



Edification

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Inside this issue:

An Interview with Sandra Wilson	2
Why Do I Try So Hard But Change So Little?	5
An Inward Look	9
Locating Christian Psychology	12
Works of Christian Psychology: New Additions	15
Meet the Board, Special Contributors, and Staff	16
The Mission Statement for the Society of Christian Psychology	16

Website Information

For more information about Christian psychology, including articles and discussion groups, visit the website at:

www.Christianpsych.org

Welcome to the second issue of Edification. We have been encouraged by the response to our first issue and look forward to continuing the dialogue that has begun. We also welcome to our board C. Stephen Evans and Larry Crabb, both of whom have been advocating for a long time for a Christian psychology. Each one epitomizes a necessary focus for the movement. Evans is one of the leading evangelical philosophers of our generation, and one who has spent considerable time reflecting on the human sciences. As a participant in the Christian philosophy movement, he early on recognized the potential for a Christian psychology and was the first to challenge Christians in psychology to develop their own version (*Wisdom and Humanness in Psychology: Prospects for a Christian Approach*; Baker, 1989). As an expert in Søren Kierkegaard, he was aware of Kierkegaard's rich Christian psychological theorizing and understood what might be possible if the Christian psychological community were to seek more intellectual independence from the modern psychological community (see his *Søren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology*, Baker, 1990). There is a continuing need for the kind of philosophical reflection Evans has demonstrated if psychologists in the Christian community are to free themselves from the constraints of modernism that have inhibited the development of a thoroughly Christian psychology thus far.

Though he has not been as inclined as Evans to use the term "Christian psychology," no one has more vigorously advocated such a direction over the past decade than Larry Crabb. In contrast to Evans the philosopher, Crabb has written as a counselor and, more recently, as a spiritual director, articulating at a popular level many themes integral to a radical model of Christian soul-care. An integrationist in the 70's, by the

90's Crabb had shifted in his understanding of the task of a Christian counselor and wrote about the unique soul-healing resources of Christianity in *Finding God* (Zondervan, 1993), *Connecting* (Word, 1997), and, most recently, *Soul-Talk* (Integrity, 2003).

More time in this issue will be spent introducing readers to another board member who has also been developing a counseling approach based on the distinctive therapeutic assets of Christianity, Sandra D. Wilson. Like Crabb, she is a widely-sought speaker and has written a number of books, including *Released From Shame* (InterVarsity, 2002) and *Into Abba's Arms* (Tyndale House, 1998) where she shows the relational healing possible through our personal relationship with God. A selection from *Into Abba's Arms* and an interview with her is found within. In addition, Diane Langberg, chair of the board of the American Association of Christian Counselors, a member of our board, a therapist for 25 years, and expert and author on the treatment of child abuse (*Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, Tyndale, 1998), offers some thoughts on the value of repentance for Christian counseling.

It is hoped that Christians involved in people-helping will be encouraged by the potential demonstrated by Crabb, Wilson, and Langberg. Christian psychology will not provide alternative theories of neural transmission, vision, animal learning, or cognition. However, in areas of psychology like counseling, where world-view assumptions more substantially affect interpretation and practice, Christian models should be abundant. Crabb, Wilson, and Langberg have all been pointing the way.

We hope you find this second installment helpful.



An Interview with Sandra Wilson

By Lia Vassiliades

Question #1. One of the goals of Christian psychology is to construct a psychology that is distinctively Christian. You have used the term “reclamation” to better communicate your preference over the idea of integration. Could you speak more to these differences and why you favor the idea of “reclamation” and what that term means to you?

When I say that Christians in mental health professions need to focus on *reclamation* rather than *integration* I mean what I imagine Robert Roberts means when he talks about the need to “retrieve” the historical Christian psychology rather than merely continue to buy into the establishment view of psychology. Long before reading Roberts’ eloquent essays on Christian psychology, I was urging my colleagues and my seminary students to *reclaim* the Church’s classic task of soul-care, or what Dr Gary Collins has called “people-helping.” It has always mystified – and frankly – annoyed me that so many of us Christian mental-health folks seemed to cede to the American Psychological Association, or some other self-proclaimed and culturally-derived accrediting body, more authority to determine what is a legitimate model of understanding and helping people than to the Scriptures and the classic Christian writers, such as Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and Kierkegaard, among others. I’m delighted to see the growing body of literature on an explicit and intentional Christian psychology from authors like Roberts, C. Stephen Evans, and Eric Johnson.

Question #2. What aspects of your training and practice have contributed to the work you do that is considered Christian Psychology?

I married at 19 with only two years of college, and it was twenty years before I returned. However, during those two decades as a homemaker, I taught innumerable Bible studies both in my church and neighborhood. The study that this required grounded me deeply in Scripture, and I remain grateful for that biblical foundation. Reflecting on all that Bible study and teaching, I realize that I always emphasized practical application. Specifically, I challenged myself and others to seriously consider how what we read in Scripture could both explain and guide our attitudes and actions. Clearly, I concur with Robert Roberts when he says that psychology is native and fundamental to the Christian faith. In effect, I was a psychologically-minded Bible teacher long before I became a biblically-minded psychotherapist. So I entered graduate school in my early forties with a Christian psychology in place – I just didn’t know enough to name it that. In more recent years I’ve discovered additional nuggets of Christian psychology in the writings of C. S. Lewis, Dallas Willard, and other non-clinicians, as well as in the classics on spiritual disciplines, e.g., Teresa of Avilla.

Question #3. How would a thoroughly Christian model of counseling differ from a secular version and what would you see as the benefits of that Christian model?

When we consider that the Greek, *psyche*, from which we get *psychology*, means life, or soul, we might well



be astonished that anyone would seek to be a “psyche-ologist” or counselor while being uninterested in the historical Christian practice of soul care. In fact, that soul care is seen as foreign, if not inappropriate, by even many *Christian* psychologists and professional counselors indicates how great the need is to reclaim what for centuries was viewed as a Kingdom concern. I believe, therefore, that a thoroughly Christian counseling model would intentionally and unapologetically, reclaim and embrace the ancient soul care paradigm. Further, such a counseling model would be built upon the bedrock of Scripture generally and upon the person and work of Jesus Christ specifically. Obviously, this requires a substantial personal knowledge of both. This counseling model would include some of what currently is defined as “spiritual direction,” i.e., helping a person with his or her relationship with God. At the same time, it would reach beyond this, to include helping persons with their relationships with themselves, e.g., developing accurate self-concepts, and their relationships with others, e.g., forgiving abusive parents, improving communication with a spouse and/or children.

In addition to knowing the theories of the establishment psychology, practitioners seeking to use this model would want to master the literature that articulates the history, substance, and scope of Christian psychology. And in a more personal, “use of self” realm, those who counsel within this paradigm must take serious the Scriptural call to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...strength and...mind.” (See Luke 10:27.) This verse also addresses one of the chief benefits of a thoroughly Christian counseling model, namely, the personal, spiritual, and clinical congruity it offers its practitioners. And as I consider the benefit – to the *counselee* – of a thoroughly Christian model of counseling, I’m reminded of some-

thing that I have been saying for years: I will not be comforted to learn someday that my counseling efforts have produced *better-adjusted people in hell!* Clearly, I’m so politically incorrect that I consider “relationship evangelism” (in contrast to the “hit-and-run” style) a legitimate goal of thoroughly Christian counseling. Clearly too, a consistent commitment to truth demands full disclosure about the Christ-centered, biblically-based nature of a thoroughly Christian counseling practice. But the greatest benefit, I believe, is that an intentionally, thoroughly Christian counseling model places Jesus Christ at the center of all we are and all we do. And that is exactly where He belongs since, “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (See Colossians 1:17.)

Question #4. In chapter 2 of *Into Abba’s Arms* you talk about the difference between living in the reality of the promises of God without living in the reality of the Promiser Himself. Why is this so important in helping people experience and receive God’s love?

“When we consider that the Greek, *psyche*, from which we get *psychology*, means life, or soul, we might well be astonished that anyone would seek to be a ‘psyche-ologist.’ ”

Now you’re opening up a touchy issue to the many Christians counselors enamored with cognitive restructuring. Of course, I opened it myself in that chapter, as you’ve observed. The first part of the answer to your question is found in the “necessary-but-not-sufficient” nature of reality-based theoretical constructs, or what we usually call *truth*. The second part of the answer speaks to the difference between a theological certainty and an experienced reality. In my view, it is when the former becomes the latter that people are deeply changed or transformed. That is, believing biblically-informed truth rather than culture-based lies (the very heart of Christian cognitive restructuring) is necessary but not sufficient, in my opinion, to produce what I call “deep-heart change.” This means that memorizing the promises of Scripture is necessary and helpful, but they will remain merely uplifting theoretical constructs unless the Promiser who spoke them becomes real to me. If this is true, and I fervently believe it is, then verses like John 17:3 come alive at an even deeper level: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.” The very definition of eternal life is *knowing God* – not knowing *about* God. Jesus never intended for Christianity to be a mental exercise in



the mastery of (denominationally-approved) theoretical constructs defining God. Scripture portrays our Savior God as a Passionate Pursuer, not some intellectually manageable idea or collection of ideas. Consider the New Living Bible's translation of Exodus 34:14: "You must worship ...only the LORD, for he is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you." Jesus did not go to the Cross so that we could have more accurate ideas *about* God! Jesus suffered and died to make a new and living way into His presence, so that we might have an intimate relationship *with* God. (See Hebrews 10:20-22.) Grasping this reality, or - more accurately - being grasped by it, takes biblical promises from the head to the heart and makes God's transforming love an experienced reality rather than only a theological certainty. (For many years I have defined Christian counseling, as I tried to practice it, as "private lessons in applied theology" - with the emphasis on "applied.")

Question #5. "Soul-care" and "spiritual formation" are widely used terms with just as wide a spectrum of meaning depending on the context and philosophy of those using them. Based on your experience and work in these areas, is there something different with regard to Christian psychology that you consider important to distinguish?

As noted above, I think that Christian psychology encompasses much of what is termed soul care. In fact, it seems to me that the *ideal* people-helper would be trained in Christian psychology and also prepared personally and spiritually to function as a spiritual director. True, such an ideal helper may be rare. However I see no compelling reason why competence in both disciplines could not be developed by those who sense the call from God and who seek to glorify Him with all of their hearts, souls, and minds.



Why Do I Try So Hard But Change So Little?

By Sandra Wilson

As Christians we're usually proud of our solid theology. But our shaky hearts and relationships are another story. We feel guilty for not living in the "peace that passes all understanding" that we know – complete with chapter and verse – God promised his children (see Philippians 4:7). We're disappointed in ourselves for not having a consistent sense of our Savior's abiding presence.

What's more, when we are aware of the pain from the holes in our souls and the scars of abandonment, we feel alone, like outsiders who long to belong – to God and to other people. And some of us feel so empty inside. Or at best we feel uncomfortably insecure in situations that include even minor rebuffs.

It's not supposed to be like this! After all, we're Christians.

We want things to be different, but we're not sure what to do. Some of us have been pursuing personal change for quite a while. Yet many of us also know that we have not *substantially* changed – deep down in the innermost core of our beings. So we're frustrated. And tired.

What's wrong with this picture? Or perhaps the better question is this: What's wrong with our ideas about change?

FAMILIAR FORMULA FOR CHANGE

When most of us think of changing, we think of correcting our misbeliefs, our thinking patterns. That makes sense if we believe that the rational part of us is the core of who we are.

Many people helpers have taken this approach. Typically they also address spiritual

needs and encourage people to turn to God as the power source for their changing processes. Over the years that's been my approach to facilitating change.

The Truth About Abandonment

I feel upset and scared right now because something happened that reminded me of how alone and terrified I sometimes felt as a child. I don't like this feeling, but I know that I will survive experiencing it and it will pass.

The truth is that as an adult, I cannot be abandoned in the same way I could have been as a child because I now have resources that I did not have then.

The truth is that I may get passed over, stood up, forgotten about, left behind, ignored, "dumped," and even cruelly rejected, but I will survive all of these painful experiences.

The truth is that as God's beloved child, I have this promise that he will never leave me, forsake me, or abandon me. I can rest safely in his faithful love.

For example, in *Released from Shame*, I encouraged readers to write a statement of truth like those in the preceding box to help correct misbeliefs that create painful feelings of abandonment.

"Thought correctors" like this can be enormously helpful to us. Our belief systems do significantly shape our emotions, our choices, and our behaviors. In fact, Jesus said in Mark 7:20 that all attitudes and actions flow out of our thought-lives: "It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out



of a person's heart, come evil thoughts." Clearly, replacing lies by learning truth will always be a critical part of change.

But how do we learn truth deeply enough to change deeply? I've been wondering recently if we have been going at change from the wrong direction. I have come to believe that before we can know truth at a transforming level of deep change, we must experience it in the context of *relationship*. In essence, that's what God demonstrated through the change model he used.

GOD'S MODEL FOR TRANSFORMING CHANGE

God delivered transforming truth in a *relational* package – the person of his Son. That truth came in the form of One with whom we can have an intimate relationship.

We experience deep change through the *Person* who is Truth, not by merely believing *precepts* of truth. Truthful propositions remain vitally important for us to learn, memorize, and assimilate into our belief systems. And this happens most effectively in intimate relationships and dialogue with a person – ideally with the One who names himself Truth.

Think about this question: Where did we learn the lies that pollute our belief systems? We learned them in the presence of those who mattered to us – in dialogue with people. We heard the lies spoken, we saw the lies lived, and we experienced the effects of the lies within relationships. For example, we may have been told repeatedly that "men are only out for sex" or "women are only out for money." If we have absorbed these lies, then our expectations of relationships have been affected. Or perhaps we saw our parents live the lie that financial success matters more than anything else in life. And now we may find ourselves living that same lie and teaching it to our children in the process.

We learn the truth in the same way. Someone has said that we do not change when we stay alone. That's why one-on-one mentor-

ing, discipleship, and counseling will always be more powerful than the best organized, most eloquently presented seminar (or book!) in the world.

Of course, ultimately we want to be able to speak the truth to ourselves. Yet those of us with past abandonment wounds are apt to become too overwhelmed with fear to remind ourselves of truthful precepts convincingly enough to make a difference deep within. We're so easily confused and discouraged when we're trying to change. Because we need modeling, affirmation, and lots of encouragement to stay with the hard work change requires, I believe that the presence of a trustworthy, caring person is the key to deep, life-transforming change. This means that we need to apply our Creator's relational model of *spiritual* transformation to *every* area of our lives where we seek genuine change.

What's more, the relational wrapping of transforming truth may help to answer a question that has troubled many of us for years. Why can't we get the biblical truths we know in our heads down to our hearts?

FROM THE HEAD TO THE HEART

Some truths don't need to make that arduous head-to-heart journey. I use basic mathematical truths to balance my checkbook without experiencing a deep personal connection to them. But then I can't say I've been transformed on any significant level by mathematical truths either (as my bank can confirm!). Even some *biblical* truths – for example, the names of Jacob's sons – don't need to grip our hearts, so to speak.

The relationship with truth required in balancing checkbooks and memorizing biblical names differs dramatically from learning to relate to God as a loving Father, developing a sense of secure belonging, or restructuring our relationships with important people in our lives. Discovering that has changed my life.

Over the past two years I've experienced a healing of my deep feelings of aban-

donment, and the healing has been more significant than I ever thought possible this side of heaven. In effect, the pathway from my head to my heart opened wide. And I am now experiencing an unshakably secure sense of belonging that years of Bible study, consistent prayer, and intermittent counseling failed to produce, even though each helped me to grow.

What happened? My friend Gary Moon gave me a copy of his first book, *Home-sick for Eden*. As I read it, I ached to experience God the way Gary said he had learned to experience him. I sobbed in regret for never knowing there were spiritual habits, usually called “disciplines,” to help me realize that possibility. I sobbed for joy at the possibility that I could learn them. And I began to practice some of the spiritual habits that Christians through the ages have used to deepen their awareness of God’s real presence in their lives. (Especially the habits, or disciplines, of silence and solitude.) Immediately my routine “quiet times” exploded and disappeared.

Reflecting on it now, I think most of my previous devotional times were spiritual sunscreen applied as quickly as possible each morning to protect me from over exposure to the day’s sin. Or to use another image, my quiet times were sort of “Jiffy Lube” for the soul, a practice intended to keep everything running smoothly. My devotional times routinely included two elements” (1) Scripture reading structured to accomplish a certain amount by a certain date, and (2) prayer, which meant me talking and God listening.

You’ll notice that this kind of devotional time doesn’t leave a lot of room for relationship building. It is rather like reading a close friend’s letters when the friend sits beside you, then talking without letting that friend speak. True, I knew a lot about God’s Word, which taught me quite a lot about God.

But for the most part, that knowledge stayed wedged in my intellect. There wasn’t much “trickle-down effect” to my heart to secure me when abandonment assaulted my shaky sense of belonging.

Like many sincere evangelicals, I had settled for learning denominationally determined definitions of theological terms *about* God instead of learning how to have an increasingly intimate relationships *with* God.

But all that is changing.

PRACTICING GOD’S PRESENCE

As I read about believers who found heart-to-heart intimacy with Jesus Christ, I kept seeing the phrase “practicing the presence of God.” The phrase was strangely mystical to my Baptistically tuned ears, to be sure. Yet I knew it was thoroughly biblical.

From the outset of my Christian life, I had been taught that, by his Spirit, Jesus was in me and with me even as he sits at the right hand of his Father in heaven. And I believed it. I just didn’t know how crucial it was to transfer that head belief into heart experience. Consequently, I hadn’t actually focused on the unseen but *real* presence of Christ right there with me in my devotional times. Or anywhere else. And I had little sense of intimacy with the Savior.

Genuine relational intimacy doesn’t develop quickly. Or accidentally.

We need to cultivate an environment in which intimacy can flourish. And we do this by practicing habits like listening to and giving undivided attention to the person with whom we want to be close. As we practice such habits over time, we really get to know someone. Relational intimacy grows.

That processes applies to a relationship with Jesus, too.

How close and intimate would a human friendship be with someone who never spoke directly to us? Not very. In our relationship with God, the problem isn’t that he doesn’t speak; it’s that we are often unwilling to listen.

In His book about prayer, Eddie Ensley quotes from fourteenth-century believer Catherine of Siena

“My quiet times were sort of ‘Jiffy Lube’ for the soul, a practice intended to keep everything running smoothly.”



on this point. When asked why God no longer conversed with his children in the personal way he did in the past, Catherine replied: "God is no longer as personal as He once was because instead of treating Him as the Master and seeing ourselves as the disciples, we treat Him as the disciple and act like we are the Masters."

Ensley goes onto say, "In short, instead of praying, 'Speak Lord, your servant is listening,' we pray, 'Listen Lord, your servant is speaking.'"

I've already admitted that most of my prayer life reflected this attitude. Of course, I never thought of it in those terms. And I would have been shocked and offended if someone else had suggested it to me.

Spending time with God in solitude, experiencing the reality of his presence, and cultivating inner quietness create the condition in which we can hear him more clearly. And as we share our hearts with God and hear him share his heart with us, our relationship grows deeper, closer. More *real*.

That's how friendships work.

The above is an excerpt from Sandra Wilson's *Into Abba's Arms: finding the acceptance you've always wanted*, 1998. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing House. Used by Permission from the Publisher. All Rights Reserved.



An Inward Look

By Diane Langberg

Forgiveness is a popular topic today. Who would have believed that we would be reading about forgiveness in the professional literature? The world has decided that something God calls us to is good!

There is something else God calls us to that we do not hear much about, certainly not in the professional literature, but sadly, not even that much in the church. We do not hear much about repentance, do we? In consulting with a church about some difficult matters I was asked to set forth for them what repentance actually looks like in a life. It was a profound exercise. I found it both sobering and convicting. I also realized how central it is to the work we do as counselors.

Think how healing true repentance would be for victims of sexual abuse, for those whose spouses have had affairs, for relationships ravaged by addictions. And think how damaging and confusing it is when someone who has been wounded and sinned against receives a verbal, "I'm sorry", that is nothing more than words without substance.

I would like to give you what I have learned about repentance. God knows we need to understand it for our own lives. And I learned long ago that you cannot teach another what you do not truly know yourself. You cannot lead others where you will not go. We do a disservice, or worse, further damage, if we work with those who have sinned or been sinned against without a true understanding of what repentance looks like.

Let us consider what repentance might look like for someone in leadership who carried

on a sexual relationship with someone under their care. The first question is an important one. Of what does the person need to repent? We tend, I think, to answer the question on a superficial or merely behavioral level. We do a great disservice to the person we are working with and demonstrate a naiveté about sin when this is so. In our example, we are faced with at least the following: adultery, deceit and lies, rebellion, hypocrisy, presumption, stealing, lust and unfaithfulness to God, spouse and the body of Christ.

What is the nature of repentance? The word means "to have another mind" about something. It really means to have the mind of Christ about the sin (s) we have committed. I formerly had my own thoughts about the sin, but having repented, I now have another mind, i.e., the mind of Christ. At the very least, repentance will include the following: 1. Truth about the sin, the events surrounding it, myself and its impact on others; 2. humility, a submissive spirit. I will recognize that I have demonstrated a lack of wisdom and discernment. Having demonstrated the "wrong mind" I will be humble enough to submit myself to those who give evidence of the mind of Christ; 3. Empathy for those who have been wronged and damaged by my sin; 4. An awareness that the sin is against the goodness and holiness of God, not merely a behavioral aberration that got me in trouble; 5. A desire to make restitution.

Paul says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation...See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done" (II Corinthians 7:10). Is the person diligent to deal with their sin? Are they eager to be rid of all complicity with sin in their life? Are they

greatly afflicted with the offender, i.e., themselves? Are they alarmed by their susceptibility to the sin? Do they long for restoration? Do they demonstrate zeal for God's honor? Do they strenuously work for a clearing of the sin and its consequences?

It is easy to see why I was both sobered and convicted by my study. Such fruit in a life is not born of counseling techniques, though God may use them. The fruit of repentance is the work of the Spirit of God in a life. May those of us who counsel others seek its cleansing work where necessary. We who have seen how sin ravages lives should be the first on our knees.

Repentance is defined by Paul as an intensely Godward sorrow that fashions transformation (II Corinthians 7:10). How easily we slide into seeing it, not as Godward but as "humanward." And how readily we reduce it to words and tears rather than transformation.

One of the Puritans, Obadiah Sedgwick (who else would have such a name!) wrote an excellent book, *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*. He gives us four things which give evidence of a superficial repentance, which is, of course, no repentance at all. The first is that the principal restraint is only for those things which fall under the eyes of others. This results in restraining sin *so it is not visible*. Second, that which grieves the person reveals that which owns the heart. Those who grieve loss of position or reputation love their work more than their God. Third, when the sin in the heart is not the real burden, but rather the specific consequences are seen as the greater burden e.g., loss of job, reactions of others, then repentance is not deep. And finally, when we care more about being spared than about being truly searched by the Word of God and the Spirit of God we are not truly desirous of being cleansed from sin. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin (as opposed to our simply getting caught), it is not our relationships

with others that trouble us primarily (though trouble us they should), but our relationship with God.

Think about what repentance is and what it is not in the context of counseling a Christian leader who has fallen, a batterer or someone caught in an addiction to internet pornography. Truly it is a difficult thing to repent. It is hard and deep work and we short-change our clients when we do not understand this and fail to do everything we can to help them repent. Sedgwick says, "It is not easy for a man to become an enemy to himself, to lay down his delights, his natural bent, to condemn his heart and ways or forsake his own counsels and inclinations (1995, p.125). Charles Spurgeon tells us that true repentance is recognizable by the fact that the repentant one dreads the sin as the burnt child dreads fire (1994, October 13, Morning Reading). Oswald Chambers teaches that repentance destroys the lust of self-vindication and that wherever that lust resides repentance is not true (1996, p. 29). Such teachings help us to see how rare the jewel of true repentance is.

"The fruit of repentance is the work of the Spirit of God in a life. May those of us who counsel others seek its cleansing work where necessary. We who have seen how sin ravages lives should be the first on our knees."

How do these truths relate to our counseling practices? First of all, I think it is very easy for us to get so caught up in the clinical aspects of our work that we fail to tend to matters of the heart. I believe that our clinical work is important. There is a body of knowledge we should know thoroughly and skills we should perform with excellence. To be poorly versed or sloppy in such matters is wrong and does not glorify the God we serve. However, to think our clinical knowledge is sufficient for working with the hearts and lives of human beings is foolish.

Second, we cannot foster true repentance in the lives of our clients unless it is a reality in our own lives. How can we expect to recognize superficial repentance or nurture true repentance if we have never bowed the knee and allowed God to do that work in our own hearts?

Paul, in Galatians 6:1 says, "... if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (NIV). I take from this Scripture the follow-



ing: 1) Those involved in restoration, as we certainly are, should be those who live lives of repentance, bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives and have the mind of Christ; 2) restoration is to be done with humility. There is no room for harshness, superiority or disdain; and 3) restoration is accompanied by watchfulness. Sin is contagious. It is easy to catch the disease you are working with or react to one sin with another, e.g., pride or a critical spirit.

Repentance is a work begun and carried out by the Spirit of God. It is neither quick nor easy. It is far more than words and emotion. When it is not present in a client our call is to intercede for them until it is. To engage in such work is to stand on holy ground. I have never gone through this process with another where God has not used it to convict me of sin as well. His call to us as counselors is to respond to our sin in the way we would lay out for others. May we be counselors who are not merely concerned with the health of our clients but with their holiness as well.

References

Chambers, Oswald (1996). *Conformed to His Image*. Discovery House Publishers.

Sedgwick, Obadiah (1995). *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*. Soli Deo Gloria Publications

Spurgeon, C.H. (1994). *Morning & Evening*. Christian Focus Publications.



Locating Christian Psychology

By Eric Johnson

To many, the idea of a Christian psychology is as nonsensical as Christian chemistry or Christian car mechanics. Psychology is a science, they say, and the hallmark of science is that its methods yield a universal knowledge to which all interested parties can subscribe, irrespective of their particular religious or philosophical views. This is the view of modernism, it was the founding framework of *modern* psychology, and it continues to be the dominant worldview within mainstream psychology to this day.

Over the past 40 years, postmodernism has become an increasingly influential position that takes the contrary stance that knowledge is essentially local and communal. Knowledge, by this reckoning, is constituted by the beliefs and practices of communities (or guilds) to which one belongs. Postmodernists believe there is no way for scientists, or anyone for that matter, to extricate themselves from their sociohistorical assumptions, in order to see things as they really are--how they are for all cultures for all time--so they argue that the knowledge-seeking enterprise of science must be content with describing how things look to us, according to our community's views of things. Postmodernism has helped to legitimize the study of feminist, gay, Buddhist, African-American, and Asian perspectives, behavior, and personality to the point that cross-cultural psychology has now been accepted by mainstream (modernist) psychology.

So, Modernists favor the One of human knowledge (since it is universal, regardless of cultural variation, and accessible to any disinterested observer), while postmodernists favor the Many of human knowledge (since it is always

historically situated within particular cultural contexts, resulting in a degree of incommensurability between members of different cultures). So the fact that responsible researchers have found that cultural or subcultural differences result in empirically demonstrable cognitive, attitudinal, personality, and relational differences would seem to offer both modernists and postmodernists some encouragement. In the face of competent research, modernists have conceded that sociohistorical influences can shape the formation of human thought, behavior, and experience. This isn't that problematic; the One is simply multifaceted; universal knowledge is more complex than we thought it was and requires greater context-specificity. Postmodernists, on the other hand, are disposed to see the Many in the plurality of subcultural and cultural *psychological* differences, and they conclude this research proves that all we can ever achieve is the development of a set of distinct psychologies. Mainstream psychology, they argue, has simply been the most successful in the West at selling itself as "*the Truth*," creating a hegemony that continues to marginalize the psychologies of other communities. Perhaps someday there will be greater acceptance of the plurality that in fact exists.

Such conversation has created an intriguing time to think about Christian psychology. For centuries, the Christian community has developed a way of thinking about human nature, its problems, and its healing that is at variance with many of the accepted understandings of mainstream psychology: humans are creatures of God, made for relationship with God and made in God's image; individual humans are composed of bodies and souls (admittedly, most Christians have believed this, but not all); sin is the worst psychological abnormality, a universal condi-



tion rendering all of humanity “abnormal” in the most significant sense imaginable; faith in Christ’s death on the cross for one’s sins results in supernatural birth at the core of one’s being and leads to a special relationship with God; and Christians are uniquely indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It must be conceded that these beliefs were not formed on the basis of publicly verifiable, empirical research, but rather through study of the Bible, the reflections of Christian philosophers and theologians, and the experiences of Christians down through the ages. The question is whether their origin should count against the validity of these beliefs, so that they should not be considered scientific and therefore a part of psychology.

Since none of these assertions are empirically demonstrable to those who do not share the Christian faith, modernists must relegate such beliefs to “theology” (or worse, “superstition”), but it simply makes no sense to them to consider these beliefs worthy of the label “knowledge” or the deliverances of “science.” We would expect the postmodernist, however, to be more sympathetic, since they anticipate that a community like the Christian would have its own way of construing the world and itself, and since they suspect there is no universal knowledge, they would have little trouble accepting the unique view of humanity shared by the Christian community (this openness is demonstrated in Kenneth J. Gergen’s jacket endorsement of Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen’s, 1985, book, *The Person in Psychology*).

Historically, however, most in the Christian community have not shared the anti-realist assumptions now affirmed by postmodernism (and affirmed in the past by skepticism, Kantianism, and pragmatism). Christian thinkers have almost universally been “realists,” believing in the possibility of attaining universal truth, that is, that human reason could ascertain something of the actual state of affairs, both of the natural and the supernatural orders. As a result, Christian thinkers have therefore almost universally held that the Christian faith was the one true faith in which all people could and should believe. So, while a Christian version of psychology includes beliefs about human beings and about Christians that are

not shared by all people, Christian psychology would seem to entail the belief that to the extent its version of human nature is an accurate description of the way human nature really is, it is true, indeed the “most” true, and therefore it *should be* believed by all people. As a result, Christian psychology would seem to cause offense to both modernists and postmodernists.

The most important thing that distinguishes the totalizing and universalistic perspective of modernism from that of Christianity is the Christian assumption that God is genuinely omniscient. He knows all things, that is, his understanding of things corresponds to the way things actually are. God’s understanding is total and universal. This says nothing directly regarding human knowledge, but it bears on human knowledge, since if there is at least one Knower who knows things as they really are, perhaps it is possible for other knowers to know things as they really are. What tempers these totalizing and universalistic inclinations is another Christian assumption that human knowing is limited, being finite, and therefore never comprehensive and exhaustive. Moreover, Christianity’s doctrine of sin teaches believers that there is a built-in cognitive or noetic bias that is never completely overcome in this life. So, while omniscience will always elude any finite, sinful creature, God’s mind stands as a standard by which the Christian’s mind is measured and towards which it is to strive to resemble. (We will not deal here with the important problem of how Christians can be sure that they can know God’s mind.) While comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge is unattainable, Christians have tended to believe it is possible to know in ways that correspond more closely to the way things really are, the way that God knows them.

The search for a “middle way” between modernism and post-modernism has been bolstered in the past decade by the work of Alvin Plantinga, one of the most important Christian philosophers in the 20th century. He has argued (1993) that it is rational to assume the following: 1) the human mind is a belief-producing mechanism; 2) the human mind produces beliefs according to its design plan; 3) if it is producing beliefs according to its design plan, it is properly functioning; 4) if it is properly functioning, it will yield reliable knowledge; and 5) if it is not functioning properly, it may not yield reliable knowledge. In his



more recent book (2000), Plantinga has argued further that, according to Christianity, 1) the design plan of the human mind has been compromised by sin which has caused damage to its knowing capacities and so has compromised its ability to know certain things (e.g., knowledge of self and God), and 2) one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the restoration of those knowing capacities lost by sin. Obviously, the conclusions of this book are outrageous when examined according to the canons of modern discourse, because of its bald assertions that some humans (Christians) may know important things that others cannot know unless they become Christians. Plantinga acknowledges that he cannot *prove* the validity of specifically Christian beliefs to the non-Christian, but he is not interested in such proof. He has simply tried to make the case that the Christian is within her epistemic rights to hold to those beliefs, that it is rational to do so, *even though they are not held by some other rational persons – that is, even though they are not publicly verifiable*. But his specifically Christian conclusions would likely call forth at least amusement if not downright concern from the postmodernist, since Plantinga is also arguing in favor of a realist theory of human knowing that is, that humans can know things as they really are and, even more scandalous, Christians can know some things more accurately than non-Christians, implying that if one does not believe in the Christian God, one's knowing faculties are deficient. And this is a stance that the usually tolerant postmodernist cannot tolerate.

This brief summary cannot do justice to the complexity of his arguments, nor can it deal with difficulties in the position (e.g., if belief in the Christian God can be rationally held in the face of objections from other rational persons, what about belief in alien abductions?). We must move on to enquire into the significance of Plantinga's work for Christian psychology. To begin with, he has written a well-structured argument for the rationality of holding to specifically Christian beliefs even though other rational persons disagree. This is of seismic importance for the Christian psychologist because of the many distinctively Christian beliefs that bear on human nature and Christian experience that are not shared by modernists

or most members of other cultural or subcultural groups. If Plantinga is right, the Christian psychologist is also within her epistemic rights to hold to specifically Christian beliefs and allow them to influence her research, theory-building, and counseling practice, regardless of the "discourse rules" and "ethical standards" of the modernist majority who dominate the field of psychology currently. His work suggests that the project of a Christian psychology could be rational and worthy of the communal efforts of Christians in psychology. The Christian community has its own defensible discourse rules and ethical standards. Also, it is significant that Plantinga's entire epistemological model itself is an example of a specifically Christian type of philosophy, one that makes certain Christian assumptions and argues on the basis of them, regardless of whether certain non-Christians can concur. This makes him also a philosophical role-model, exemplifying the way for Christian psychologists to do likewise in their field, a field dedicated to research, theory-building, and practices concerned with human nature. (It should also be stated that Plantinga's work has spearheaded a renewal of Christian philosophy over the past 20 years that, as a whole, points the way for Christians in psychology and counseling). How would such a psychology differ from the secular version that dominates the field currently? We won't know until we work earnestly and communally on such a project for a number of years.

Next Issue: What is Christian Psychology?

References

- Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant and proper function*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plantinga, A. (2000). *Warranted Christian belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Leeuwen, M.S. (1985). *The person in psychology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.



Works of Christian Psychology: New Additions

- Alexander, Archibald. (1998). *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust.
- Anderson, Ray S. (1982). *On Being Human*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Benner, David. (2000). *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Bridge, William. (1961). *A Lifting Up of the Downcast*. Banner of Truth.
- Browning, Don S. (1987). *Religious Thought and Modern Psychologies*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Capps, Donald. (1987). *Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Cloud, Henry & John Townsend. (2001). *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Crabb, L. & Dan Allender. (1984). *Encouragement: The Key to Caring*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Crabb, L. (1993). *Men & Women: Enjoying the Difference*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Crabb, L. (2003). *Soul Talk: The Language God Longs For Us to Speak*. Nashville, TN: Integrity.
- Emler, Michael R. (2002). "Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. 20, 7-52.
- Edwards, Jonathan. (1967). "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, In Three Parts." *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Volume 1*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth.
- Manning, Brennon. (1990). *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.
- Moncher, Frank. (2001). "A Psychotherapy of Virtue: Reflection on St. Thomas Aquinas' Theology of Moral Virtue." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. 20, 332-341.
- Narramore, Bruce. (1984). *No Condemnation: Rethinking Guilt Motivation in Counseling, Preaching, and Parenting*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Payne, Leanne. (1996). *Broken Image*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Payne, Leanne. (1996). *Restoring the Soul*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Piper, John. (2002). "God's Glory is the Goal of Biblical Counseling." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. 20, 8-21.
- Piper, John. (2003). "Counseling with Suffering People." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. 21, 18-27.
- Plantinga, Cornelius Jr. (1995). *Not What it's Supposed to Be: A Brevity of Sin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Plantinga, Cornelius Jr. (2002). *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Skoglund, Elizabeth. (2000). *Bright Days Dark Nights with Charles Spurgeon in Triumph over Emotional Pain*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Sibbes, Richard. (1998). *The Bruised Reed*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth.
- Sisemore, Timothy A. (2001). "Saint Augustine's confessions and the use of introspection in counseling." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. 20, 324-331.
- Sisemore, Timothy A. (2003). "Christian Counseling for Children: The Five Domains Model." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. 22, 155-122.
- Shuster, Marguerite. (1987). *Power, Pathology, Paradox: The Dynamics of Evil and Good*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- White, John. (1982). *The Masks of Melancholy*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity.
- White, John. (1987). *Putting the Soul Back in Psychology*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity.
- Yarhouse, Mark. (2001). "John Owen on Spiritual Mindedness." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. 20, 342-350.



THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN
PSYCHOLOGY

SBTS Box 952
2825 Lexington Road
Louisville, KY 40280

Email: info@christianpsych.org

*A Christian Psychological Newsletter for
Edification and Awakening*

LOOK AT ARTICLES AND OTHER
FEATURES ON THE WEB AT
WWW.CHRISTIANPSYCH.ORG

The Board of the Society of Christian Psychology:

- Larry Crabb, Ph. D. (New Way Ministries)
- C. Stephen Evans, Ph. D. (Baylor University)
- Kathrin Halder, IACP. (IGNIS—Kitzingen, Germany)
- Eric L. Johnson, Ph.D. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)
- Diane Langberg, Ph.D. (Diane Langberg and Associates)
- Werner May, Dipl.-Psych. (IGNIS—Kitzingen, Germany)
- Robert C. Roberts, Ph.D. (Baylor University)
- Timothy A. Sisemore, Ph.D. (Psychological Studies Institute—Chattanooga)
- Paul C. Vitz, Ph.D. (Institute of Psychological Sciences—Arlington, VA)
- P. J. Watson, Ph.D. (University of Tennessee—Chattanooga)
- Sandra Wilson, Ph.D. (Scottsdale, AZ)
- Mark Yarhouse, Psy. D. (Regent University)

Special Contributor to this issue: Lia Vassiliades.

Edification's Staff: Eric Johnson, Louis Belva, Lia Vassiliades, Joshua Creason, Dee Reju.

**Missions Statement for
the Society of Christian Psychology**

The Society exists to promote the development of a distinctly Christian psychology (including theory, research, and practice) that is based on a Christian vision of human nature.

Amplification of the Mission Statement: A Christian vision of human nature is shaped primarily by the Christian Scriptures, as well as Christianity's intellectual and ecclesial traditions. However, a Christian psychology will also be critically informed by other relevant sources of psychological truth, particularly its own reflection, research, and practice, but also the psychological work of other traditions (e.g., secular psychology), philosophy, human experience, and the other human sciences. Also, we believe that God's understanding of human nature is singular and the goal of a Christian psychology, but given human finitude and the existence of distinct Christian traditions, the Society happily acknowledges that a Christian psychology is realized only through the contributions of those coming from various Christian tradition-perspectives.

Implementation of the Mission Statement: The Society will seek to advance the development of a Christian psychology by creating opportunities for dialogue and fellowship through its newsletter, website, and conferences, and by encouraging reflection, research, publishing, soul-care, education, and training that is intentionally committed to the realization of a distinctly Christian psychology.