian philosophy, and scripture. He cites documentation on the effectiveness of group counseling (pp. 24-25), paying appropriate homage to leaders in the field, Yalom (2005) and Corey (2008), with multiple references and citations related to principles of group process and leadership accepted by such organizations as the American Counseling Association and the Association for Specialists in Group Work. In addition, he references the contribution of Robert Weiss (1994) to the understanding of therapeutic relationships (pp. 145-147).

He also references the work of John Wesley (Davies, 1989), Thomas Oden (1972), and others as examples of Christian approaches to group counseling and offers a response to what he calls the “secularization of fundamentally spiritual concepts” (p. 85), while acknowledging the value of secular group approaches. He refers to The Four Loves of C. S. Lewis (1969), in comparison to Weiss’ (1994) work mentioned above, as a more specifically Christian view of human relations. In an example well known to professionals in the field, he recounts Irwin Yalom’s struggle to reconcile religious beliefs with psychiatry (p. 249). He places Yalom’s (2000) dissertation in the context of Calvin’s (1997/1564) assertion of two sources of knowledge, and thereby establishes a perspective from which to integrate seemingly opposing viewpoints. An excellent example is Greggo’s comparison of the popular model of group development (forming/orientation), storming (conflict/transition), norming (structure), performing (work), and adjoining (dissolution/termination) to a more “pace” focused (vs. stage) approach, described by cooperation, competition, collaboration, and consolidation (p. 125). A distinctly Christian fellowship, as demonstrated in a group trekking toward wholeness, displays such characteristics as “patience, kindness, rejoicing, truth, protection, trust, and hope” (p. 127) as group members work out their goals for healing and growth.

Having established this foundation in the first two sections, Greggo provides instruction for the leader to facilitate the group process based on biblical concepts related to shepherding: caring (section three), attachment (section four), and meaning attribution (section five). Caring for the Christian group leader needs to reflect the concept of “soul care” as described by David Benner (1998), or “hospitality,” as described by Henri Nouwen (1975). In the latter, the guide extends an invitation to enjoy the warmth and acceptance of shared experience, which in turn motivates the group member also to become a “conduit for God’s redemptive and restorative love” (p. 171). To do so effectively, the guide becomes, as Arnold Lazarus (1993) applied the term, an “authentic chameleon” (p. 178): able to be genuine, consistent, and honest while flexible and adaptive enough to suit the clients’ unique needs and expectations.

Attachment grows out of empathy and emotional stimulation, cathexis from catharsis. “Exposure of affect enables participants to establish new supportive affiliations and deepens existing attachments (p. 184). The leader must provide an environment of safety and trust by teaching and modeling group norms that regulate emotional intensity and connect feelings to thoughts and interpretations of past and current events. In the ninth chapter, Greggo describes three qualifications to navigate the leader through this potentially dangerous process (p. 185-191).

In section five, Greggo acknowledges his existential roots and describes a uniquely Christian application of the principles of existential psychotherapy, the modality to which Yalom (1980) and Corey (2008) also subscribe. He describes three aspects of meaning attribution: “supplying the ingredients for cognitive structure, solidifying a cognitive framework, and stimulating spiritual formation through expanding one’s faith journey narrative” (p. 241). He incorporates insights from John Calvin (1997/1564), Paul Tillich (Yalom, 2000), and Irvin Yalom (1980) to explain meaning attribution as a “wisdom-oriented activity.” Again, the establishment of safety and trust is critical to the success of this process. The calming reassurance of a safe and confident leader, dramatically amplified by an awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit, is essential. The result may sometimes be a substantial restructuring (second-order change) of one’s internal processes involving alterations in cognition, emotions, and relational expectations (p. 252). Greggo concludes this section with a list of six keys to a successful group:

1. The Holy Spirit is a reliable source for wisdom to discern when to raise a concern, expose vulnerabilities, or acknowledge growth.
2. A brief group leader is present to serve in a specific way, setting, and mission.
3. Since the role of trekking guide is temporary and narrowly focused, the process involves assessing holistically, but intervening strategically.
4. A temporary group assists members to iden-
tify supports and resources available over the long term.
5. A group operates at its best when members serve other members.
6. Spiritual formation is the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, who will draw the seeker closer to the Great Shepherd.

It is difficult to find a weakness in Trekking Toward Wholeness because it is both scholarly and practical, covering the historical underpinnings of group counseling from both psychological and spiritual points of view. And it presents many different applications from professional psychotherapy to Church-based small groups. Professors, counselors, students, clergy, and lay leaders will find this book to be useful and inspirational.

References


Reviewed by Robert W. Kellemen, Ph.D., LCPC, who served for over a decade as the founding Chair- man of the Master of Arts in Christian Counseling and Discipleship Department at Capital Bible Seminary. He is now Professor-at-Large in that department. His email address is bob.kellemen@gmail.com.

Real Church, the latest book by counselor, speaker, and prolific author, Larry Crabb, relates his earlier writings to the local church. Reading Real Church is like reading Understanding People, Inside Out, Connecting, and Soul Talk and asking, “What might a church look like if it were based upon the life and ministry concepts contained in these works by Larry Crabb?”

Crabb writes in his typical deeply personal, reflective style. In fact, he was motivated to write the book by his realization that “in most Evangelical church services I’ve attended, my hunger for truth that transforms, for love that liberates, is rarely satisfied” (p. xiv). Given his personal quest, in Real Church, Crabb seeks to answer one central question, “What church would compel me to attend?” In answer to that question, Crabb provides an extended introduction in which he sketches his four visions (what we might call his “Four Marks”) of a captivating, biblical church.

1. A Church of Spiritual Theology: Truth That Has the Power to Change Lives. A real church is a ragtag assortment of truth-hungry folks who want to hear the beautiful story God is telling.
2. A Church of Spiritual Formation: Lives That Increasingly Reflect the Inner Life of Christ. A real church is a bunch of formation-focused folks who want to love like Jesus so they can join the story and advance its plot.
3. A Church of Spiritual Community: Relationships That Are Meaningful and Satisfying. A real church is a group of people who want to hang out with and relate deeply to others who do not love all that well.
4. A Church of Spiritual Mission: A Purpose That Makes an Eternal Difference. A real church is a gathering of people who love well so that the world becomes a little more of what God had in mind.

Crabb powerfully summarizes his idea of real church, “The church I want to be a part of, a real church, will teach spiritual theology that stirs a hunger for spiritual formation that surfaces the need for spiritual community that then marshals its resources for spiritual mission” (p. xix).

Though Crabb doubts that most pastors and church members are headed in a similar direction (p. 3), so far what he has presented is not significantly different from what most Evangelical pastors, and the seminary professors who train them, envision for bib-
ical local church ministry. His four marks align neatly with the typical “4 Cs” of pastoral equipping: Content, Character, Community, and Competence:

3. Christian Community (Home): Empowering and Encouraging God’s People to Speak the Truth in Love to One Another—Spiritual Community.

While Crabb puts his unique nuances on this four-fold model, pastors I have spoken to sense that his presentation of the model has the feel at times of, “You are wrong and incomplete in how you do church, and here is what is right and comprehensive.” This can come across, intended or not, as, “I’ve found the secret(s), and you have not.”

I wonder if Real Church might have more impact on pastors in particular, if the tenor were less “prophetically” and more “priestly.” Perhaps the feel could have communicated more, “Here are four common core values all biblical churches share, to which I want to offer my small contribution.” This can come across as, “We’re all striving the best we can to be a real church, and here’s my contribution to the discussion.”

Real Church does have a distinctive contribution to make, as Crabb places the “4 Cs” (or his “4 Ss” or “4 Marks”) in the context of a story—a wonderful love story, replete with an invitation to join in the eternal, joyful “dance” of the Trinity. He summarizes his take on the story in two short sentences. “God is a party happening. I’m invited to the party” (p. 15).

Crabb then adds to the mix what he wrote in Inside Out—the horrible inner sin of false idols of the heart and false lovers of the soul. Additionally, he incorporates what he has written about in Connecting and later books—the new nature of the new covenant Christian. Putting all of this together the way he does is rare—it is the “difference maker.”

Here is Crabb’s Real Church. He wants a church with the four marks (spiritual theology, spiritual formation, spiritual community, and spiritual mission) that revolve around God’s eternal, relational love story and that address the depth of evil with the wonders of life-changing grace.

That is quite inviting. Having been a pastor and now equipping pastors, I think most pastors, lay leaders, and lay people would happily ask, “How can we all move together increasingly toward that vision?”

In the context of this love story, Crabb writes: “Church was designed by God to be the dance studio. A gathering becomes a church when a group of Christians together hear the music of heaven’s party and the laughter of god enjoying Himself and begin awkwardly dancing with the Trinity into the relationships and circumstances of life in order to bring heaven’s way of doing things to earth” (p. 15).

Within this quote, Crabb embeds the following footnote. “No book has helped me more to believe that the music and laughter can be heard now than The Shack, a remarkable novel by William Young” (p. 159). Crabb is well-read and well-schooled in the controversies of the day, and in the varying convictions about The Shack. Once again, if his design is to invite the average Evangelical pastor to ponder his prescriptions, it seems that dropping this comment into the mix, without any statement of concern about anything in The Shack, may not be entirely inviting. This seems especially true given that Crabb expends great energy in Real Church to critique how most churches do church today. He discerns and prophetically addresses their faults, as he sees them, but offers basically a blanket endorsement for a book that many Evangelical pastors discern to be less-than-fully Evangelical.

In another paragraph, Crabb writes, “I’m glad that as a conservative evangelical who still believes in biblical inerrancy and penal substitution, I’ve gotten over my Catholic phobia, and I’ve been studying contemplative prayer, practicing lectio divina, valuing monastic retreats, and worshipping through ancient liturgy” (p. 41). Given that Real Church criticizes all current ways that Evangelicals do church, it seems surprising that Crabb would share such an all-embracing statement about non-Evangelicals without disclaimers or cautions.

After his extended introduction, Crabb hypothesizes why so many people still attend church and like it. In this section he exposes three less-than-biblical ways of doing and being church.

The first answer that does not work for Crabb is, “Church will make my life better.” As he describes this church, Crabb seems to be assessing the “seeker church.” He asks the pointed questions, Does going to church help people want to know God more or use God more? Do I come to church so my life is better or so I become a better person, defined as a Christlike lover? Do I go to church to get good things from God or to get God Himself.

The second answer some give for doing church is, “It will show me how to change my world.” In this section Crabb evaluates the missional church (and to some extent the emergent church). He sees the missional church valuing: experiencing God now, authenticity, and influence—changing the world. He is wisely reluctant to embrace and endorse these values. “Here’s
my hesitancy to buy into an experience-grounded approach to living like Jesus: it opens the door to false mysticism. There is such a thing as true mysticism” (p. 39).

Crabb makes the astute point that we should build our lives on our future hope for intimacy with God, not upon experience-on-demand today. The demand to experience God now actually numbs our longing for God later, and it is that unfulfilled longing that motivates us to serve God passionately now. He also wonders if the longing to make a difference becomes a value that trumps personal holiness.

Additionally, Crabb perceptively critiques the missional/emergent de-emphasis on conversion. “Of course, getting saved means more than someday getting into heaven. But it doesn’t mean less” (p. 48).

The third answer some give for what makes a church real is, “It offers salvation and sanctification.” Here Crabb seems to move between critiquing the stereotypical “fundamentalist, doctrine-not-applied-to-life church,” and/or the “soul winning moralistic church,” and/or the “deep Bible teaching church.” He contends that such churches can pervert great theological truths such as justification, sanctification, and glorification. It’s not terribly clear how Crabb sees such churches doing this, other than that they make these words “boring.”

Crabb precedes this section on three wrong ways to do church with Revelation 3:1, “You think you are alive, but you are dead.” He wonders if God would not say the same to some churches today. This is another case of prophetic warning in Crabb’s writing, that while a valuable caution, may be given with brush strokes that paint every church wrong other than the one the author believes is a superior way of doing church.

Crabb shows a keen eye for categorizing, and displays keen discernment for exposing stereotypical, potential, likely, or actual weaknesses in other model approaches. He then places his approach to real church in the healthy “mean,” balanced between unhealthy extremes. In essence he says, concerning the church options available today, “I see what _____ is doing. I see this _____ has good in it. However, I see this _____ has bad in it. What they need to do instead is this _____. Then they would have it right.”

Having spent thirty pages divulging what’s wrong with all the typical (stereotypical) Evangelical ways of doing church today, Crabb then asks, “So what church do I want to be a part of?” The rest of the book answers that question with the “4 Ss” already introduced: spiritual theology, spiritual formation, spiritual community, and spiritual mission.

Crabb powerfully addresses spiritual theology as truth that exposes the sinful addiction of loving anyone more than we love God. He calls this a hunger for truth that sets addicts free. Crabb creatively discusses how a real church could present such truth:

1. Resurrection Truth: There’s always hope. Never give up.
2. Story Truth: Doctrine applied to life by seeing the Bible as 66 love letters from God.
3. Signpost Truth: Truth applied not in formulas but in creative freedom that relate truth to daily life.

A spiritual formation church, according to Crabb, respects the necessary ingredients in the remedy for addiction. The ingredient is unquenched thirst for God that will not be met fully until heaven.

Crabb shrewdly notes that some versions of spiritual formation wrongly advertise that spiritual disciplines will provide an experience of union with God now that completely satisfies our thirst. Instead, true spiritual formation is about helping people to become more like Jesus inside, where it counts. He traces the four capacities of personhood (see his earlier book Understanding People) and notes that we are to reflect increasingly the inner life of Christ in our desires (relational beings), beliefs (rational beings), choices (volitional beings) and feelings (emotional beings). This comprehensive understanding of the imago Dei remains a major strength of Crabb’s biblical psychology.

A spiritual community church finds contentment in wanting what Jesus wants. Truth-hungry churches of spiritual theology become formation-focused churches of spiritual formation, and then become community-centered. The more our appetite for truth and our desire to resemble Christ grows, the more profoundly we will long to connect in a new way with others. Good discernment, succinctly worded.


Having spoken against the wrong ways of doing church and having outlined the right way of being church, Crabb asks, “Now what?” It is not Crabb’s style to offer prescriptions. He thinks deeply and reflects personally. Thus, his “take-aways” purposefully stay at the level of principles which he wants people to apply creatively. Therefore, he offers the following five considerations for applying Real Church.

1. Spiritual Theology: Truth should be a dialogue.
2. Spiritual Formation: Formation takes a lifetime.
3. Spiritual Community: Conflict is an opportunity, don’t skirt it.
5. We’re all addicted to the same thing: Self

These are sound principles, briefly developed, that perhaps could have left a stronger impact had Crabb concluded by addressing some of the very practical questions that pastors and church leaders in the trenches must face. For example, questions such as:

If I am a leader or a lay person in a local church that is not living according to the “four marks,” how do I transition my church?

If movement toward a “four marks” church is not done through programs (which Crabb has a strong distaste for), then how are such churches developed?

How could pastors and leaders be equipped for leading “four mark” churches?

What does it look like to preach and teach spiritual theology that leads to spiritual formation in spiritual community?

In summary, Real Church shares solid insights for pastors and lay people, at times presented in a way that may come across to some readers as having “cornered the market” on a superior way of doing real church. The four marks of spiritual theology, spiritual formation, spiritual community, and spiritual mission in the context of life as a story of God’s love offered, rejected, and restored, show great promise for equipping pastors, planting churches, transitioning churches, and deepening congregational life. Readers willing to step back and take in the constructive critiques will find many areas of renewed focus that could lead any congregation toward a healthier, God-honoring real church.

---

**SCP Academic Conference**

- **September 17-18, 2010** at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
- **Theme:** “Human and Christian Agency”
- **Speakers** include: C. Stephen Evans, William Hathaway, Eric Jones, Michael Pakaluk, Andrew Purves

**SCP Mini-Conference**

**As part of the 2010 AACC Conference**

- **September 23-25, 2010** at Branson Missouri
- SCP Mini-conference begins on Sept 23, the day before AACC conference
- **Theme:** “Working with the Old Self/New Self Dichotomy”
- **Speakers** include: Mark McMinn, Robert Yarbrough, Ed Welch, and Eric Johnson

For further information, contact Eric Johnson at ejohnson@sbts.edu.
Christianity & Psychology: Five Views
March 19-20, 2010 • Rudd Auditorium, Bryan College

No period has brimmed with theoretical explanations of human nature and all its complexities as the century just behind us. Nearly a decade into the 21st century, social critics have identified more than 250 schools of psychological method.

But what “model” is most distinctly Christian? What is the best way to put that view into practice? Does psychological research confirm Scriptural truth, or vice versa? Should Christian psychologists be concerned with the bias of secularism in their field? What does brain and genetic research portend for the theoretical and clinical psychologist? What are the challenges and opportunities confronting individuals called to serve in the field?

These questions will be part of a rich and lively conversation among proponents of five major approaches to the relationship between psychology and the Christian faith, hosted by the Bryan Institute for Critical Thought and Practice. This conversation will benefit clinician and lay person, teacher and researcher. You are cordially invited.

For more information visit www.bryan.edu/institute or call 423-775-7265, 423-775-7571

Speakers

Warren S. Brown, Jr. Ph.D. Director, Lee Travis Research Institute, Professor of Psychology at the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary

Eric Johnson Ph.D., Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Stanton Jones Ph.D. Provost and former Chairperson of the Psychology Department, Wheaton College

John Coe Ph.D. Director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation, Biola University

David Powlison Ph.D. Professor, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation and Westminster Theological Seminary

Paul Watson Ph.D. U.C. Foundation Professor and Chair of Psychology, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Schedule

Fri. 3/19 11:00 am Eric Johnson “Five Views: A Dialogue”
7:00 pm Warren Brown “Neuroscience, Psychology, and Faith: Levels of Explanation and the Search for Resonance”

Sat. 3/20 9:00 am Stanton Jones “A Christian View of Persons & the Advance of Psychological Science: An Integrative Perspective”
1:00 pm John Coe “Psychology in the Spirit: A Transformational Approach to Psychology and Christianity”
2:30 pm David Powlison “The Question of Causality: Nature, Nurture, and a Whole Lot More”
4:00 pm Panel Discussion