

# CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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*The Agency of Christ*

# CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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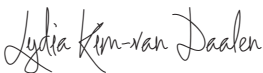
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Lydia Kim-van Daalen  
Managing Editor,  
*Christian Psychology*

# Vicarious Agency

Rev. Andrew Purves

*Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

*The Christology of vicarious agency teaches that Christ acts in our place. He does so as the mission of God. He fulfills this mission in a two-fold way: as God become flesh in which he ministers the things of God to us, and as the human who receives and responds to God in which he ministers the things of humankind to God. Through union with Christ, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, we are joined to this two-fold ministry so that it is the actuality of Christ's ministry that enables the possibility for our ministry.*

*Keywords: Vicarious humanity of Christ, Participation, Union with Christ, Human Agency*

“Mark well these words: John said, We have presently a sufficient Advocate, whom Paul affirms to sit at the right hand of God the Father, and to be the only Mediator between God and Man. ‘For he alone (says Ambrose) is our mouth, by whom we speak of God; he is our eyes, by whom we see God, and also our right hand, by whom we offer anything to the Father’; who, unless he make intercession, neither we, neither any of the saints, may have any society or fellowship with God” John Knox (1882, pp. 47-48), Scottish reformer.

This is a paper on theological dogmatics, with a concentration on Christology, but as such it is also a paper on human agency, in this case the agency of the divinely human man for us. Just because the focus is on the agency of Jesus, who acts in the unity of his person as wholly God and wholly human, it is not less, but, I will argue, more fully human agency in a special, unique sense as vicarious and redemptive agency.

This paper is in three parts: a discussion of Jesus Christ, the mission of God; a presentation of a dual-action Christology in which Jesus acts from the side of God to us and from our side to God as the apostolic high priest; and a conclusion in which I will emphasize Jesus' vicarious agency and suggest briefly implications for ministry.

## Jesus Christ, the Mission of God

Christian faith believes that the ministry of Jesus Christ is the direct act of God: “I do as the Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). Jesus comes with a job to do, with a saving purpose in view, for which he is sent from the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of Mary. His life and ministry is a Trinitarian action, a hypostatic divine event. This means we cannot consider the meaning of the mission of God apart from the person of Jesus Christ. He is in his

own person the mission of God to and for the world, and any sense in which some other person or movement might subsequently become identified with the mission of God is possible only on the basis of sharing in Christ's continuing mission. His ministry may not be understood independently of who he is in the unity of his incarnate personhood. His being and act, his person and work, must be held tightly together lest in unhinging the meaning of the mission of God from the person of Jesus we lose altogether the actual event of that mission as Jesus Christ.

There is no talking about God's mission to and for the world apart from the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, ascended to rule, and who will come again. Jesus is not just a messenger of God or a prophet. He comes as Emmanuel, as God with us in human flesh, God in our midst as a particular human being. Athanasius put it clearly, “He was not a man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us” (1998, 1.39). This reflects the church's codification of the central affirmation of faith in the Nicene Creed's assertion that Jesus is “of one substance with the Father” (*homoousios to Patri*). Jesus in the flesh is God incarnate as Mary's son who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, God with us and for us. The *homoousion* is the core confession of the church that has guarded the mystery of the incarnation, without which there would be no Christian faith, and apart from which there is no ground for understanding the mission of God. Thus the irreducible singularity of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God become incarnate for us and our salvation is the totality of what is meant by the mission of God. The mission of God is thereby Christologically grounded in a thoroughgoing and controlling way so that everything in Christian faith and life flows out from this center and toward this center. The corollary of the incarnation, of course, is the Christian doctrine

of God as one being, three persons, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The incarnation of the Word of God becoming flesh as Jesus of Nazareth is identified, then, as the mission of God. It is a gracious sending and becoming, because as God with us he comes as God for us, to do for us in the flesh of our humanity what must be done to restore us to union and communion with the Father. The whole doctrine of the atonement can be assumed here, for he comes not just as Emmanuel, but as Emmanuel and Savior. He comes not just into the world, but also for the world. The theme of reconciliation is woven into the fabric of the gospel because it is woven into the being of the Savior and takes place within his incarnate person (Torrance, 1988, p. 155).

Thus, Karl Barth insists that God:

is amongst us in humility, our God, God for us, as that which He is in Himself, in the most inward depth of His Godhead. . . . The truth and actuality of our atonement depends on this being the case. The One who reconciles the world with God is necessarily the one God Himself in His true Godhead. Otherwise the world would not be reconciled with God (Barth, 1956, p. 193).

As God with us and for us, Jesus also reveals what it means to be the truly human one. In the ontological union of his divinity and humanity, he remakes human nature to be now fully conformed to the image of God. He is “the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). In Jesus, we see what a human being was intended to be in the purposes of God. His love, his purposeful ministry, his relationships, his God-centeredness show what being human really involves. And because our deepest identity as human beings is found in union with Christ, the truly human one, the core of who we are is defined not by our achievements, possessions, personalities, natural endowments, or even our religious associations and experiences. We find and claim our authentic personal humanity in the fact that God has been gracious to us and become one with us in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit made us one with him. Our union with Christ is the ontological basis of true humanity.

Redemption takes place then within the mediatorial life and person of Jesus Christ. Our salvation takes place in the inner relations of the mediator in the unity of his person as wholly God and wholly human, and not just in Christ’s external relations with God and with humankind. Because of his becoming a man, the Son of God made what we are his own so that what he is by nature as a human person in communion with the Father, becomes ours in him by grace through our union with him.

The hypostatic union, the doctrine that Jesus Christ was to be understood in terms of the personal and particular union of God and humankind, takes

place when the one person of the Son assumes human nature into himself and thus into his divine nature. The union of divine and human natures is entirely the act of God in becoming a man. The result is that the Son of God exists as the man Jesus, son of Mary, in the integrity of his human agency. Apart from this act of God in becoming human, however, Jesus would not have existed at all. Thus the fully human life of Jesus must be regarded as grounded in the act of the Word of God becoming flesh, and has no independent existence apart from this. The doctrine of the anhypostasis asserts that Christ’s human nature has its reality only in union with God, having no independent existence or subsistence apart from the incarnation. Christ’s human personhood is human nature, therefore, in communion with God, human being as it was intended by God to be.

The doctrine of the enhypostasis, on the other hand, asserts that Christ’s human nature was nevertheless a real and specific existence in which Jesus had a fully human mind, will, and body. This means that we must think of the incarnation in terms not of God in humankind, but of God as a particular man, yet not ceasing to be God even while being wholly and actually that man. In sum: the human nature of Jesus Christ was enhypostatic in the Word. Jesus Christ the Word of God was really human, a man, at once the one and the many. In traditional language (inclusive language does not allow the point to be made as clearly), he was both man and a man, representing all humanity in the singularity of his specific, individuated manhood (Torrance, 1959, p. 250). This means that the hypostatic union is to be understood not just in terms of incarnation, but also soteriologically in terms of the reconciliation between God and humankind in the unity of his person, while reconciliation is to be understood not just in terms of the cross, but also in terms of the incarnation.

### The Two-Fold Ministry of Jesus, Our Apostolic High Priest

The position for which I argue is this: first, Jesus Christ is himself both God’s saving Word of address to humankind, and the human response of hearing and receiving that Word and acting in perfect obedience toward God (see John 5:17–47; 10:30; and Heb. 3:2 especially, where Christ is faithful—*piston*—to the one who appointed him). This dynamic twofold

nature of Christ’s ministry is the heuristic truth embedded within the doctrine of the hypostatic union, in which Jesus Christ is understood to be wholly God and wholly human in the union of his one personhood. Thus the hypostatic union is inherently a practical doctrine: Jesus Christ is the “place” where the Word and action of God and the word and action of humankind meet in oneness, and is therefore “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Second, Christian ministry arises as our participation through the Holy Spirit in this twofold ministry of Jesus Christ, where the Word of God is spoken, heard, obeyed, and given back to God in its fullness in fulfillment of its purpose (Isa. 55:11). Thus, the church's ministry is inherently an apostolic and priestly ministry because it is a sharing in Christ's ministry, which is itself apostolic and priestly, as Hebrews 3:1 insists. Through our union with Christ, ministry is accordingly shaped to the Christological pattern. Thus Jesus' statement at John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," is the singular basis not only for piety and faith, but also for ministry, for it is in union with Christ that we can walk the way, know the truth, and live the life of those who serve in the name of Christ. In this way we share in his ministry, in which, he ministers the things of God to us and the things of humankind to God, to the glory of the Father and for the sake of the world.

The corollary is that apart from union with Christ, ministry is cast back upon us to achieve as a moral imperative. This, however, is a recipe for failure, for we all fall short of the glory of God. The understanding and practice of pastoral work in this case is a burden too heavy to bear and follows a path that denies the gospel. We do not heal the sick, comfort the bereaved, accompany the lonely, forgive sins, raise up hope of eternal life, or bring people to God on the strength of our piety and pastoral skill. To think that these tasks are ours to perform is hubris and a recipe for exhaustion and depression in ministry. We must move away from a pragmatic and needs-assessment perspective of ministry — in which we ask, What should I do in response to the need or pain before me? — toward a perspective rooted entirely in the gospel, in which what we do and how we do it are done in the Spirit through sharing in Christ's own speech and action as the one Word of God and in Christ's own response in filial obedience to the Father. This is the reversal of the approach that moves from ministry that God makes possible, with the responsibility to make it actual left up to us, and toward the approach that moves from ministry that God makes actual, our sharing in which ministry makes our ministry possible. It is an approach that is entirely theological, and as such, rooted at all points in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Let me now fill in the Christology more fully with a brief discussion of the apostolic and priestly ministry of Christ. The apostolic and priestly ministry of Jesus Christ is the soteriological center of Christian practical theology. By the terms "the apostolic and priestly ministry of Jesus Christ" I mean that Christ is both the apostle of God, the one who utters the Word of God, and the high priest, who responds to this Word and to God on behalf of the people. By

emphasizing the apostolic priesthood in this way, we lay the cornerstone both for a radically reconstructed theology of the church and for pastoral care that is able to bear the full load of the gospel as a gospel of salvation. Through union with Christ, pastoral work has a dynamic, participative doctrinal grounding in which emphasis is properly placed on who God is and what God does for us in, through, and as Jesus Christ.

Through our participation in Christ's humanity, the practice of ministry is sharing in the apostolic and priestly ministry of the pasturing God.

Christian ministry is grounded in the twofold character of Christ's ministry in which through his incarnation he took on our human nature and from within it healed it and made it holy in himself, and which he offers up to God in and through himself on our behalf. As Son of God, Christ represents God to us. He is the Word of God, Emmanuel. As son of Mary, Christ represents humankind to God. He is the appropriate response to God from the body of the flesh. Christ's ministry in this way is determined by who Christ is in the hypostatic union of his incarnate personhood, as wholly God and wholly human, and what God, the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, wills in and through him that we should be and do. As the "apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1), Christ, in the unity of his personhood, brings God to us and us to God in a saving work of grace that restores to us the gift of communion with God in which we discover the fullness of our humanity. Our Lord's ministry consists in this dual action of the one work of incarnation and atonement. Because of the centrality of Christ's twofold ministry, the understanding of Christian faith, church, and ministry needs to be thoroughly constructed in the light of the theological testimony to the ministry of Jesus Christ exercised through his vicarious humanity.

Two points should be noted briefly. First, the church's faith in this two-fold ministry of Jesus Christ presupposes the reality of the incarnation, which in turn presupposes the doctrine of the Trinity. It is only as God with us in a singular and unique way that Christ is also the human for God in a saving way. From beginning to end, from God and as God and from humankind and as a human person, salvation is God's work. The gospel stands or falls, then, on the singularity of Christ's soteriological apostolic and priestly sonship in the flesh of our humanity. Second, it is because Jesus is the human for God that the incarnation becomes wholly redemptive through his active obedience in which he offers us up to God in the flesh of his own humanity through his life of worship, obedience, and filial love. Understood in this way, we take seriously the teaching that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6). We are presented to God by the priestly hand of Christ alone,



as Knox (1882) said. This is not only a completed past event in the body of the flesh, but is the continuing priestly ministry of Christ in his ascended rule at the right hand of the Father, in which he ever intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

The danger for theological orthodoxy is likely always to lie in understanding the incarnation—the “downward” act, as it were—as the whole gospel, which undercuts Christ’s ministry in our humanity in a docetic way. It means the loss of his vicarious humanity. Salvation means not just that God is in communion with us and that God has acted in Christ for us, but also that we should be in communion with God. For this, Christ must, from the side of our humanity, be our high priest, offering by his own hand vicariously our response to God, confessing our sin (the meaning of his baptism unto repentance), and living the filial life that God requires. In him and through him, he is the Word of God to us and the righteous response of humankind to God, the response given by God as the man Jesus for us.

Christ’s ministry in its widest sense means (1) the Word of God addressing us in and as the incarnate one, Jesus of Nazareth, and (2) the human work of Jesus Christ, wholly God, in response in his dealing with the Father on our behalf, as our representative before God. The church has insisted that Jesus in this regard is not a kind of third entity between God and humankind—this was the mistake of Arius that prompted the clarifying rebuttal of the Nicene *homoousios to Patri*. Neither is Christ a mathematical point of connection between God and humankind. He is the mediator between them as one in being with both God and humankind. This is a significant point of the doctrines of the *homoousion* and the hypostatic union. This is what Hebrews 3:1 means when it refers to him as the apostle and high priest of our profession. According to T. F. Torrance,

As Apostle Christ bears witness for God, that He is holy. As High Priest He acknowledges that witness and says Amen to it. Again as Apostle of God He confesses the mercy and grace of God, His will to pardon and reconcile. As High Priest He intercedes for men, and confesses them before the face of God. . . . From the side of God He acts in the steadfastness of divine truth and love in judgment, from the side of man He acts in unswerving obedience to the Father (1993, p. 10).

And as T. W. Manson observes:

Here we have the essential characteristics of a perfect high-priesthood: on the one side an unbreakable link with God the Father in the unflinching obedience of the Son; on the other an unbreakable link with his brother men through an unflinching sympathy and under-

standing. This solidarity with God and man uniquely fits Christ to be the Mediator, to represent God to men and men to God, to make the Holy One of Israel real to his children and to fit those sinful children to enter into the divine presence (1958, p. 58).

The two-fold ministry of Jesus Christ, then, is the practical center of the gospel, on which everything in faith, life, and ministry depend. Christ comes as the incarnate Word of God who yet makes the response of faith, life, and ministry in our place as wholly human in a personal and vicarious manner. The gospel, then, is not a religious idea proclaimed, a moral ideal asserted, or even a cosmic drama conducted “above our heads.” It is God’s personal act in and through Jesus Christ by which God comes as Jesus in an atoning incarnation and to which Word Jesus our brother and advocate responds. Further, the gospel includes us in the benefit of this twofold action through sharing in his person, not by imputation but through relationship with Christ, in union with Christ. This dual movement in and through the hypostatic union of the one person of Jesus Christ forces us to understand our salvation in terms not only of the act of God in Christ that deals with our sins, but also as the act of God in Christ that offers to God from the side of our humanity the life of satisfaction through the worship and service that God desires—the life of communion with God. Without both the worldward and Godward movements of God in Christ there is no gospel and no atonement that brings us into communion with God and allows us to worship and serve God as God desires. And in particular, without the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ to which we are joined through the Holy Spirit, there is no possibility of our faithful response to God, and the gospel is cut off from us at just that place where we are required by God to respond with worship and service.

### Vicarious agency

From this discussion I draw three brief conclusions. First, Christ’s substitution is not just an act done for us two thousand years ago. Always standing as our mediator, in his substitutionary priestly office he continues to be the one who stands between God and humankind, setting aside our deeply inadequate and sinful attempts at obedience, worship, and service in a soteriological displacement, offering his own obedience, worship, and service in our place.

Second, he continually prays for us, interceding with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 6:20; 7:25–28; 8:1–6). He takes our prayer, for we do not know how to pray (Rom. 8:26), and perfects it in himself, giving us his prayer in a “wonderful exchange.”

Third, he sends us the Holy Spirit to join us to his own obedience, worship, and service, making us an apostolic priesthood, obeying, worshiping, and



serving God in and through Jesus Christ, to the glory of the Father. His ministry becomes our ministry by grace, and this is the theological basis for ecclesiology in general, and for pastoral care in particular. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell summed up the consequence: "Therefore Christ, as the Lord of our spirits and our life, *devotes us to God and devotes us to men in the fellowship of his self-sacrifice*" (1996, p. 255).

The consequence of this dual mediatorial ministry of Jesus Christ is, in the well-known words from Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, that the Savior "became human that we might be made divine" (1993, 54.3). This refers to the transition of humankind from one state into another, which the theological tradition came to call "the wonderful exchange," as a commentary upon 2 Corinthians 8:9: "You know the generous act (grace) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." **Out of the measureless love of God, Jesus Christ became what we are in order to make us what he is. Our divinization, of course, is "in Christ."** Says Athanasius, "He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son and God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man" (1998, 1.38).

God's act for us and the human response to God are understood in terms of a covenant already fulfilled from God's side *and* the human side by Jesus Christ. The gospel is not a bilateral contract on offer, where God meets his obligations, and we must meet ours, or else the contract is void. Our response, rather, is one of gratitude for a grace-gift given and received unconditionally in love. Our response is the thankful consequence of the response of Jesus Christ, who offers in our place the Amen of faith and obedience that we, in our sin, do not and cannot offer. Thus Paul writes that "For in (Jesus Christ) every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen,' to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20). In this way we are cast back upon and rely entirely on Christ's faithfulness, not upon our own faithfulness. So when I have days or seasons of doubt and unfaithfulness, or an attitude of lassitude concerning matters of Christian life and ministry, I am not now thrown into despair about my lack of response and faithfulness. Rather I trust myself to the faithfulness of Jesus, which he in his humanity continually offers to the Father on my behalf. In this way, backsliding is robbed of its vicious bite. Again, I am reminded of Paul, "for freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1).

The question frequently arises: "If Jesus has done it all for me, why then should I bother?" As I have pondered this question through the years, I have begun to wonder if the issue is apperception, the

framework out of which we interpret experience. One person looks at a house and sees a home. Another looks at a house and sees an investment. Something very basic indeed about how we see the world – or more generally, apprehend experience – is going on here. With respect to the theological issue before us, I look at the gospel and see my response as a consequence of God's grace and love. Another person looks at the gospel and sees his or her response as a condition for receiving God's grace and love. Which, do you think, is more truly gospel, good news? Which, do think, deals seriously and adequately with the whole Jesus Christ?

I now turn briefly and finally to ministry considered in terms of the vicarious humanity of Christ. The New Testament understands Jesus as *leitourgos, didaskolos, and diakonon*. That is, he is the minister in the holy place (Heb. 8:2), he ministers as the teacher (John 3:2), and he ministers as the one serving (Luke 22:27). Let us turn then to look at Christ as the one who leads our worship and proclaims the Word of God, who teaches us the things of God, and who acts in the freedom of his love for us and for our salvation. Recognizing that Christ's ministry is not reducible to these aspects, we will let them stand in for the greater whole to make the point.

First, Christ is the mediator of worship. The deep structure of Christian worship has a dynamic Trinitarian pattern and action. Worship is through the Son, to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is, Jesus mediates our worship. He is *ton hagian leitourgos*, the servant of the holy things, or as the NRSV translates Heb. 8:2, Christ is the minister in the sanctuary. He is the one who serves in the tabernacle of the Lord. Before we worship, as leader or member of the congregation, Jesus is already in place as the one who ever lives to join our worship to his praise of the Father within the unity of the Godhead. As he is the Word of God who speaks himself forth, likewise he is the worshipping human respondent, hearing that Word and ministering the human response of faith and love to God.

Jesus Christ offered and continues to offer the worship that gladdens the Father's heart, the praise that is worthy and rightly due. God, as it were, in, through, and as Jesus Christ, provides the worship that God wishes from us. Before we have arrived in church, Christ the *leitourgos*, the liturgist, has stood in for us, leading all creation's praise to the Father. Our "Amen" of worship is in response to and a sharing in his prior and ongoing "Amen." Jesus Christ acts ahead of us and in our place as the High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1).

Second, Christ is the teacher, not just the one taught. Christ is the teacher of the things of God. He is the *didaskalos*. The Greek verb *didasko* is used 97 times of Jesus and the apostles. Teaching was a



major slice of their ministries.

Our theme, remember, is that we do not mediate Jesus Christ. He, as it were, mediates us through his vicarious agency. How this is to be understood with regard to the teaching ministry of the church is a special challenge, however, because in teaching we have a subject, the teachings of Jesus Christ, to teach. How, then, in teaching does Jesus Christ mediate us rather than we him?


John 14:6 is a helpful framework to explore what it means to say that Jesus is the *didaskalos*, the teacher, who mediates us to God. As we explore this briefly we will see unfolding a three-fold stratified understanding, where level two deepens the meaning of level one, and level three deepens the meaning of level two. Thus:

Level one: Knowing the way – what the teacher teaches →

Level two: Knowing the truth – the teacher is the one taught →

Level three: Knowing the life – through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, we have communion with the Father.

Thus we move (1) from the teaching of Jesus to (2) Jesus the teacher who is himself the truth to (3) the deep knowing of God that arises from a sharing in the life of God, the fruit of our union with Christ. To complicate what is already difficult enough, level three then feeds back to our grasp of level one and the process begins again in an ongoing pedagogical spiral that takes us deeper and deeper into the life and knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

Level One: teaching the teachings of Jesus does not carry much difficulty for us, for it fits easily into our notion of teaching. There is a corpus of material. It can be taught. Thus we enquire into what Jesus taught, and we reflect on what it means for our lives. This is basic Christian education at the level of Bible knowledge and application. 

Level Two immediately reverses the movement of mediation. For now, through the work of the Holy Spirit, that is, God's act, we are brought into a profound engagement or encounter with the living Lord. We move from learning about the teachings of Jesus to actually dealing with a living Lord who draws us into union with himself to share in his life as the truth of God. With this, Christian education has taken a wholly new turn.

Level Three is communion with the Father. This is the end and goal of all our knowing, when we share in Christ's own knowledge of and life in God. What an amazing notion this is: knowing God through sharing in the life of God. This is the goal of Christian education.

To suggest something of what communion with the Father means through our union with Christ, con-

sider the image of our being enfolded into the inner life of the Trinity. We come to know God "from the inside," as it were. No longer do we know about God, but we have a foresight, even in a mirror dimly, of seeing – knowing – face to face. To know Jesus through a relationship with him, which is the Spirit's work, is to share in some important sense in the Father-Son relationship. It is in some sense to participate in the life of the Trinity.

I have put a qualifier in these last two sentences quite intentionally because the more deeply we enter into this kind of knowing the less we can easily speak of it with analogies and metaphors drawn from everyday experience. This transformation of our minds through knowing God (Romans 12:2) causes us to stretch language to the breaking point. Yet even as that is said, it is surely true that this deep knowing of God is found in the faith, if not in its articulation, that expresses its joy in believing in a countless number of congregations scattered throughout history and around the world.

Third, Christ is the one serving. This sums up everything said thus far. According to Athanasius, Christ ministers the things of humankind to God. This is his service. In particular, as the *diakonon* of Luke 22:27, in the context of the institution of Lord's Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he is among them as the one serving. And what is this that he does? The Son does what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19). He does the will of the one who sent him (John 5:30).

The account of Jesus healing the blind beggar near Jericho illuminates the point. As Jesus approached the city, this impoverished and desperate man shouted out for mercy. He is cruelly turned on by the crowd, but he shouted all the more. Jesus heard his urgent cry, had the man brought to him, and then asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Luke 18:41). What is the meaning of this question? Certainly it is a question put to Jesus directly. But what does it mean for our action? A caveat: do not read this as a moral tale about an attitude that needs to be born in us. The story is about Jesus' attitude of service. Leave it at that.

The Lord does not call us to serve, with a top up of grace now and then to help along the way. We do not need new strategies for ministry or five year plans for congregational growth or a new missional imperative. Our problem is more serious than solutions rendered by ministerial first aid. The gospel is more radical than all of that. We are called to a radical metanoia, to a have new mind, to adopt a theology more faithful to the ministry of Jesus Christ. We are called to abandon the theology that has brought us to a place of exhaustion and depression, indeed, to abandon our ministries, and turn to the continuing vicarious ministry of Jesus Christ. For he comes now

in the Holy Spirit to help us understand that he has joined us to himself, and to what he is doing for us and our people. Our glorious task now is to bear witness to this.

**Rev. Andrew Purves, Ph.D.**, is Jean and Nancy Davis Professor of Historical Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and has been a member of the faculty at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary since 1983. He is the author of *The Resurrection of Ministry* (2010), *The Crucifixion of Ministry* (2007), *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology* (2004), and *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (2001). Rev. Purves is married to the Rev. Catherine J. Purves. They are the parents of Brendan, Gordon, and Laura. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rev. Andrew Purves, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 616 N. Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. Email: apurves@pts.edu.

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## Commentaries on Andrew Purves' "Vicarious Agency"

*Each issue of Christian Psychology begins with a discussion article followed by open peer commentaries that examine the arguments of that paper. The goal is to promote edifying dialogues on issues of interest to the Christian psychological community. The commentaries below respond to Andrew Purves' "Vicarious Agency."*

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### Which Christianity? The Creedal Imperatives of Christian Psychology

Russell D. Kosits

*Redeemer University College*

The genius of Robert Roberts' (2000) original vision for Christian Psychology was the idea that by retrieving the psychological thought of the past we could so to speak suspend the pervasive influence of modernity on our psychologizing (Kosits, 2012, p. 181). It was—and is—a great idea. What it is not, of course, is a foolproof way of protecting ourselves from the corrosive acids of modernity, and one can perhaps still detect a bit of late modern individualism and consumerism in the way we *choose* our favorite Christian psychologists of the past. Lots of SCP types love Kierkegaard. I've found the work of Jonathan Edwards to be insightful and uplifting. Others gravitate to the Desert Fathers, or Thomas Aquinas. Our individualism may also surface in how we *read* these thinkers—selecting those aspects that appeal to us in some way, ignoring those aspects that don't.

But why do we gravitate to certain thinkers and not others? How do we decide which aspects of those thinkers' writings are most worthy of our attention? And how do we determine whether and how these thinkers represent orthodox Christianity at all? Part of this will be determined by our sensitivities and instincts as psychologists, of course, but our answers to such questions will also inevitably be influenced by how we—implicitly or explicitly—*define* Christianity.

Which pushes the question back a bit more—how should we define basic Christian belief? The question is relevant to Christian psychology for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that we need clarity on theological convictions before we can begin "translating," i.e., exploring the psychological implications of these convictions. So where do we go? For Protestants, the *norma normans*, the "norming norm" of all theological systems is of course the Scriptures. But this doesn't—or at least it *shouldn't*—imply a "bible alone" approach to defining Christianity. Rather, as Carl Trueman (2012) has recently argued, there are strong biblical and practical reasons—indeed, there

is an *imperative*—to turn for guidance to the *norma normata* (the "normed norms") of the church, i.e., the creeds and confessions of Christianity (p. 17). A lack of willingness to articulate one's own theological beliefs does not mean they do not exist, he argues, but it does mean that they cannot be scrutinized by others in view of Scripture or history. It may also betray a lack of self-consciousness about where one is located theologically or historically within the church.

Is there a creedal imperative for Christian Psychology? I should say so. The stronger our theological and historical self-awareness, the better we shall be able to articulate why certain "Christian psychologists of the past" (or the present) appeal to us, and when and how they uphold, illuminate, elaborate, or push the boundaries of historical Christian teaching. Such an orientation would also keep us from a cafeteria-style approach to differing theological opinions, where we take a little of this and a little of that, but leave the rest, according to taste. Further, it would better connect us to the concerns and authority of the institutional church, and provide "an established, conventional vocabulary" and "form of sound words" (Trueman, 2012, pp. 74, 75) which will be immensely helpful as we attempt to psychologize in a manner consistent with that profession. I shall elaborate on these and other benefits of a creedal orientation toward the end of this essay.

Andrew Purves knows the importance of creeds and confessions well indeed, and I can imagine him affirming some form of creedal imperative for Christian Psychology as well. He has been a courageous advocate of historic orthodoxy in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and a participant in various renewal movements within that fellowship. He is the co-author of *Union in Christ: A Declaration for the Church*, a statement of faith "commissioned by the Presbyterian Coalition—a federation of evangelical and renewal groups within the PC(USA)," and also co-editor of *A Passion for the Gospel: Confessing Jesus Christ for the 21st Century*, a collection of essays following "the basic pattern" of *Union in Christ* (Achtmeier & Purves, 2000, p. x). More recently, in 2010, in conjunction with the 219th General Assembly of the PC(USA),

Purves spoke at a meeting of Presbyterians for Renewal, on the importance of creeds and “confessional orthodoxy.” Sounding much like Trueman, Purves argued, “it is the wisdom of tradition that helps protect us from the heresies and rabbit trails that lie ahead” (Purves, 2010).

As a fellow Presbyterian, I’m not surprised to find much in common with Dr. Purves—a strong desire to be Christ-centered, an emphasis on his person and work, and the crucial significance of union with him. I feel particular kinship with the way he applies the idea of union with Christ which has remarkable similarities to the way I have taught this material in my own lay preaching and teaching, such as when he writes, “in union with Christ, that which is his becomes ours. His Father becomes our Father. His knowledge and love and service of the Father become, in union with him, our knowledge and love and service of our Father” (Purves, 2004, p. 171). Further, many of our common commitments are of utmost psychological significance: the importance of finding our identities not in our own works or righteousness but in Christ himself, an appreciation for the psychological perils of legalism, and, more broadly, an awareness of the central role that systematic theology has to play in defining what it means to be wholly and fully human. Further, there is an elegant simplicity to the theological vision sketched out in the essay. The centrality of the *homoousion*, redemption through the human-divine personhood of Jesus Christ, the downward act of God through Christ’s apostolic office, and the human response to God in Christ’s priestly office. As I have studied Purves’ writings and lectures, I have grown in my respect and appreciation for who he is and what he stands for.

Yet I raise the issue of the creedal imperative not only because Purves and I share a love for the great creeds of the church, but also because I needed to return to the creeds of my own tradition (the ecumenical creeds of the early church and the Reformed creeds of the 16th and 17th century) in order to situate and understand Purves’ contribution. Though Purves and I both consider ourselves Reformed, and it’s clear that we’re after many of the same theological goods and share many of the same theological intuitions, it strikes me that in light of these standards Purves takes a different route to these goods and intuitions, which very well may have importance for the theory and practice of Christian psychology.

Since Purves uses a lot of theological terminology with minimal historical explanation, let me here lay out some of the relevant background, certainly not to educate Dr. Purves, but so that I may better engage with his contribution. Toward the end of the essay, and in light of this dialogue with Purves, I’ll revisit the question of a creedal imperative for Christian psychology. Though there are several areas raised by

Purves I would like to discuss in detail, I will need for the sake of space to limit myself to one—the central Christological issue raised by the essay, i.e., Purves’ understanding of the relationship between incarnation and atonement. Even here my engagement will be brief and tentative.

In traditional Reformed systematic and historical theologies incarnation and atonement are usually discussed in the context of Christology, as Purves’ essay would suggest. However, the Reformed tradition has tended to treat incarnation under the notion of “the person of Christ” while the atonement has been discussed under “the work of Christ.” No “dualism” is implied—the two are related in crucial ways, and one conversation leads to the next, but they are still nevertheless distinguishable discussions. Let me here sketch out briefly the traditional positions as background to Purves’ essay and as a platform for my interaction with it.

Let’s begin with the person of Christ, particularly with his incarnation, “the *center* of Christology” (Horton, 2011, p. 468). If we are to understand the nature of the incarnation we must of course turn to the ecumenical councils.<sup>1</sup> Of seminal importance, Purves rightly argues, is the Christian belief that “Jesus is ‘of one substance with the Father’ (*homoousios to Patri*).” The concept of the *homoousion* was articulated first at Nicaea in 325, in response to the teaching of Arius that denied the divinity of Christ, and later codified in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (what is known as the “Nicene Creed”). But, significantly, Nicaea raised new questions—if Jesus is as the first council of Nicaea indicated, “of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,” (Trueman, 2012, p. 92), and, if it is true (as established at the First Council of Ephesus) that Christ is one person, then what kind of a *human being* is he? If humanity too has its own substance, “how do these two substances, the divine and the human, relate to each other in Christ? And, more specifically, how do the two substances relate to each other in a way that does not create either two persons (albeit occupying one geographical space) or some peculiar blend or fusion of the two substances that leads to the formation of a third substance, which is neither divine nor human?” (Trueman, 2012, p. 97).

The First Council of Ephesus disposed of the Apollinarian position which denied the full humanity of Christ by replacing his human soul with a divine Logos; it also rejected the Nestorian position which denied the unity of the divine and human nature in one person. Then, decisively, at Chalcedon, the rejection of Eutychian thought emphasized that the true humanity of Christ must not be absorbed or blended into his divinity. The formula adopted at Chalcedon (which is accepted in Protestant, Orthodox, and



Catholic churches) defined the relationship between the substances and person of Christ and affirmed that Jesus is "like us in all respects, apart from sin," and "recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation," yet one person. There is, crucially, as Trueman (2012) writes, a negative emphasis in the Chalcedonian Formula, setting up boundaries which are not to be transgressed rather than making positive statements. These are:

Christ must be fully God; Christ must be fully human: the two natures must not be so mixed together that either disappears into the other or that a third, hybrid nature is produced; and the two natures must not be separated so as to undermine the unity of the one person. (Trueman, 2012, p. 100)

Chalcedon's teaching, that there are "two natures in one person" raised another question: how can the union between divinity and humanity reside in a single person? "This difficulty led to the introduction of yet another technical term, *anhypostasia*, into the language of Christology. The term is of course also central to Purves' system. "The incarnate mediator, the God-man, remains one person because the human nature he assumed is 'anhypostatic' or 'impersonal'" (Macleod, 1998, p. 199). As Horton put it, "the Logos did not assume an individual person but generic humanity...strictly speaking...his humanity is impersonal"(Horton, 2011, p. 468, p. 468). This admittedly strange doctrine preserves the idea that the second *person* of the Trinity did not adopt or inhabit an existing human person (which would have created a two-person being which seems out of accord with Scriptural teaching). Rather God took to himself our human nature.

Now on to the "work of Christ." The doctrine of atonement has traditionally been handled under this head, with an emphasis on the work of the cross specifically. This cross-centeredness is thought to follow the emphasis found in Scripture: "For good reason it has been suggested that the Gospels are passion narratives with long introductions" (Horton, 2011, p. 492). Biblically, the crucifixion is understood from multiple perspectives, so it is not surprising that various "theories of the atonement" have been offered. Among these are the "ransom theory" (commonly attributed to Origen) in which Christ's death is understood as "a ransom paid to Satan for the ownership of humanity," the *Christus Victor* approach that "emphasizes Christ's victory over the powers of death and hell at the cross," and the satisfaction theories, such as Anselm's idea that Christ's cross "satisfied God's offended *dignity*," and the penal substitutionary theory, which has to do with the satisfaction of divine justice. We might also portray Grotius's "government" theory in this category as well, though Christ's sacrifice is

thought here to satisfy the requirements of a relaxed moral law. Abelard, in rejecting Anselm, offered the "moral influence" theory, in which the cross-work of Christ was primarily intended to exhibit the love of God (Allison, 2011; Horton, 2011, p. 509). Anselm's classic work *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why the God Man?) raises the same question addressed in Purves' essay: why did God become a man? For Anselm, and for the Reformers after him, the answer is "the atonement is the real reason for the Incarnation" (Boice, 1978, p. 151) and by atonement, they had in view the cross-work of Christ.

### Analysis of Dr. Purves' Thought

Dr. Purves would not disagree with the idea that the atonement is the reason for the incarnation (indeed, I imagine he would appreciate that quote very much). However, in a manner consistent with his teacher Thomas Torrance (and also with Eastern Orthodoxy<sup>2</sup>) Purves (2014) argues that incarnation and atonement must be brought more "tightly together" (p. 4), so much so that he writes of an "atoning incarnation" (p. 12). It isn't that God took flesh so that he could live a righteous life and bear our sins on the cross as a spotless lamb. Rather, in taking flesh, Purves seems to imply that the chief—though certainly not the only—work of atonement had already been accomplished. The cross-work of Christ is not dismissed but de-emphasized—"the stress in atonement is rightly placed first of all on the Word becoming flesh, and thus for all flesh, before it is placed on the cross" (Purves, 2004, p. 26). There apparently is no legal transaction at the cross, though there is clearly a revelation of "the depth of God's love for sinners" (Purves & Achtemeier, 1999, p. 14) as in the moral influence theory. Purves also seems to draw from a more ancient theory of the atonement, the "recapitulation theory" of Irenaeus, in which the entirety of Jesus' life restores what was lost through Adam's fall (Allison, 2011). Surely there is truth in both of these views, though the apparent loss of the legal aspect of the cross is theologically and psychologically problematic. But the point I would like to emphasize here is that Purves' (2014) formulation has a distinctively *ontological* emphasis which seems to place a greater emphasis on Christ's *being* than upon the life he lived: "The theme of reconciliation is woven into the fabric of the gospel because it is woven *into the being* of the Savior and takes place *within his incarnate person*" (p. 5, emphases added).

This stress on ontology leads us to what seems to be the greatest influence on Purves' piece, i.e., the thought of his mentor Thomas Torrance (who had read Irenaeus and other ancient church fathers quite carefully as well). Torrance was undoubtedly a thinker of the first order, and Purves had the privilege of studying under him in Scotland. His influence seems



quite clear throughout the essay. The notion of the vicarious humanity of Christ, that “Christ’s incarnational redemption involves mediation not only from God to humanity but also from *humanity* to God,” and the “anhypostasis/enhypostasis couplet” all seem to have their origins in Torrance’s theology (Colyer, 2001, pp. 103-104, 118; Molnar, 2009). But the focus here will be on Purves’ and Torrance’s elaborations upon the *homoousion*.

For Purves, the key truth of the Christian faith is the *homoousion*. The idea that Jesus is of one essence with the Father, “. . . is the core confession of the church that has guarded the mystery of the incarnation” (p. 4). Purves shares this emphasis with Torrance, who believed that “in the *homoousios to Patri*, the deepest truth of Christian faith as a gospel of salvation was brought to expression” (Purves, 2004, p. 20). Why did Torrance put such an emphasis on this one theological construct? As Purves elsewhere explained, Torrance believed that the church had since its earliest days and through the influence of a wide array of thinkers from Plato to Kant, been faced with “a cosmological and epistemological dualism of immense proportion that threatens the gospel.” The tendency of this dualism “between the ‘real’ world of the intelligible and the phenomenological or less ‘real’ or shadowy world of the sensible” is, ultimately, to “shut God out of the world” (Purves, 2001, p. 52, p. 52). Noted for his “disdain of dualisms” (Cassidy, 2008, p. 165, p. 165), Torrance believed that Nicaea’s notion of the *homoousion* provided the key to overcoming dualism, preserved the gospel itself, and contained crucial epistemological and soteriological significance. As Purves (2001) has remarked, for Torrance, the *homoousion* “was pregnant with intimations of still profounder aspects of divine reality in Jesus Christ pressing for realization within the mind of the Church,” and “the all-important hinge” for theology and theological development (p. 56).

I would be fascinated to hear Dr. Purves distinguish his own position from that of Torrance here, but at this stage I would like to raise two points of concern. First, I’m reminded of the old saying that we are defined by our enemies. The Christian corollary of that maxim might be that it is essential to allow the Scriptures to define for us our enemies. Dualisms can indeed be bad, but I don’t think their avoidance should define how we theologize. Second, and much more importantly, extra-biblical concepts help the church to articulate the content and parameters of Scriptural teaching and are essential in the theological development of the church, but these concepts inevitably lead to other theological problems that must be solved through additional formulations or terms, as Trueman (2012) emphasizes. Hence, the meaning of the Nicene Creed was defined and limited by Chalcedon. Purves (2001) rightly exhorted that

Torrance not “be wrongly accused of constructing a closed, rationalistic system of theology based deductively upon fourth-century Greek theology,” (p. 56), and we should grant Purves the same courtesy. But I would nevertheless like to raise the possibility that their extrapolations on the *homoousion* may have led them not only into conflict with the limits set by Chalcedon, but also with the demands of a robust Christian psychology.

Let me explain. Dr. Purves rightly portrays Jesus as the perfection of humanity. “As God with us and for us, Jesus also reveals what it means to be the truly human one” (p. 5) To this, I say amen. “In Jesus, we see what a human being was intended to be in the purposes of God. His love, his purposeful ministry, his relationships, his God-centeredness show what being human really involves” (p. 5). Amen again.

Still, there seem to be two difficult implications of Purves’ understanding of Christ’s true humanity, both of which, though perhaps consistent with Nicaea, seem to be in tension with the limits set by Chalcedon, both of which seem psychologically problematic. First, there are places where the incarnation appears to make up for some ontological/creational deficit in humanity, which would imply that Christ’s humanity is different from God’s originally created design. Second, Purves’ understanding of incarnation seems to suggest that Jesus took upon himself *sinful* humanity.

First, the possibility of an ontological/structural (rather than ethical/directional) deficit in humanity.<sup>3</sup> Purves (2014) writes, “In the ontological union of his divinity and humanity, he remakes human nature to be now fully conformed to the image of God” (p. 5). It isn’t simply that the incarnation heals a broken humanity, or even that human nature is, as William Ames (1968/1643) put it, “elevated to [its] highest perfection” (p. 130), but that it *refashions* humanity. To say it differently, if true humanity and full conformity to the image of God requires this ontological union, wouldn’t it follow that there was no true humanity or true image before Jesus Christ? This would seem to call into question Genesis 1:27, which teaches that human beings are by virtue of God’s original creative activity the image of God, and it would also seem to imply that human nature itself has somehow been changed, that some third substance has been created in Christ. I know that Dr. Purves fully affirms the true humanity of Christ, so I would appreciate some clarification.

He seems, however, to say something very similar when he deals with the idea of anhypostasis. Though it is true—as the anhypostasis teaches, that “Christ’s human nature has its reality only in union with God, having no independent existence or subsistence apart from the incarnation,” Purves draws an unusual conclusion: “Christ’s human personhood is human nature, therefore, in communion with God, human

being as it was intended by God to be" (p. 6). It is of course also the case that to be truly human is to be in communion with God. But he is not here dealing with Christ's authentically human response and obedience to God. Rather, the "communion with God" that he has in view is the hypostatic union itself—*this*, it would appear, is the essence of true humanity. This again would seem to imply that there was no true humanity before the incarnation. Dr. Purves can't mean that! Perhaps he will clarify.

If it is the case, however, that true humanity is derivative of the hypostatic union, and, further, if it is the case that in the incarnation he "remakes" human nature, can we say with Chalcedon that Jesus is "like us in all respects..." and "recognized in two natures... *without change*"? If divine-human hypostasis is prerequisite for true humanity then there could be no humanity before it. Jesus would have been the first to have assumed a human nature, which means he was not like us in all respects. It's crucial that Christian psychology have an adequate understanding of the nature of true humanity, so these concerns, if sustained, would seem to be important indeed.

Another possible area of agreement with Torrance but, ultimately, of tension with Chalcedon, is the idea that the atonement takes place within the hypostatic union: "Our salvation takes place in the inner relations of the mediator in the unity of his person as wholly God and wholly human, and not just in Christ's external relations with God and with humankind"(p. 6). Torrance taught the same thing: "the work of atoning salvation does *not* take place *outside* of Christ, as something external to him, but takes place *within* him, *within* the incarnate constitution of his Person as Mediator" (Purves, 2001, p. 55, p. 55). In order for the incarnation itself to deal with sin (which is what atonement is all about), it would seem to follow logically that Christ would have to take upon himself a sinful human nature. Here Purves seems to echo Torrance's rejection of "the Latin heresy," or a false gospel of merely "external relations." Torrance believed that Gregory of Nazianzus's phrase (which was originally intended to reject Nestorius's idea that Christ did not have a true human soul): "that which He has not assumed He has not healed" (Macleod, 1998, p. 224, p. 224) implied a deficiency in Chalcedon. Contrary to the Chalcedonian formula, "the hypostatic union cannot be separated from the act of saving assumption of our *fallen* [emphasis added] human nature" (Torrance, 2008, p. 201, p. 201). Torrance believed that from the fifth century on (Chalcedon was in 451) the Latin church had begun to adopt the mistaken idea that Christ's humanity was sinless. This Latin "Heresy" which he rejected sounds a lot like traditional evangelical and Reformed theology:

...if in incarnation the Son of God did not

assume our fallen and sinful human nature, Torrance argues that Christ's atoning sacrifice can only be understood in terms of *external* (*forensic*, for example) relations between Christ and humanity's sins. The incarnation thus becomes *instrumental* in relation to the atonement. It is the means of providing the sinless human being capable of living a life in perfect obedience to God's law, and of taking our place on the cross and enduring the judgment and wrath of God which we deserve because of our sin. In Christ's suffering and death there is an external judicial transaction in the transference of the penalty for sin and of the judgement and wrath of God from us to Jesus Christ... (Colyer, 2001, p. 87)

So, it's fairly clear that Torrance rejected the idea of penal substitution, and Purves himself is critical of "highly rationalized penal theories of the atonement" (Purves, 2007, p. 61) and in other writings it seems fairly clear that Purves thinks the penal theory problematic (Purves, 2004). I will not return the favor and call this position "heretical" (did Torrance really think that such widely embraced beliefs in the Reformed community were heresy?), but it is important to identify the difference and to explore the psychological ramifications thereof.

### Christian Psychology's Creedal Imperatives

I want to reiterate how much I admire Dr. Purves for his courageous stance for orthodoxy within the PC (USA), and my respect for him as a churchman. Further, I am deeply aware that the sort of questions I raise in this essay deserve much more careful treatment and elaboration, which is obviously beyond the scope of a short response such as this. Even though my opinions on Purves' system are still tentative (i.e., they are raised only as questions at this stage), this exercise has helped me to clarify my own thinking on the benefits of a creedal orientation for Christian Psychology. Let me here describe how Dr. Purves' essay underscores these themes.

One obvious benefit of a creedal imperative for Christian Psychology is that it helps us to become clear about *theological difference*. Leaving aside the crucial question of the scriptural basis of this or any other theological system, it would seem that theological dialogue amongst Christians would need to begin with clarity on this point—how precisely does one approach differ from another? Purves didn't provide much help here (even in distinguishing his system from traditional, confessional Reformed orthodoxy), and I spent a fair amount of time this summer trying to answer this question. This process of clarification is not Christian Psychology in itself, though it may lead to Christian psychology as psychologists gain a better hold on their theological positions.

After we have clarified difference, a creedal orien-

tation helps us to better see that an essay like Purves' is an attempt to persuade us or at least an invitation to consider the possibility of adopting another position (if we are not already "on board"). This kind of dialogue is useful because it calls us to go back and ask why we believe as we do and whether there is a better way, and I think Protestants at least ought to be willing to do that re-assessment. At this early stage of discussion, I'm not convinced that it is better, as the foregoing analysis suggests. But may the conversation continue!

A creedal orientation is, as Carl Trueman (2012) argues, a profoundly counter-cultural stance in which theological positions are scrutinized in terms of their orthodoxy. Though this sort of thing can be quite uncomfortable (and can at times bring out the worst in fallen human nature), I do think that, in the end, a willingness to respectfully raise such questions would benefit Christian Psychology. And, based upon Purves' other writings, I'm confident that he would affirm this role for the church's confessional standards (e.g., Purves, 2004, pp. xiv-xv).

One of Trueman's (2012) recurrent themes is the inter-relatedness of the doctrines contained within creedal formulations, and another benefit of a creedal orientation in Christian psychology is that it will sharpen our ability to discern the deep interconnections within theological systems. One council solves one problem, but creates another, which is solved by yet another council or doctrine which then creates another problem, and so on. This raises questions such as: If Purves' Christology *is* problematic, how does it influence other doctrines? Without penal substitution and imputation (foundations of traditional Reformed orthodoxy which he eschews), what kind of justification and assurance (aspects of traditional Reformed orthodoxy that Purves wants to retain) does he have?

Yet another benefit of a creedal imperative for Christian psychology is that creeds provide "an established, conventional vocabulary for orthodox teaching," (Trueman, 2012, p. 75), that is, they help us to define terms. "One of the first things that teachers in *any discipline* [emphasis added] do," Trueman astutely points out, "is to teach a special vocabulary to their students and instruct them on how to use that vocabulary correctly" (p. 74). This would imply that a discipline without clarity on the meaning of its vocabulary will in the end struggle, including the discipline of Christian Psychology. This highlights a tension—unavoidable, really—within the Christian psychology movement. On the one hand, there has been an admirable desire to pursue a "mere Christianity" approach to psychology. On the other, some leaders in the movement such as Eric Johnson have acknowledged that different theological traditions will have their own psychologies (and, of course, lexicons). Purves' own approach illustrates this point.

A great champion of Nicene Christianity, he shows that insofar as an ecumenical creed will be fruitful for Christian Psychology, it must be elaborated upon. And such elaborations can lead in very many different directions. I believe that Christian psychology will advance when like-minded Christians psychologize well within the framework of their own confessions, using their own established vocabularies. And perhaps people from other confessional streams would be best edified when they see what a well-developed psychology from that other perspective looks like.

Of course a greater willingness to psychologize confessionally may raise questions about a confusion of theological (not to mention psychological) tongues, which brings us to an unexpected benefit of a creedal approach. Such an orientation may actually serve, ironically, to *diminish* radical relativism within Christian Psychology. This is where (I imagine) Trueman and Purves' different visions for a "creedal imperative" become relevant. In Trueman's vision, creeds and confessions have binding authority over churches and church officers (and, by extension, Christian psychologists), not because they have a higher authority than Scripture, but because the institution and its officers have affirmed that a particular confession accurately conveys the essential message of Scripture. Purves' vision, on the other hand, seems to reflect the sentiment expressed in the PC (USA) *Book of Order*, which views the eleven diverse standards contained within its *Book of Confessions* as having real authority and importance, but, in view of their historical contingency and inconsistencies, lacking *binding* authority—the Reformed church is always to be reforming. Purves' approach to theologizing would thus seem to be more fluid and creative, but perhaps also more novel and idiosyncratic. Though the attractions and strengths of such an approach are self-evident, there is, it would seem, a significant downside when it comes to unity in confession and in Christian psychology (it would seem that innumerable "reconstructions" would be possible). On the other hand, if Christians were to unite around the historic confessions of their fellowships (as Trueman discusses, the Book of Concord for Lutherans, the Three Forms for the continental Reformed, Westminster for Presbyterian<sup>4</sup>, etc.), real progress could be made in articulating a psychology that upholds each tradition. Of course, Christian Psychology as an umbrella organization would benefit from both approaches, from both (traditional and reconstructive) creedal *imperatives*.

In closing, a few practical thoughts. A creedal orientation in Christian Psychology can free us to begin psychologizing. The painstaking identification of theological difference such as that only commenced in this article is not, alas, *psychological* work. If we are to take seriously the missional purpose of Christian involvement in psychology (Kosits, 2013), it seems clear

to me that this type of work, as important as it is, could distract us from the task of showing the world how the gospel of Christ is good news for psychology.

As Trueman (2012) points out, creeds are expressions of churchly authority and unity, which raises one last benefit of a creedal imperative for Christian psychology. When we identify ourselves with a particular ecclesiastical creed and attempt to psychologize from within the boundaries of that confession, we may hope to prove ourselves worthy of the trust of those fellowships. Now there is of course the possibility of a closed-minded, unattractive, ignorant, rigid and self-unaware form of creedalism, a "stuffy, conventional ecclesiastical expression" as Purves (2011) put it, and I'm not advocating this. But Christian psychologists should serve the institutional church and a creedal orientation can help us to do so.

Let me close by once again affirming Dr. Purves in the good work he has done in seeking to courageously lead his denomination back to the blessings of faithfulness and Christ-centeredness. Though I have raised many questions in this response, I still sense that he and I are kindred spirits, as I have noted above. I have family and friends in Pittsburgh and visit there often. Perhaps he and I can meet over coffee sometime soon to continue the conversation.<sup>5</sup>

**Russell Kosits, Ph.D.**, is associate professor of psychology at Redeemer University College in Ontario, Canada. His publications are related to historical, theological, and philosophical aspects of the psychology--Christianity question. The recipient of the Early Career Award for Scholarship in the History of Psychology by the Society for the History of Psychology, he will serve as executive editor (academic) of *Christian Psychology* beginning in the fall of 2015. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Russell Kosits, Department of Psychology, Redeemer University College, 777 Garner Rd. E., Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4, Canada. Email: rkosits@redeemer.ca.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The Seven Ecumenical Councils were as follows: Nicaea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus I (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II and III (553 and 671-680), and Nicaea II (787). Protestantism “only really engages at a creedal level with the work of the first four councils” (Trueman, 2012, p. 91).

<sup>2</sup>“For Eastern Christianity, the incarnation is not just the necessary preliminary or foundation for what Christ would subsequently do as Savior via his life, death and resurrection; rather, the incarnation itself is part of the accomplishment of salvation” (Payton, 2007, p. 122).

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the distinction between structure and direction, see Wolters (2005).

<sup>4</sup>Many of the Presbyterians I know affirm the Three Forms of Unity, so there would seem to be a ready basis for wide Reformed confessional collaboration.

<sup>5</sup>I’m almost certain that the inspiration to invite Purves to coffee came from Christian Smith, who, in response to a spirited published critique of one of his books, invited the reviewer to nachos and Guinnesses to continue the conversation (Smith, 2011). I would completely understand if Dr. Purves opted instead for Smith’s menu!

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## The Incarnation and Vicarious Agency: A Response to Purves

Kevin Timpe

*Northwest Nazarene University*

In his “Vicarious Agency,” Andrew Purves gives us an extended treatment of the Incarnate Christ’s ministry to and involving humanity. At the heart of his treatment is the claim that “the agency of Jesus ... [is a] more fully human agency” (p. 5) than we find in other humans. I think that this driving claim behind Purves’ paper is correct, and I find that there are many points he makes with which I agree. Nevertheless, in what follows I raise three significant worries about his article. The first one is theological, involving the necessity of the Incarnation to accomplish our redemption. The latter two objections are philosophical. The first concerns an asymmetry between the epistemic and ontological primacy of Christ’s perfected human nature; the latter concerns a lacuna with respect to the nature of agency in the paper. As a result of these problems, I conclude that Purves hasn’t given us an account of “vicarious agency,” despite the article’s title.

### On the Necessity of the Incarnation

Purves’ article is right to emphasize the centrality of

the Incarnation for what God has done for humanity regarding our redemption. However, at a number of places his discussion suggests that the Incarnation was necessary for this end. But that is, historically, a contested theological issue. While I tend to side with the opposing view than does Purves (that is, I think God could have secured our redemption without having become Incarnate), at the very least he ought not presuppose a contested theological claim at the heart of his article without making its presupposition both explicit and motivated.

There are a number of reasons that I think that Purves holds that the Incarnation was necessary to secure humanity’s redemption. First, at a number of places in his article Purves seems to identify the two. For example, he claims that “the incarnation of the Word of God becoming flesh ... is identified, then, as the mission of God” (p. 5). Similarly, in a paragraph devoted to God’s revelation of true humanity in the Incarnation, Purves writes that “our union with Christ [through the Incarnation] is the ontological basis of true humanity” (p. 6). These sound like identity claims: God’s mission is (that is, *is identical with*) the Incarnation. But if these are identity claims, then the Incarnation becomes necessary for our redemption.<sup>1</sup> Later in the paper Purves claims that “without both the worldward and Godward movements of God in Christ [in the Incarnation] there is no gospel and no atonement that brings us into communion with God” (p. 8). This is less clearly an identity claim, but nevertheless it still suggests that our redemption and atonement couldn’t be accomplished apart from the Incarnation.

This claim regarding the necessity of the Incarnation has its supporters in Christian history. It was held, for instance, by Anselm of Canterbury.<sup>2</sup> But support for this view isn’t uniform. Consider, for example, Aquinas in question 1 of the third part of the *Summa theologiae*:

A thing is said to be necessary for a certain end in two ways. First, when the end cannot be without it; as food is necessary for the preservation of human life. Secondly, when the end is attained better and more conveniently, as a horse is necessary for a journey. In the first way it was not necessary that God should become incarnate for the restoration of human nature. For God with His omnipotent power could have restored human nature in many other ways.<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas is here claiming (rightly, in my mind) that humanity’s redemption could have been accomplished in a manner other than the incarnation.

My objection here doesn’t hang on Purves thinking that the Incarnation is necessary for our redemption in the sense that the latter couldn’t be accomplished with the former. Rather, the objection is that given that it’s not an essential claim of the Christian

faith (in that the claim is not a part of any ecumenical creed or council's statement), it's not obviously true. At the very least, given the role that Purves assigns the Incarnation in accomplishing our redemption via 'vicarious agency,' this is a significant lacuna in his treatment of vicarious agency in the Incarnation.

### Epistemic vs. Ontological Ordering

Before developing my second objection to Purves' article, let me set the stage by noting a place at which I strongly agree with his treatment. Purves claims that, in the Incarnation, "Jesus ... reveals what it means to be ... truly human" (p. 6). Shortly thereafter he also writes that "Christ's human personhood is human nature ... in communion with God, human being as it was intended by God to be" (p. 6). I think these claims are exactly right; what isn't clear to me, however, is that they are helpful to us in understanding the lives to which we are called. That is, I think that these claims rightly express the ontological relationship between Christ's perfected human nature and the human nature we are called to exemplify. But I don't think these claims are helpful for us epistemically as we try to understand the lives to which we are called.

Let me illustrate what I mean with two examples. Descartes' treatment in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* shows the asymmetry between the epistemic and ontological ordering. For Descartes, the first thing that an individual can know is that he exists when thinking: "Thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist—this is certain" (Descartes 1999, *Meditation Two*).<sup>4</sup> But later in the *Meditations* Descartes "know[s] most clearly that I depend upon some being other than myself" (Descartes 1999, *Meditation Three*). This being, of course, is God, who Descartes thinks necessarily exists. So God's existence is ontologically prior to ours (since our existence depends on His, but not the other way around); nevertheless, epistemically we are first aware of our own existence and only later are aware of God's. The ontological ordering and the epistemic ordering here are asymmetric. Or consider the following. Suppose that, while touring Florence, I come across the replica of Michelangelo's *David* that is in the Piazza della Signoria. As a result of seeing the replica, I then go to the Accademia Gallery, where the original is housed. My knowledge of *David* comes first through the replica and then through the original, even though the replica depends on the original. (The replica is, after all, the *replica*.)

Returning then to Purves' article, I think that he is correct that, in the ontological order, Christ's perfected human nature has priority over our current fallen human nature. "Christ's human personhood is human nature, therefore, in communion with God, human being as it was intended by God to be" (p. 6). In the Incarnation, we see the fulfillment of human

nature.<sup>5</sup> The Incarnate Christ is the "ontological basis of true humanity" (p. 6). But this ontological priority doesn't help us understand what a perfected human nature looks like (or, at the least, it doesn't for those of us who lack any direct acquaintance with Christ's human nature in the Incarnation). We must begin, epistemically, with our own human nature—one which falls short, both individually and communally, of what God intended—and do some serious philosophical and theological work to get to what perfected human nature and agency look like.

### Where's the Agency?

This thing brings me to the largest lacuna in Purves' article. It claims to be an account of 'vicarious agency,' but gives us no account of the nature of agency, much less vicarious agency. If my point in the previous section is correct, then any discussion of human agency must begin with our own (i.e., non-Incarnate) agency, even if that agency fails to live up to the fullness of human nature as it was intended to be. We begin, epistemically, with our own agency even if perfected human nature, as revealed in the Incarnation, is ontologically prior.

Purves speaks repeatedly of God's ministry and activity in the Incarnation. Purves writes, for example, of Jesus' threefold "ministry considered in terms of the vicarious humanity of Christ" (p. 9). But he doesn't defend, or even articulate, an account of human agency. Purves writes that Jesus "mediates us through his vicarious agency" (p. 9), but he gives us no account of what it means for a human to be an agent in the relevant sense (e.g., is he speaking of free agency, that is, of free will?), much less how one human can be an agent on behalf of another. Are our intellects and wills involved in Christ's vicariously responding to God on our behalf (pp. 7-8)? If so, how so? Unfortunately, Purves gives us no indication.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Purves also claims that we are to participate in Christ's humanity (p. 10). But how such participation relates to Christ's vicarious agency cannot be understood without an account of vicarious agency to begin with. If, for example, we understand human agency in terms of the recognition and volition of the good, does Jesus, in vicarious agency, recognize the good for us, will the good for us, or both? How can one individual will on behalf of another? Perhaps the 'vicarious' is meant to be less than literal, holding instead that we are to align our agency with Christ's agency. If this is the case (and this is a claim that I think is correct), then the participation language makes more sense. But then it isn't quite right to say that salvation is only "God's work" (p. 7), insofar as the salvation of ourselves depends not just on Christ's agency, but on our own.<sup>7</sup> Christ does not merely exercise agency on our behalf; by His agency as a perfectly obedient human He makes possible our



living up to our intended human nature and union with God and each other. This is, I think, a very promising line of theological investigation. But if this is what Purves' project is, then serious and systematic reflection on the nature of agency must play a more prominent role.<sup>8</sup>

**Kevin Timpe, Ph.D.**, is professor of philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University, and a former Templeton Research Fellow at St. Peter's College, Oxford University. His research is focused on the metaphysics of free will and moral responsibility, virtue ethics, and issues in the philosophy of religion. He is the author of *Free Will: Sourcehood and its Alternatives* 2nd ed (Bloomsbury, 2012) and *Free Will in Philosophical Theology* (Bloomsbury, 2014). He has edited a number of volumes, including *Virtues and Their Vices* (OUP, 2014), *Arguing about Religion* (Routledge, 2009), and *Metaphysics and God* (Routledge, 2009); he is currently working on putting together (with Meghan Griffith and Neil Levy) *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*. He has published articles in *Res Philosophica*, *Philosophical Studies*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Faith and Philosophy*, and *Religious Studies*; and has chapters in ten edited collections. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Kevin Timpe, Department of Philosophy, Northwest Nazarene University, Williams Hall, 623 S. University Avenue, Nampa, ID 83686. Email: ktimpe@nnu.edu.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Here I am assuming that if *X* is identical with *Y*, then it is necessary that *X* is identical with *Y*. But this principle is, I think, unimpeachable.

<sup>2</sup>See Visser and Williams 2008, chapter 13, especially pp. 223 for a careful discussion of Anselm's view on this point.

<sup>3</sup>Aquinas does go on to say that "in the second way [that is, speaking of fittingness rather than logical necessity] it was necessary that God should become incarnate for the restoration of human nature."

<sup>4</sup>Keep in mind that, for Descartes, knowledge requires

certainty. See his *Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting One's Reason and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*.

<sup>5</sup>I think there's also an important difference between Christ's fulfilling human nature and His "remaking" (p. 6) human nature that Purves fails to appreciate.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of human agency, both in its fallen state and as perfected in the eschaton, see Timpe, 2014.

<sup>7</sup>I'm not endorsing works righteousness here, but rather simply that insofar as we are free agents, our own redemption and perfection is not accomplished apart from our wills. We too, like Christ, are called to "be perfect" (Matthew 5:48) and to become obedient and offer up to God our "own humanity through [our] life of worship, obedience, and filial love" (p. 10). Like Purves (p. 15), I think that such behavior is the consequence of God's work in our lives, not the condition of it.

<sup>8</sup>Thanks to Eric Johnson and Audra Jenson for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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## Let's Get (Even More) Practical: A Response to Purves' Christology of Vicarious Agency

Peter C. Hill  
*Biola University*

Andrew Purves provides a convincing case for a radical gospel through the vicarious agency of Jesus Christ. In so doing, Dr. Purves calls us to understand the mission of the incarnational Christ not only as God's ministerial representative to us, but also as our representative to God. The theological basis of Dr. Purves' contention is the uniquely divine act of the hypostatic union, that particular union of God and humanity where "the Son assumes human nature into himself and thus into his divine nature" (p. 6). His claim, that this is an inherently practical doctrine, is demonstrated through both a more complete understanding of ourselves in which we "discover the fullness of our humanity" (p. 7) and through the applied implications for ministry – that ministry is not something that we do, but rather that it is Christ's vicarious apostolic and priestly ministry through which God's mission is fulfilled and in which we can rest. Furthermore, the practical nature of the doctrine, Purves contends, is found in the person of Jesus Christ – "the 'place' where the Word and action of God and the word and action of humankind meet in oneness, and is therefore 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14)" (p. 6).

I am a social psychologist by training and will therefore focus my discussion on the psychological implications of Christ's vicarious agency. Perhaps it seems a bit odd to consider such a profound theological doctrine involving the intricacies of the Trinity from the basis of scientific research focused on human experience and behavior. After all, Purves argues that an approach to ministry based on our union with Christ is "entirely theological, and as such, rooted at all points in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (p. 7). Furthermore, by virtue of psychology's allegiance to science and its attempts to be objective and value-free as possible (questionable assumptions, at best), the analysis is less how things should be and more how things descriptively are. Though such a modernist conception of psychology-as-science should be digested critically (for it has many shortcomings), it will serve our purpose in this brief essay, as we consider some of the regularities of human cognition and motivation that may facilitate or impede the application of vicarious agency to our lives and ministries. This fundamentally different orientation between theology and modernistic psychology has tremendously important implications which should become apparent in my discussion below. Thus, my comments have less to do with the theological undergirding of Purves' contention -- wisely so, given my amateur status as a theologian -- and more with how humans might respond to the notion of vicarious agency. Therefore, I will focus on Purves' claim that the vicarious agency of Christ is an inherently practical teaching with implications for living and ministry, and will do so on the basis of psychological research.

#### Psychological Implications of Vicarious Agency

Dr. Purves' repeated emphasis on the practicality of the doctrine of Christ's vicarious agency is demonstrated by an application to pastoral ministry; that is, it is an approach to understanding ministry that has implications for how ministry is to be done. I wish to extend Purves' analysis on the practicality of the doctrine of vicarious agency by considering the extent to which it is *practice-able*. My thesis is that even though a Christology of vicarious agency may be theologically practical, it will be difficult to actually put such a doctrinal understanding into practice. Now, of course, my claim could be articulated strictly on a theological level in terms of the human tendency to self-direct and the vices associated with such a tendency (e.g., autonomy from God, faithlessness, pride), but here I will supplement theological insight with a psychological analysis of specific human characteristics that serve as mechanisms through which such a human tendency is manifested. In so doing, I wish to avoid a reductionistic account that discounts the veracity of the theological, and instead suggest that a psychologi-

cal accounting furthers our understanding of why it might be so difficult to actually put this theological doctrine into practice. Why is it that one could be theologically committed to a Christology of vicarious agency yet not willing to appropriate -- or perhaps even capable of such appropriation -- that doctrine to the conduct of life? I will attempt to answer this question by considering implications regarding human agency from two related lines of research in social psychology: social comparison processes and our desire to maintain equity in social relationships.

#### Social Comparison

Human agency is strongly vital to our self-concept. In an individualistic society such as ours, we are constantly reminded of our agentic nature and its consequences, and it is this cultural context in which our self-concept is formed and maintained. For much of our social life, the reference point is the self as if it is a self-contained unit. So, for example, when considering one's abilities or the veracity of one's opinions or beliefs, people look to others similar to themselves for social comparison purposes. College student Lisa might not feel very good about receiving a 65% on a statistics exam, until she learns that the class average is 50 and that her exam score is the second highest in the class. Suddenly, her interpretation of her grade has radically shifted to the point that she may view that grade as a badge of honor, even if she could only get 65% of the exam correct. Furthermore, she is most likely to make such comparisons with others who are similar to her. Her 65 on the exam might still look bad to her if everyone else in the class, for example, were ninth graders (in fact, she could be bothered that her grade was *only* the second highest in the class). This is not to suggest that people *should* rely on social comparisons, for there are great costs, both personal and societal, associated with a heavy dose of comparing ourselves with others. Of course, there are also motivational benefits, such as when we are inspired by another's virtuous behavior or accomplishments. Nevertheless, whether for good or for bad, it appears to be descriptively true that we do use such comparisons to assess both our abilities and the accuracy of our opinions.

The tendency to socially compare may actually undermine our ability to apply Christ's vicarious agency. That is, *psychologically speaking*, as much as one may believe in this doctrine, the incarnational Christ may still experientially be understood as a separate being in location and time that provides a standard (albeit an impossible standard) for self-comparison. The WWJD slogan, popular in years past, is but one manifestation of our natural tendency for social comparison as an impetus for maintaining human agency. Though fraught with good theological intentions for high motivational standards, the WWJD question is

really a question involving personal agency.

### Social Equity

The crucial point here is that agency, something central to our sense of self, is so socially or culturally defined that it is virtually impossible to experientially override, even by a profound theological truth to which a believer offers assent. Yet another manifestation of the social nature of human agency can be found in our attempts to maintain equity in human relationships. When I was growing up, my father and the man next door each enjoyed growing vegetable gardens in their back yards and each would share a partial harvest of their labors with the other. This went on for as many years as the two remained neighbors. However, if only one of the two had shared, without reciprocation from the other, then the activity would have likely ended rather early in the relationship, simply because the sense of relationship equity (at least as it pertained to sharing vegetables) was violated. The implicit calculation of equity is not always equitable in that many human relationships are hierarchically structured – employer/employee, teacher/student, pastor/parishioner, etc. Even then, however, norms are established as to what is an appropriate amount of giving and receiving in such relationships and should actual behavior deviate from such implicit norms, then the sense of equity is challenged. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of our desire to maintain social equity, is that when there is inequity in most normal relationships, the person who is most affected (and therefore most motivated to restore equity) is the person to whom the favor has already been granted. Thus, in contrast to an apparent willingness to undertake financial indebtedness, we are more motivated to remove a debt in human relationships than we are to collect from those indebted to us.

A possible corollary to this regularity of human nature is that we generalize our sense of equity to our relationship with the Trinitarian God. Granted, such a relationship is inherently inequitable, for there is no amount of repayment that can possibly match what God has done, and continues to do through vicarious agency, for us. The implications, however, are obvious when one considers the difficulty for some of receiving grace without legalistic obligation. For many, grace is not something easily experienced; people feel more comfortable earning their benefits. The very idea that one can do nothing to earn the greatest benefit of all, the gift of salvation, is so utterly contrary to a value of merit in a society occupied with individualistic achievement that, when coupled with our sense of social equity, makes the *experience* of being a beneficiary of unmerited grace difficult, even when one cognitively holds the doctrine of grace near and dear. Thus, it is not surprising for our tendency to want to do something for God as a means of earning

that grace. These very same dynamics may be at work in the experience of Christ's vicarious agency. That is, people feel the need to contribute, whether God needs that contribution or not.

### Conclusion

The practicality of the doctrine of vicarious agency cannot be fully appreciated unless that doctrine can be put into practice. What is practical is not necessarily practice-able and what is provided here are some possible reasons why it is so difficult to put the doctrine of vicarious agency into actual ministerial practice. I hope that this brief essay will be a useful supplement to Dr. Purves' thoughtful analysis and, in so doing, demonstrate the value of a psychologically informed theology.

**Peter C. Hill, Ph.D.**, is Professor of Psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, in La Mirada, CA and is editor of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. A past president of Division 36 (Psychology of Religion) of the American Psychological Association (APA), he was elected Fellow of the APA in 1998. Dr. Hill's research interests focus on four major areas in the psychology of religion and spirituality: 1) integrating psychology with Christian thought, 2) religious/spiritual measurement, 3) positive psychological virtues such as humility and forgiveness, and 4) religious fundamentalism. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Peter C. Hill, Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA 90639. Email: peter.hill@biola.edu.

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### Christology as Authentic Humanity: A Response to Andrew Purves' Vicarious Agency

Rick Marrs  
*Concordia Seminary*

I was privileged to attend one of the fledgling meetings of AACC in the Chicago area sometime in the late 1980s. There I heard Dr. Arch Hart tell a group of us how important it was for Christian counseling and Christian counselors to reach out to theologians, especially systematic theologians, for their insights and guidance in how we should think about God, people, and the work we do with them. I agreed wholeheartedly with Dr. Hart then, but for 10-15 years I did not see much evidence that we as a field took his advice to heart. I attended many good AACC conferences and read many intriguing AACC materials during 1990s, but sensed a pragmatism within them that pleaded for a deeper theological foundation.<sup>1</sup>

It has been so pleasing to see Dr. Hart's advice taken to heart more in the past 10 years. Dr. Purves' work is an excellent example of that. Our American

Christian tendency is to place our trust in what Jesus did for our salvation 2000 years ago, but then to assume that the spread of that salvific word is up to us humans – as long as we pray to God about *our* plans for His message every once in a while. Dr. Purves rightly reveals to us that it is all *Christ's* mission. When we realize this, it is actually comforting, because we can approach His ministry as servants who receive blessings from the Master, rather than with the typically American pressure to succeed as individuals.

"We find and claim our authentic personal humanity in the fact that God has been gracious to us and become one with us in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit made us one with him. Our union with Christ is the ontological basis of true humanity" (p. 6). I loved that assertion. Ironically, we better understand our true humanness by understanding Christ and Christology (p. 6). This seems counter-intuitive, especially to counseling professionals who spend so many hours studying the human personality from a psychological perspective. Dr. Purves rightly takes us back to the Nicene Creed and the Church Fathers to help us see that biblical doctrines like the Trinity, Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection, and reconciliation are not ultimately separable from one another, but woven into a whole – for us. The systematic vocabulary of the hypostatic union can be challenging for non-theologians to swim through, but the main point, that our pastoral and counseling ministries are actually Christ's ministry, is key. That ministry is rooted in the Gospel and His incarnation rather than our own piety, skill, or pragmatism (p. 7). It was refreshing to be reminded again of the importance of Christ's two-fold ministry. He was sent from the Father, and "took on our human nature and from it healed it and made it holy in himself" (p. 7). But as "son of Mary, Christ represents humankind to God. He is the appropriate response to God from the body of the flesh" (also p. 7). It is very easy for our generation to err in one direction or the other, just as others did in previous generations, underestimating the importance of either Christ's divinity or humanness, His role as apostle or high priest.

Luther wrote in his *Small Catechism* (Explanation to the Third Article, i.e., the last sentence, of the Apostles' Creed about the Holy Spirit, etc.): "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith...." Our human tendency, especially by those of us so influenced by America's love for individualism, is to believe that we somehow "decided to follow Jesus" and that we can continue, by our own strength of will and faith, to keep on

following Him. But the Church Fathers, like Luther, and theologians like Dr. Purves, steeped in Scripture, help center us back on the reality of what God is doing to us, for us, and with us. Luther goes on in his explanation of the last sentence of the Apostles' Creed: "In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers." The Holy Spirit, working through the various means available through Christ's Gospel, is actually doing something with us and to us on a daily basis. It's not about our will responding to some historical facts presented to us (although they are historical facts), but it is about Christ's continued two-fold ministry among us. Every time one of us reminds a fellow Christian with a simple "Jesus loves you and forgives you," we are again part of that ministry. I have, unfortunately, spoken to too many pastors who believe that proclamation of the Gospel is only for converting unbelievers, to convince the "lost" of their need for a Savior. Those pastors do not realize that believers in Christ still need to regularly hear of the forgiveness of their sins, the covering of their shame, the healing salve for their spirits that only regular doses of the promises from Christ will bring. The apostles realized this in their epistles. May the Lord grant that realization to our generation of pastors and church leaders.

With all that praise of Purves' article up front (it's hard to argue with good Christology), I did have one concern, and I would like to make a few suggestions for future conversation. The one concern was in the last paragraph, where I thought the author overstated something in a way that could lead to misinterpretation: "We do not need new strategies for ministry or five year plans for congregational growth or a new missional imperative." I completely agree that in the U.S.A. our pragmatic ministry strategies have over-emphasized secular corporate approaches of success. These over-emphases have, as he said, brought many of "us to the place of exhaustion and depression." The Gospel is more radical than such strategies, and we are called to a radical *metanoia* (new mind/repentance) in which we realize the Holy Spirit works faith when and where He wills it. Yet I hope that Dr. Purves is not calling upon Christian congregations, denominations, and other institutions to avoid doing long-term planning. Good long-term planning, even when done by us frail, limited creatures, can be used by the Holy Spirit to unite groups to seek the same faithful institutional goals, to communicate within particular parts of the Body of Christ what each part is striving to do. We can learn helpful strategies from the secular world, as long as we recognize their limitations and trust in the God who created the whole world, including those strategies.

As for future conversations, I look forward to discussing with Dr. Purves and others how the Holy Spirit brings us this ministry of Jesus through the



means of grace, Word, and sacraments. The Holy Spirit does bring us humans into union with Christ, and according to Romans 6 this comes via being baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. I suspect that some of our contrasting Calvinist and Lutheran emphases will inform that discussion, but I did notice that Dr. Purves uses some similar baptism and Lord's Supper language in his book *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (pp. 81, 86-87) that are simply not in this shorter paper.

I also look forward to discussing the challenging question (p. 14), "If Jesus has done it all for me, why then should I bother?" In my circles we have found that Luther's theology of "Two Kinds of Righteousness" (Preus, 2000; Kolb & Arand, 2008) helps to clarify an answer to that question. In brief, vertical righteousness—which we receive completely passively through the Holy Spirit, through no effort of our own—is complete and total. Because we are united with Christ's righteousness, we are holy before the Father. The core of our identity comes from this vertical righteousness. The second type, active, horizontal righteousness, flows from the vertical source, but is motivated by our Christian love for our neighbor. This horizontal righteousness, including our pastoral care, is never perfect; nevertheless we seek to act out our identity in Christ by loving our neighbor, both non-Christians and Christians (see Galatians 6: 9-10).

**Rick Marrs, Ph.D.**, is the Director of the M.Div/RAR Programs, as well as Associate Professor of Practical Theology, at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He has an M.A. in Counseling from the University of Kansas, a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Loyola University of Chicago (Licensed Psychologist), and an M.Div from Concordia Seminary. He was a professional counselor, psychologist, and psychology professor for 15 years before becoming a parish pastor. His hobbies include tennis, table tennis, and competitive stair climb racing. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Rick Marrs, Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO, 63105. Email: marrsr@csl.edu.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup>The author of this response also took Dr. Hart's advice personally. After completing a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology in 1994, I left my college teaching/counseling position to attend seminary, pursued an M.Div., and became a parish pastor for more than five years. I was then called to teach pastoral counseling at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, a seminary in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. I am now blessed to rub elbows daily with systematic and exegetical theologians who have deep insights and abilities to explain their insights to counselor-types like me.

## Missing Persons in Purves' "Vicarious Agency"

Jason McMartin  
Biola University

I read Dr. Purves' article with joy, thrilled to see serious and robust theological engagement brought to bear on themes of pastoral ministry. His article includes many needed emphases, claims, corrections, and developments. In this article and in *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, Dr. Purves signals his resistance to business as usual within pastoral theology.

In general, I wholeheartedly endorse the implications and theology of ministry that Purves suggests. At the same time, a potentially damaging theological conception may prowl among the valid insights. Since the evidence from the article appears somewhat mixed, I am uncertain whether my claims are critical of or complementary with Purves' views. In my view, they are complementary and make the best sense of several of his affirmations both in this article and in his book. I did not feel that I could draw adequate conclusions concerning his claims in this article apart from considering their more complete treatment in his book. Perhaps with greater knowledge of his other works, I would have drawn yet different conclusions than I have here.

I will explore Purves' arguments in three parts. First, I will consider the model of the atonement that appears to be his preferred theory: vicarious penitence. Second, whatever the merits or demerits of that atonement theory, I will describe a danger I perceive to be lurking in the neighborhood of this model of Christology and soteriology, namely the loss of human persons, both of Christ and of us. Finally, I will briefly outline a connection between Christ as creator and king to the theological use of social scientific insight. I believe this to be a valuable and complementary addition to Purves' ideas, but given his emphases it may be less than welcome. Like Purves, I am convinced that we must delineate a robust and orthodox Christology to provide proper grounding for our ministry endeavors.

### Salvation and the Nature of the Atonement

Purves rightly desires to expand the scope of soteriology beyond its often restrictive bounds so that it includes our present ministries of care and counsel and not just the past action of the cross and conversion. To do that, he links Christ's person, Christ's work, and soteriology in the strongest possible way.

Under inspiration from John McLeod Campbell, he presents a theory of the atonement frequently called vicarious penitence. Vicarious penitence (VP) theory locates the atonement primarily in Christ's active obedience (his perfect, obedient response to God as the representative for humanity) rather than in his passive obedience (his sacrificial death on the cross, as would be the case in penal substitution theories). The two facets of Christ's obedience are clearly compatible, and penal substitution theorists link Christ's active obedience to his passive obedience (Berkhof, 1996). Purves appears to leave open the possibility of the coexistence of the two (2004, pp. 70-71), even though he clearly prefers VP theory. Advocates of vicarious penitence usually see it as a more desirable theory than, and as a replacement for, penal substitution. Even supposing that the two theories are compatible, they would not both be explanations of a single event known as the atonement (in an unequivocal sense).

I am not yet convinced that VP is the best way to understand the nature of the atonement, even though good sense can be made of how it works (Crisp, 2007). Is there a non-ad hoc reason to think that Christ repents on our behalf? Is there evidence that he says Amen for us in a way acceptable to the Father as a substitute for our sinful rebellion in the way the theory postulates? Though it need not, VP may have the implication of soteriological universalism for Purves. If so, then human agency has not been represented so much as obliterated. As high priest, Christ does mediate on our behalf before the Father. The ministry implications that Purves believes follow from it are all still valuable and welcome amplifications of soteriology, which is itself broader than merely the atonement. However, I am not sure that these priestly activities should be thought of as constituting the atonement.

VP theory places a heavier emphasis on the humanity of Christ by locating his vicarious, atoning action in his human responses to the Father's will. In doing so, it has the potential to drift into a problematic identification of three events that should remain conceptually distinct: incarnation, atonement, and personal appropriation of salvation. In the conception of the orthodox consensus, the event of the incarnation makes possible the atonement by providing a person who bears the necessary qualifications (human and divine) to atone for sin. The merits of that atoning act are applied to believers through the agency of the Holy Spirit who joins believers into union with

Christ (Murray, 1955; Calvin, 1962, 3.1.1). Purves only hints at the distinction between the events of atonement and application in this paper, but develops it more fully in his book (2004). Each of the confluences (incarnation with atonement or atonement with appropriation) causes the individual human persons for whom Christ vicariously acts to disappear.

### Preserving Persons

Purves wishes to diminish human agency in ministry in certain ways; I endorse his aim to resist autonomous human agency in Christian ministry. Diminishment of human persons, though, walks a fine line with obliteration. He does not fall prey to the elimination of personhood, but danger lurks in the neighborhood.

Purves rightfully mines the riches of the fourth ecumenical council (Chalcedon, 451)<sup>1</sup> and delves a bit into the fifth (Constantinople II, 553) to formulate a Christology of pastoral ministry. I suggest that more thorough incorporation of the en/anhypostatic Christology of the fifth council would lend additional clarity to the project. Curiously absent is the sixth council (Constantinople III, 680-681) on the number of wills in the incarnate Christ. Given his focus on agency, this is odd. Initially, it would seem that dyothelitism<sup>2</sup> would bolster his claims, and I would be curious to hear his views on that matter.

Consider this sentence part way through Purves' explication of the en/anhypostatic human nature of Christ, focusing particularly on the part I have italicized: "Christ's human personhood is *human nature*, therefore, *in communion with God, human being as it was intended by God to be*" (p. 6). Saying that human nature is in communion with God confuses two meanings: 1) it is part of the nature (essence) of the human person to be in communion with God, which defines the flourishing and fulfillment of created human persons, and 2) human persons are meant to commune with God. Both of these are true, but the first focuses on the structure and the second on the action. Human natures do not commune with God; human persons do. The necessary complement of the non-personal human nature (anhypostasis) of Christ prior to the incarnation is the personalizing of that nature (enhyposstasis) by the second person of the Trinity (Sanders & Issler, 2007).

As a discrete person unifying two natures, Christ acts on our behalf. He must possess those two natures to do what he does on our behalf, but it is not the natures that act. Confusing persons and natures in this way may result in diminishing or relativizing the work of Christ. In consequence, the single event of the incarnation could become sufficient for our salvation, as seems to be implied by Purves' statement that "our salvation takes place in the inner relations of the mediator in the unity of his person as wholly God and



wholly human” (p. 6). Later, the event of the cross appears also to be necessary, showing that Purves’ more considered view does not conflate incarnation and atonement.

The lingering threat can be seen when Purves shifts to Christ’s work where “Jesus Christ is . . . the human response of hearing and receiving that Word and acting in perfect obedience toward God” (p. 7). Perhaps the better way to put this is that Jesus Christ’s response to God is one human’s perfect obedience that vicariously represents his fellow human beings (even though he is not merely human). Even still, it is unclear whether Jesus represents particular (elect) humans or all of humanity. Purves states that the paper is on human agency, but does not indicate whether any restrictions of scope apply.

The shift from impersonal to personal human nature in Christ impacts the way in which he acts vicariously for others. The object of his agency is not human nature, but human persons. Does Christ heal, make holy, and offer up to God human nature or human persons (p. 9)? Strictly speaking, if the answer is human nature, then Christ could have done so without any human person existing other than himself. If Christ heals human nature, then no event of application of his saving work is necessary, since every human participates in this healing simply in virtue of being human. In this version of vicarious agency, the personhood and agency of individual humans is simply irrelevant (which is surely too strong). According to this distortion, “the incarnation becomes wholly redemptive” (p. 10), meaning that nothing other than the incarnation is necessary for redemption. Again, “atoning incarnation” (p. 12) would mean that the incarnation itself atones rather than the incarnation makes possible the atonement and the incarnate one atones for us.

Purves does not depersonalize salvation, since he preserves the role of Christ’s agency in the past event of the cross and in his continuing active obedience through which “the incarnation becomes wholly redemptive.” And yet, as the examples above show, a distortion of his conception of the relationship between soteriology and Christology threatens to conflate Christ’s person and work in an illegitimate way. Employing the fifth council’s an/enhypostasic Christology safeguards Christ’s full personhood and agency and that of the humans he vicariously represents.

### Expansion of the Project to Include the Human Sciences

Finally, I would like to expand the soteriological implications of Christology yet further by considering Christ’s activities as creator (Col. 1; Heb. 1; John 1) and his ascended kingly office at the right hand of the Father from which he rules. I suggest that these doctrines provide the means for dignifying the human

vocations operating under the creation mandate, since the scope of redemption includes everything Christ created (Col. 1:20; Eph. 1:10; 2 Cor. 2:18-21). Further, this provides the rationale and guidelines for theologically mining the insights of the social sciences for the sake of an integrated Christian vision of pastoral ministry. Although we must develop our theology carefully, it is theologically mistaken to neglect what can be learned from the social sciences. If Christ has spoken to us through his world, then it behooves us to listen. I believe this is consonant with Purves’ aims and motives and need not fall prey to his searching criticisms concerning the flawed uses of social science by pastoral theologians in the past. We cannot cover every relevant topic in every writing, but I think Purves’ work would only be enhanced and not diminished by integrating social scientific insights.

**Jason McMartin, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor of Theology at Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He serves as Pastor at Maple Evangelical Church, Fullerton, CA, and holds a Ph.D. in religion from Claremont Graduate University, along with degrees in philosophy and biblical studies. His areas of interest are theological anthropology, philosophical theology, religious epistemology, and doctrines of humanity and sin. He has published in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, and *Religion Compass*. Address correspondence concerning this commentary to Jason McMartin, 13800 Biola Ave. La Mirada, CA 90639. Email: jason.mcmartin@biola.edu.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The seven ecumenical councils were those universal church assemblies called to address doctrinal issues in the early church and whose declarations most

all Christian communions recognize. The first four (through Chalcedon) are almost universally affirmed. The fifth through seventh have greater or lesser adherence. Protestants often deny, tolerate, or ignore the seventh council on the veneration of icons. These first seven were convened between 325 and 787.

<sup>2</sup>Dyothelitism is the position that, in the incarnation, Christ had two wills: a divine will and a human will. Constantinople III condemned monothelitism (the position that Christ only had one will in the incarnation).

### **Jesus paid It All and Provides It All: A Look at Vicarious Agency Through the Eyes of a Psychologist**

Theresa Clement Tisdale  
*Azusa Pacific University*

Reverend Purves invites us to a systematic theological reflection on the Christological topic of vicarious agency. At a time when some branches of theology are taking on shades of grey, I found his call to return to some basics of orthodoxy refreshing.

He uses the term *vicarious agency* to refer to the two-fold mission and ministry of Christ to bring the presence and manifestation of God to mankind (this he refers to as the downward movement of the incarnation), and also to represent humankind to God (this he refers to as the upward movement of the incarnation). A Christian's union with Christ in His two-fold ministry, made possible through the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, is what makes human ministry possible. For Reverend Purves, this possibility includes compelling implications for identity and vocation. A valid, God-given and Spirit-inspired sense of identity and vocation is possible only as fruit of a vital, on-going, Spirit-fueled union with Christ. Embracing only half of Jesus' two-fold ministry and purpose may lead to, among other tragic outcomes: discouragement, deception, depression, or lack of fruitfulness.

I felt inspired and joyful as I read Reverend Purves' article. Inspired by his bold call for Christians to embrace the essential and profound truth of the person and two-fold ministry of Jesus, and joyful because he underscores the need for Christians to view vocation (in whatever form that is expressed) as vitally and dynamically connected to the person and two-fold ministry of Jesus. One statement I found particularly compelling is: "Our union with Christ is the ontological basis of true humanity." His straightforward proclamations are a protection against erosion of the connection between the person of Jesus and our purposes for existence and motivations for ministry. This erosion may lead to co-opting kingdom intentions by personal and/or political aspirations of

perhaps well-intentioned believers who do not realize they have lost a vital connection with Jesus as a source of identity and vocation.

As a psychologist with a passionate interest in spiritual formation and integrating religion/spirituality in clinical practice, I found myself pondering some of Reverend Purves' comments and discussion about the expression of the life of Jesus to, in, and through believers. My musings and questions are informed by my studies in theology and spirituality (admittedly not my first language professionally, but a past and on-going subject of study), my classroom teaching and supervision as a professor of graduate psychology and integration, my clinical practice as a psychologist, and my own experience of sanctification (what I would term a journey toward wholeness) as a Christian.

In the section of his paper on the two-fold ministry of Jesus, Reverend Purves outlines and discusses the central thesis of his article, namely Jesus as mediator between God and man (in both directions), and ministry as participation through the Holy Spirit in this two-fold ministry. The questions that came to me as I pondered this section relate to my classroom experience teaching integration, and to work with patients in my clinical practice. These questions have less to do with affirming belief in the major theological tenets articulated by Reverend Purves, and more to do with *how* a believer may perceive and experience union with Jesus, filling and empowering by the Holy Spirit, and fruitful ministry, all of which have implications for both identity and vocation. Questions that have come up in clinical and classroom contexts represent an important crossroad where psychology, theology, and spirituality meet. At this intersection, what any particular Christian believes (theology) may converge or collide with the nature and extent of lived experience with God (spirituality), as well as individual and collective aspects of being human (psychology). In my experience, collisions at this intersection are what may lead to anxiety, depression, and discouragement within believers.

I agree with Reverend Purves that foundational to Christian living is solid theology. I would add to that foundation the importance of building up or fleshing out how the truths we believe become increasingly evident in our lived experience. I concur with him that ministry must be more than a moral imperative, more than something we make actual that God has made possible. Who we are and what we do must be rooted and grounded in Christ. However, what is less clear to me from his article is what it would look like for a believer to: "move away from a pragmatic and needs-assessment perspective of ministry—in which we ask, What should I do in response to the need or pain before me?—toward a perspective rooted entirely in the gospel, in which what we do and how we do

it are done in the Spirit through sharing in Christ's own speech and action as the one Word of God and in Christ's own response in filial obedience to the Father." I can envision how two believers may ponder that same question from very different experiential reference points. One from a reference point that is more detached from vital and dynamic union with Christ, from a place that is more rational and less relational. Contrast this with a reference point of contemplation and active surrender to the Holy Spirit, mindful of the scriptures where Jesus, the Word of God, speaks through example and divine breathings (as Thomas Kelly describes in *A Testament of Devotion*, 1996/1941). To add more complexity to this picture, the response of both believers may look quite similar, but the motivation is dramatically different.

I concur with Reverend Purves that God makes the ministry of the believer both actual and possible in Christ. What I would add to that is the notion of the life-long journey of every believer to discover and apprehend the unique outworking of the accomplished work of God through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit individually and collectively as a member of the body of Christ. Jesus stated that He did only what He saw the Father doing (cf. John 5:19). I believe Reverend Purves intends for us to do the same, to do only what we see Jesus doing. The capacity of the believer to see, to perceive the actions and words of Jesus, is through union with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a psychologist and Christian I have had occasion to interact with many clients, students, colleagues, friends, and family about what it means to participate in the life of Jesus here and now. How do we live into these truths? I suspect it was beyond both the scope and purpose of his article, but I found myself wanting to ask Reverend Purves to share from what I am sure is a wealth of pastoral experience, some examples of the comparison/contrast between the different motivations and manifestations of ministry in the life of believers. The interactive dialogue of these articles here in Edification may provide some space for that conversation.

In the spirit of interactive dialogue, I would like to share a few examples from my work with students and clients, and I would enjoy hearing Reverend Purves' thoughts on these reflections. I teach a course entitled, "Spiritual Formation and Psychotherapy." One of the texts for the course is *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster (1998), in which students are introduced to the breadth of expressions of Christian spirituality across time. For many years, this text has been the favorite of students because Foster provides them with a vision for how their vocation as therapists connects with the life and ministry of Jesus. Especially when they encounter the social justice stream (the compassionate life of exemplars such as Mother Teresa

and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King), many have an epiphany moment where they realize that their love for people and desire to help is motivated by God's work in and through them. The possibility emerges for them to attend to their work in schools, clinics, and hospitals with a prayerful attention and intention to be moved by the Spirit to say and do the things God desires. Certainly the life of Jesus provides my students with clues to what effective ministry might look like in their context, and they are also inspired by exemplars of this stream. It is an exciting revelation for them. Also from Foster's book, the incarnational stream (the sacramental life where all is consecrated to God) sparks a new vision of seeing their whole life (as a student, therapist, spouse, parent, neighbor, family member, and friend) within the purview of God's grace, purposes, and goodness. One student put it so poignantly on the last day of class when he said, "what I am taking away from this course is the recognition that I am a portable sanctuary, called to bring the presence of God wherever I am."

As I recalled these recent classroom experiences, I found myself wondering if Reverend Purves might consider these as mediating for Jesus or whether he would consider these as reflecting a dynamic work of God in and through the students in my class. I pondered this as I reflected on his statement, "...we do not mediate Jesus Christ. He, as it were, mediates us through his vicarious agency." I believe I comprehend what he means theologically; I am interested in how he would explicate this practically. For over a decade, a vision that has captured many of my students echoes in some respects the two-fold ministry of Jesus articulated by Reverend Purves. These therapists-in-training discover and embrace the possibility of extending God's compassion, grace, and love to their patients (participation in the downward expression of the incarnation) and also praying for and with their patients, serving them and society, as an act of worship, service, and obedience to God and as an active expression of their Christian life and vision (participation in the upward expression of the incarnation). For them it is a dawning vision of God's life and movement in and through them.

Another example that came to mind is more complex to relate because it is from my clinical practice as a psychologist. I have seen many Christian patients over the years who were (or are) struggling with a variety of conditions such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and identity confusion. For most of them, what they believe is not at issue. What is causing pain for them is a disconnect (collision at the crossroad), between what they believe and what they are experiencing emotionally, cognitively, physiologically, and/or socially. Their life is out of alignment. I draw the reader to the late Dallas Willard's (2002) helpful conceptualization of the self in *Renovation*

*of the Heart*. For believers, regeneration by the Holy Spirit potentiates the possibility of alignment between spirit, mind (thoughts and feelings), body, and social relationships. A fruit of this alignment is the capacity for meaningful relationships and purposeful work as believers, through the process of sanctification, increasingly experience the life of Christ flowing in and through them.

Because of the complexity of human development, this flow may be blocked or interrupted for many reasons including, but not limited to: chemical imbalances in the brain, physical illness, psychological problems with managing thoughts or feelings, addictions, or spiritual crises. A treatment plan for those in such distress may include psychotherapy; medical tests or interventions; and/or spiritual direction, healing prayer, or pastoral counseling. All of this and more may be needed to facilitate, in the life and experience of any given believer, actualization of the theological truths Reverend Purves outlines. Again, I suspect this was beyond the scope of his article, but I would like to encourage theologians, pastors, psychologists, spiritual directors, and pastoral counselors to be in active dialogue in ministerial and other contexts in order to explore the implications of these collisions at the crossroad within the life of believers and in Christian communities, and together to articulate ways that each of us in our respective contexts may support and facilitate the actualization of Jesus' two-fold ministry in the life of those we serve.

In the last section of the article, Reverend Purves notes three conclusions about vicarious agency that center around Jesus' continuing role as mediator between God and humankind: that it is ongoing (not just 2000 years ago), that Jesus continues in a ministry of prayer for believers, and that the Holy Spirit enables the believer to be united with Jesus in His obedience, worship, and service to God. Worship, teaching, and serving are three central aspects of Jesus' life and ministry that are intended to be manifested in the life of believers. Reverend Purves is careful to remind the reader that even and especially in these roles or ministries Jesus is mediating believers to God not the other way around. He makes a particular point about the teaching ministry in the church, exhorting those in this role to focus on the lessons of Jesus, the person of Jesus, and union with the Trinitarian God as increasing levels of maturity in ministry.

Reflecting psychologically on this section of the paper led me to consider questions about the movements of Jesus' life in and through believers. It was not clear to me from Reverend Purves' description how he might describe his vision of the role (if any) of intentionality or agency on the part of believers with respect to worship, teaching, and serving? I believe I understand his point theologically, that believers do not mediate Jesus. However, I am left pondering

how he might answer the questions: What is the path toward actualized experience of vicarious agency? What may help or hinder the process of believers fully participating in God's kingdom life and purposes? Is it through passive acceptance/receptivity or through active surrender and cooperation with the movements of God in and through the believer? In my vision of spiritual formation, theological beliefs and truths come to fruition through an actively surrendered life that is lived in intimate, dynamic, ongoing communion with the Trinitarian God. It is clear that Jesus mediates His life from and to God on behalf of humanity. It is less clear from the discussion in this section how Jesus' life and ministry flows in and through believers to the world.

While reading this section of the article, I also found myself resonating deeply with Reverend Purves' call to radical *metanoia*, to new thinking that leads to abandoning whatever misconceptions we have about what our ministry should be and to embrace the ministry of Jesus. Again, though, I was left wondering about the process he might envision for how this comes about in the life of individuals and collective communities of Christians. I agree that Jesus is the one worshipping, teaching, and serving and we are to commune with Him; however, that often is a process in which believers are actively involved with choice, intention, and agency. Exhaustion and depression may result as much from biological and circumstantial causes as from misguided theology.

In the final section I did take issue with Reverend Purves' interpretation of the account of Jesus healing the blind beggar. He states: "...do not read this as a moral tale about an attitude that needs to be born in us. The story is about Jesus' attitude of service. Leave it at that." I agree that it is important to read the story with respect to Jesus' readiness to serve and heal as a model for believers in our willingness to serve in whatever ways the Spirit prompts us to act in union with Jesus. I also believe this is a crucial opportunity for believers to see both the choice we have in what we ask of Jesus and the importance of recognizing our broken condition and need for healing. This additional interpretation comes from my understanding of the interactive process of spiritual formation and my experience as a psychologist working with patients who at times miss the opportunity for maturity in themselves or others by rushing to serve those who have not asked for help or seeking help from others with no clear recognition of their own need. I found myself wondering why Reverend Purves seemed so insistent on this point and interpretation of serving.

Notwithstanding the questions discussed above, I found the article compelling and the impassioned expression of theology refreshing. I am captured by Reverend Purves' singular focus on Jesus. As I deeply pondered the implications of vicarious agency, I felt



renewed and inspired. My vision is focused anew on the reality of God's incredible gift to humanity, on Jesus' active and ongoing mediational actions on our behalf, on the Holy Spirit making dynamic union with Jesus possible, and on ministry as a fruit of union with the Triune God. My lingering questions have to do with how "the wonderful exchange" (Reverend Purves quotes Athanasius) becomes an experiential reality. Rather than a linear, ascending process, spiritual formation is often full of twists, turns, and setbacks. Convergences and collisions at the crossroads, as we may articulate them from the standpoint of theology, spirituality, and psychology, are important to explore and understand for the sake of the growth and maturity of every believer, and for the sake of God's kingdom, which is effected through the living members of the body of Christ.

**Theresa Clement Tisdale, Ph.D.**, is Professor of Graduate Psychology at Azusa Pacific University. She is a fourth year candidate at Newport Psychoanalytic Institute and maintains a private practice in Glendora, CA. Her clinical, academic, and research interests are in psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, religion and spirituality in psychotherapy, and spiritual formation. She has presented and published on topics in each of these areas. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Theresa Clement Tisdale, Azusa Pacific University, Department of Graduate Psychology, 701 E. Foothill Blvd., Azusa, CA 91702. Email: tctisdale@apu.edu.

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**"But Enough About Jesus, Let's Talk About Me!"  
A Response to Andrew Purves' Vicarious Agency**  
Philip D. Jamieson  
*United Methodist Foundation*

I will not pretend to objectivity when responding to Professor Purves. Andrew's mediation and dare we say it, popularization of T.F. Torrance's theology has deeply and profoundly shaped my own thinking as a pastor and a theologian. In my own time as a teacher of pastoral theology, I adopted and adapted this participatory model which I learned from him and another student of Torrance, Elmer Colyer. So even as I offer some questions, they are unashamedly and unapologetically appreciative in nature.

The question of human agency is central to the besetting problem (sin?) in American Protestantism which I raise in my tongue-in-cheek title for this response. American Protestants love to focus upon themselves or at least their own agency. What does this mean? Many mainline Protestants have the rather odd habit of confining Jesus' work to the past. That good man and great teacher of the things of God has set for us a wonderful example to follow; an example grounded in love for God and (especially) love for neighbor. And so we incessantly talk about meeting human needs, righting injustices, and so on. In this way, ministry (a particular form of agency), be it the ministry of the clergyperson or the ministry of the Christian therapist, becomes the *moral imperative* which Professor Purves describes. "I must now do this in response to what Jesus did so long ago."

When that message became central to Christian proclamation, slowly but surely, moralism replaced Gospel Good News until God, Himself, became superfluous. C. FitzSimons Allison (1966) described the historical process thus: "Starting from assumptions that can only be characterized as Pelagian, soteriological thought, by an implacable logic, moved inexorably through an exemplarist atonement, to an adoptionist Christology, to a Socinian deity, and finally from deism to atheism" (p. 192). In other words, once human agency becomes central, God is assigned a secondary position and eventually becomes superfluous altogether. Unfortunately this describes all too well the work of far too many mainline Protestant congregations: societies of right-minded people who act correctly.

But that's mainline Protestantism, surely evangelical Protestants have avoided this same plight? No doubt, most American Protestants maintain a much more robust doctrine of Christ. Central to their work has been a defense of Jesus' divine nature over against a denial of that doctrine by far-too-many mainline Protestant pastors and theologians.

Still, American evangelicalism, with its focus upon making a decision for Christ, has also led to an overly-inflated focus upon the individual's agency. Let there be no doubt: evangelicals do focus upon the necessity of God's agency in our salvation. That is, we cannot save ourselves. God alone can accomplish that particular act. But at the same time, at least some evangelical theological traditions, to varying degrees, place a strong emphasis upon the human response to God's agency.

In order to avoid either overt or inherent universalism, evangelicals have tended to insist upon some form of necessary human action that receives the gift of salvation. None of this is meant to suggest that either Professor Purves' paper or my response solves one of the greatest of theological problems: what is the human response to God's gift?

Instead, Professor Purves does something far more subtle. He insists that any agency must be understood in Trinitarian and thus in Christological terms. In other words, to adopt the central concern of this journal, when taking up the topic of human agency, a Christian psychology ought to begin with the one particular human, Jesus. The only possible thing that we as Christians may know about human action is revealed in the particular activities, the particular agency of this one man.

All other human agency is broken. All other human agency insists upon a different starting point: one's own experience of agency or a generalized sense of human agency. And that is exactly the human dilemma: *enough about Jesus, let's talk about me!* But such beginning points always remain dead ends because we cannot possibly understand human potential for action absent the life of Christ.

In response, Professor Purves rightly insists that we talk much about Jesus' agency and in particular his vicarious agency, which takes the place of our own broken agency. One question that Dr. Purves might entertain would be this one: in the process of our sanctification, how might one faithfully describe the relationship between our agency and Christ's? Is our agency healed or replaced?

Finally, Professor Purves has helped us all in gaining a firm place to stand to respond to human needs in our various ministries. At the same time, he has also shed tremendous light on what the Apostle Paul meant when he said: "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

**Rev. Philip D. Jamieson, Ph.D.**, is the President of the United Methodist Foundation for the Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conferences. An ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, he is the co-author of *Ministry and Money: A Practical Guide for Pastors*. He is currently finishing a book on forgiveness with a special focus on an atonement model that explicitly addresses shame. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Philip D. Jamieson, 27 Bridlington Ct, Brentwood, TN, 37027. Email: [pjamieson@dbq.edu](mailto:pjamieson@dbq.edu).

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## A Response to My Respondents

Andrew Purves

*Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

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To begin: thank you to my respondents. They took up their task to engage my essay with due diligence. A number gave me the courtesy of consulting my previously published work. The level of engagement was mostly helpful, although I have deep disagreements, at times, in fact, incomprehension, with some ostensible criticisms. I appreciated the affirmations that most of my reviewers were able to address to me.

I have four initial observations to make before I respond to each individually. First, as I get older (67 years old) I find the essential mystery of the gospel to be increasingly before me. I do not expect to understand everything, or to know God in the sense of having the gospel all worked out. While I find no shortage of words in my teaching and writing (I have just finished the completed draft of a 300-page book on Christology and the atonement, where some of the concerns raised are addressed and where a more fully-orbed soteriology is presented than might be assumed hitherto), I am aware of the apophatic gap between my words, sentences, and arguments, and the God given for us as Jesus Christ. Certainly in academic theology it might behoove more of us to say and write less and spend more time adoring the beauty of God in Christ for us. Adoration of the Holy Trinity, after all, is the primary work of theology.

Second, over a series of books I have tried to wrestle pastoral theology back to its historic basis in Jesus Christ and the corresponding affirmation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I have been critical of the reduction of pastoral care to pastoral counseling and the implied theological anthropology and soteriology as represented, for example, by the late Seward Hiltner. That is not to say there is no legitimate place for pastoral counseling in Christian ministry; it is to say that Christian ministry is not defined by that practice. Ordination, after all, is to the ministry of Word and sacraments. But ministers of whatever vocation have to deal with people. It is a good idea to have an educated understanding of them before we burden them with our ministrations. But my primary goal over the last thirty years was to recover as best I could the theological basis for pastoral ministry. To that end I have tried to address the question: "What makes pastoral care Christian?" And my answer, in general terms, is to say that the ministry of Jesus Christ is what makes pastoral care Christian.

Respondents are right to press me on what then this looks like "on the ground." I hear that from my students all the time. I urge them to develop a Christological hermeneutic by which they may engage the "conversation" between the parishioner and the living, reigning and acting Lord who is present in the power of the Spirit. That is to say, I begin with a vigorous affirmation of the continuing ministry of the ascended Lord. I believe that Jesus in the Spirit is present in each pastoral encounter. For that conversation to go forward with healing and sanctifying power, the ministering person must know the Lord and the parishioner. Who is Jesus Christ for this person today? That question is theological, personal and relational. There is no guide book for this, no diagnostic textbook; each pastoral conversation is unique. I see every reason for Christian psychology to be an essential tool for this ministry, but I do insist that what we have to do with here is a theological event first of all. Anyone interested in exploring this issue should consult a book long out of print, but worthy: Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*.

Third, a number of respondents were astute in identifying my theological convictions and then proceeded to question them. Often, as I read through the essays, I found myself writing "indeed" in the margins, for that was exactly what I was trying to say, even as some respondents took a different view. I have never made any secret that I find Reformed scholasticism arid and boring and that I do not give the Westminster tradition the privilege of defining what Reformed means, or that I believe Aristotle is indeed "the bishop of heretics" (Gregory of Nazianzus) – I know that is harsh, but it is fun to say – or that I am the student of T. F. Torrance. I do indeed stand in my Scottish theological heritage identified by Knox, John McLeod Campbell, and Hugh Ross Mackintosh, the teacher of T. F. Torrance. However, I am more compelled by Jesus Christ than I am by my theological arguments and convictions. "Although everyone is a liar (including Andrew Purves), let God be proved true" (Rom 3:4). If I am justified in my words, that is God's healing. I hope that is not read as false or even as smug humility. It is the truth as I see it, and I am increasingly unconvinced that I can think my way to God.

Four, I cannot respond to every criticism or plea

for clarification. In some cases the criticisms stand at least as observations and I have no rebuttal. Indeed sometimes the punctum stans is what it is, a place to stand, a conviction or an apperception that is so basic to my faith, to my sense of who I am, and of the God whom I worship, that I cannot stand anywhere else. To lay that out: it is my sense of the gospel having to do essentially with Father – Son relations, with the homoousion and with our union with Jesus by the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Notice, please, that I used the name ‘Jesus’ rather than the theological term ‘Christ’ for we are in relation with a person not a theological construct.) And sometimes too I remain unclear and that obvious observation has been identified by my respondents. The journey continues, even though the theologian’s eyes are still yet dim (1 Cor 13:12), as they must be until we see the Lord face to face.

My responses now follow. They are in no special order other than the providential order of the printed papers on my desk. Nevertheless, a loosely constructed discursive argument is here offered building from my responses as I move further through the pile. This may not be the order in which the essays are printed. Along the way I offer tentative suggestions for the task of Christian psychology as a transdisciplinary engagement.

### Russell D. Kosits

I am taken by Dr. Kosits’ notion of a creedal imperative for Christian psychology and for Christology, and thereby soteriology, to have central place, and for *an anthropology for Christian psychology to be developed accordingly*. After all, it is Jesus who makes us Christian rather than religious, who saves us, unites us to himself and who presents us in his own name before the Father. This is all summed up, for example, by the Pauline notion of ‘in Christ,’ some form of which occurs 164 times in the letters attributed to the Apostle. But while the church set the framework for Christology, soteriology is much more loosely organized. And it is here I think that Dr. Kosits and I have some difference.

The mid-nineteenth century Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell’s axiom marks out the parameters for our consideration: “The faith of atonement presupposes the faith of the incarnation” (McLeod Campbell, 1867, p. 19). That is to say, the atonement is to be seen in the light of the incarnation and the fulfillment of God’s purpose for humankind which the incarnation intends. The meaning of the incarnation unfolds as the atonement, insofar as we look at the atonement as the revealing of God’s goal for humankind. On the one hand, the atonement makes it necessary that we should have a Christology, while on the other hand, Christology seeks to bear witness to the ontological ground for the atonement

in Jesus Christ himself. Anselm’s question, Why did God become human? is answered in reference to the light that the person of Jesus Christ shines upon it, for he is the *hilasmos*, the atoning exchange (1 John 2:2 and 4:10). Atonement is not so much a work of Christ, apart from who he is, but Christ himself in his work (McLeod Campbell, 1867, p. 154). The nature of the atonement is Jesus Christ himself working out our reconciliation with God, not just in his body, but, as Calvin says, also in his soul (*Institutes* 2.16.10). That is to say in theological language, atonement is worked out in terms of Father – Son relations and the Nicene *homoousion*.

It is immediately striking that this proposition, that the atonement is the meaning of the incarnation and that the reference is to the person of Jesus Christ himself, implies that forgiveness must be more than the application of God’s will to forgive, and therefore more than a forensic account can present. If forgiveness, the covering of sin, involved the personal cost to God that we find in the life and death of Jesus, two points arise. First, we must suppose something in God that required the venture of the Son into the far country of our human condition; second, we must suppose something in our human condition, at least in its state in relation to God, that required such remedial action as incarnation and atonement. To take incarnation and atonement seriously immediately points us to the mystery of God’s love and holiness, such that we at least catch a glimpse, however dimly, of a gracious purpose within the divine incomprehensibility, as well as to the depth of human need and awfulness in our broken communion with God as to bring us to a point of near terror when we contemplate our situation otherwise (Canlis, 2010, p. 83f). Says McLeod Campbell, “It is that God is contemplated as manifesting clemency and goodness at great cost, and not by a simple act of will that costs nothing, that gives the atonement its great power over the heart of man” (McLeod Campbell, 1867, 49).

The path to be taken in our enquiry, therefore, is determined by who God is for us in Jesus Christ, and what it is in which case that God wills that we should be, in contradistinction to what we are. That is, we understand the need addressed by the incarnation and the atonement in terms of what it is that God has done for us in Christ, and not by any sense of our own need. We learn from the atonement why it was needed – “in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9). This is the way of realism in theology, by which we come to some degree of understanding regarding God and us, when incarnation and atonement are seen in their own light, to borrow McLeod Campbell’s phrase. “Less than our being alive in that eternal life which is sonship, could not satisfy the Father of our spirits; nor as orphan spirits, as in our alienation from God we are, would less than the gift of that life have met our

need” (McLeod Campbell, 1867, p. 96). “The fact of sin,” McLeod Campbell insists, “is a discovery to the awakened sinner” (McLeod Campbell, 1867, p. 40).

Thus in response to Dr. Kosits, I have two points, briefly. The reality of sin is more than broken law, it is a broken relationship with God. Indeed, I think the point is that Jesus took upon himself sinful humanity at its direst and deadliest rebellion against God’s claim upon us. Second, Christian psychology, it seems to me, is obliged to consider humanity “in Christ.” That is what will fulfil the creedal imperative.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Kosits for his frequent affirmation of my work, and for the evident effort he put into his review.

### Kevin Timpe

As (I presume) Dr. Timpe is a philosopher in the analytic tradition, he has a virtuous concern for clarity. Alas, I could take little of value for myself from his essay. I know of no God who acted for us and for our salvation other than what God did as the man Jesus of Nazareth. There is no saving knowledge of a non-acting God in Christ for us. I have no interest in speculation about God behind the back of Jesus, so to say. And I have certainly no interest, theologically, sociologically or psychologically, or philosophically for that matter, in religion. But God is known as self-given for us as the man Jesus: through God alone is God known is the worthy theological tag line. Yes: God’s mission is identical with the incarnation, and the incarnation is how God lays hold upon us for our salvation. I have no biblical warrant to say otherwise. Indeed, if I say otherwise I think I would be in violation of my ordination vows. I cannot put my point more strongly. Clearly Dr. Timpe and I see Christian faith quite differently, if I understand what he wrote. Either way, this is what I teach and preach.

Further, I am unclear what Dr. Timpe intends when he refers to the relation between Christ’s perfect human life and the human nature we are called to exemplify. What does “exemplify” intend? This looks like a moral influence theory of the atonement in some disguise – but the point is not developed enough for me to be confident in that judgment. I am more confident in disagreeing with Dr. Timpe when he asserts that we must begin, epistemically, with our own human nature, and perhaps this is his main point. What is this of which he speaks? Surely Dr. Timpe does not intend I must, for philosophy’s and psychology’s sake, think myself apart from Christ? I know of no such abstraction. Once again, to follow my response to Dr. Kosits’ concerns, Christian psychology is obliged to deal with human persons in Christ. What is the point of the atonement otherwise?

I find myself challenged here to reflect on how to understand my experiences of God, from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, because it is

precisely at this point that theology and psychology are thrust together. God acts upon me; I have experiences. Yet the experiences cannot be fully understood, or validated for our sanctification, for that matter, without theological discernment. This appears to be grist for the mill of Christian psychology.

### Peter C. Hill

I liked very much the force of the challenge Dr. Hill puts to me: the concern for practice-ability. I alluded to this concern in my introduction, and it comes at me often enough that I am obliged to take it with utmost seriousness.

I am not a social psychologist so I will not comment on Dr. Hill’s discussions on social equity and social comparison other than to say that they make sense. Theologically, however, allow me two thoughts in response.

First, let us take up the concern for practice-ability under the head of sanctification, and especially in terms of 1 Corinthians 1:30, where Christ is spoken of as the source of our life who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. All along, I suspect, at issue in our colloquium, though it has not surfaced as such, is the event and subsequent process of sanctification. I put it that way because we are at once holy in Christ – an actuality, while we are in process of becoming that – living it out, or in Paul’s image, waking up. (In theology as I see it, we move from actuality to possibility, from the indicative to the imperative.) Again, accepting the challenge that Dr. Kosits put for a creedal identity for Christian psychology demands a profound wrestling at the interface between growing “up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4: 15) and psychology. It is persons who are sanctified. This wrestling, I suggest, is an urgent task for the Christian psychology movement. I confess to having no idea what a Christian social psychologist would do with this, but I happily lob my nascent thought over to Dr. Hill for his reflection.

Second, the concern to take account of social comparison immediately set my mind in the direction of ecclesiology. As a Christian, my primary allegiance is to Jesus Christ - see Article 1 of both the Scots Confession (1560) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1562) – while my primary social commitment is to the church. Undoubtedly a host of thorny issues can arise at this point, not the least of which are civil religion and the faithlessness of the church. Nevertheless, as the place of Word and sacraments, which are the primary marks of the Body, I cannot be Christian outside of the fellowship of all who are in Christ. I want to insist on this corporate embodiment. Again, with the concern for the creedal identity of Christian psychology, one asks: what does the community of Word and sacraments mean for our understanding

of persons qua persons, and who, as such, are joined together in God's Spirit as Christ's body? To put the point as one sharp question: what does baptism mean for Christian psychology? Issues of identity, relationships, commitments and convictions, all of which have behavioral dimensions, are immediately presented.

### Rick Marrs

Dr. Marrs is a rare person, qualified in both psychology and divinity. Christian psychology is enhyposstatic in him. His brief review raised the concern that I may be underselling the value of planning, given all that Christ has "done it all for us." Sometime in the 1960's J. Moltmann published a book of essays under the title *Hope and Planning*, where a similar concern was discussed. Does hope or, in my case, the vicarious humanity of Christ, leave us with no practical use for planning, or, for that matter, for agency?

My last three books (*Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, and *The Resurrection of Ministry*) dealt extensively with the need to put to death our (I refer to pastors, but need not limit the reference) tendency (need?) to play messiah. Just one illustration: pastors sometimes speak of having an incarnational ministry. But they don't. It has already been done. The point is to get in on what Jesus is up to, and to understand that point we need a robust doctrine and celebration of the Lord's ascension and of his present ministry in the power of the Spirit. What does ministry and Christian life look like when we speak of Jesus in the present tense, of him having a continuing ministry in the Spirit, and of our being joined to that ministry through our union with Christ? Much of the present confusion today regarding Christian practice, in my view, is to be placed at the door of the ascension and the attendant issues having been pushed to the farthest edges of our liturgical and theological sensibilities. With no hyperbole intended, I regard the recovery of the ascension of Christ to be of foremost importance for practical theology today.

What does that mean for planning? I think it is an invitation into tension. There is something like a spectrum between the actual and present ministry of Jesus, on the one hand, and our dim apprehension of and stuttering participation in that ministry, on the other. Another form of this spectrum arises when we situate ourselves amid the historical Jesus, the reigning Lord, and Jesus as *eschatos* (see Heb 13:8). We cannot collapse the tensions. In other words, Christian living and Christian ministry are messy. At no point are we without sin, though we are already forgiven before we repent, as Calvin insisted. Planning happens in view of who we are in Christ as we understand that in terms both of our present lives in Christ and of the future into which he calls us. Planning has an escha-

tological proviso: it is God, as Son in the Spirit, who will establish the reign of God, yet for now we plan and live and act trusting in and looking for that reign.

Dr. Marrs raised an important concern that I have not had much occasion to consider. I feel my short response is but a tentative small step towards an answer that deserves more space.

### Jason McMartin

Dr. McMartin has researched me, and for that I am grateful. He has probed into my thinking and the effect now is to push me in due course in my response to appeal to a theological authority whom I find entirely convincing.

Above I cited my Scottish forebear John McLeod Campbell, in part because I had to reflect on the concerns of Dr. McMartin. Dr. McMartin is convinced that I have leaned too heavily on McLeod Campbell's theology of vicarious penance (not McLeod Campbell's phrase, but it is used by others to describe his position). As noted above, I have spent the last twelve months writing on Christology and the atonement, and I have come to a position in which I do see a place for McLeod Campbell in the scheme of things, but I have never intended even in previous publications that the atonement can or should be characterized alone by his analysis and conclusion. Whatever the merits or otherwise of McLeod Campbell's theory of the atonement, a fully orb'd biblical theology must stretch beyond what McLeod Campbell offered.

But by way of positive response to McLeod Campbell, I largely accept his criticism of a forensic model wedded to the western *ordo salutis*, where penal atonement becomes so strongly offered that other dimensions of the atonement are more or less altogether lost from view. I think here especially of reconciliation (*katallage*, used in the New Testament as a noun and a verb, and with God as the actor), which by its nature is a relational term. Further, although McLeod Campbell does not ask this question, I ask it: Why was Jesus baptized into a baptism of repentance? Looks like vicarious penance to me, so that in my baptism I was baptized into his baptism, meaning that I am baptized into the whole sweep of our Lord's life, death, resurrection and ascension in which at every point he stands in for me.

Does this theology of vicarious penance lead to universalism, as Dr. McMartin fearfully suggests? Here I can only confess that I stop short of pushing the argument to its logical (but maybe not theological!) deduction. It may seem an odd thing were any psychologists to read this and ponder my state of mind, but I simply stop the process of trying to tease out indubitable conclusions, for ultimately God alone is the actor. Does that mean I have obliterated (his word, not mine) human persons under the overwhelming power of Jesus' agency. Of course I



make confession of faith, but that does not save me. I act. I speak, and so on. And those of us who do these things, even hesitantly, do them by God's grace alone. At this point I want to enter the "I, but not I, but Christ" of Gal 2:20 into the argument. I am curious to know what Christian psychologists have to say about that verse, arguably one of the very most important in the New Testament.

Allow me now to cite Karl Barth at length, because the great Swiss theologian makes my point better than I can: "No one who really believes has yet understood and described his freedom to believe as a freedom which he possessed before, and brought with him. On the contrary, by receiving what he was permitted to receive from Jesus Christ, he confessed and acknowledged that *the fact that* he did receive (instead of refusing to receive) was itself the receiving of a divine gift – God's faithfulness reaching over and grasping him, and in this he, who found in himself nothing but unfaithfulness, could only see an undeserved act of kindness and an incomprehensible miracle."

Let me continue with Barth here because we are near the nub of what ails some of my respondents about me. "Was it then a spell, a piece of magic or a marvel? No, he really did receive here, while in possession of his mind, understanding, will and all his five senses. He was not an extraordinary sort of man, and it was nothing extraordinary which happened when he believed instead of not believing. It was in itself nothing more out of the ordinary than if he had crossed from the left to the right side of the street. He was not passive. On the contrary, he acted. He made no *sacrificium intellectus*. On the contrary, he thought, and that, it is to be hoped, as rigorously and consistently as it is possible for a man to think... But *the fact that* he did come to this decision, *that* he really believed and *that* he actually had freedom to enter this new life of obedience and hope – all this was not the work of *his* spirit, but the work of the *Holy* Spirit... The possibility of faith becomes manifest in its actuality, but it is in its actuality that it becomes manifest as a divine possibility" (Barth, 2005, p. 108-9).

Indeed I want a case to be made for human agency. But first it is about – all about, without remainder – Jesus's agency through the Holy Spirit on our behalf. Insofar as in love and freedom God brings any of us to faith, indeed we act and think, but all along faith is God's possibility for us, and for that I am thankful. My challenge to Christian psychology is to work with Barth, and his lesser students, by being patient with the elusive theological dialectic of faith, and try to tease out not what little is left of our human agency, but how glorious is the 'new man' in Christ.

### Theresa Clement Tisdale

Dr. Tisdale poses the worthy question of the human experience of union with Jesus, which is life in the

Spirit. Without lived experience are we really talking about anything at all? How do we live out the truths of the gospel? What does the vicarious humanity of Christ look like in our lives? Calvin famously noted that no matter what Christ has done for us, as long as he remains outside of us and we are separated from him, that is to say, unless we experience Christ within ourselves, in our hearts, all that he has done for us remains useless and without value (*Institutes* 3.1.1). I think Dr. Tisdale would concur with the reformer when she asks me to describe what the path is towards the actualized experience of vicarious agency.

She answered her question on my behalf: "through an actively surrendered life that is lived in intimate, dynamic ongoing communion with the Trinitarian God." I would not say it otherwise than to add that one does so in a spirit of gratitude, wonder and joy. Analogies drawn from human experiences to express life in God tend to stretch proportionality to the breaking point. But sometimes that is all we have. Nevertheless, when one reflects on loving a spouse, children, and friends, something of unconditional commitment, mutual forgiveness, and living to bless the other come to the front. We are placed within and place ourselves within a communion of love. Analogically, I view the life in God as through union with Christ our being enfolded into the perichoretic life of the Holy Trinity. In this life, precisely in this life, we discover personhood and freedom. I might say it this way: agency in Christ is true freedom. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5: 1). Thus I return to a theme that recurs: Christian psychology has as one task, to explore the interface between theology and human experience at the points of conversion and sanctification. A classic text, of course, is Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, published in 1746.

Dr. Tisdale reflects pastoral wisdom when she notes that spiritual formation is often full of twists, turns and setbacks. Add to that the impossible possibility that we keep on sinning, and the mix that we experience, even in Christ, is filled with pain and confusion, as well as with moments of lucid insight and the calm of the experienced and known presence of God.

Finally let me thank Dr. Tisdale for the gentle tone of her writing and the expressed appreciation of my essay.

### Philip Jamieson

Philip (he is a friend) is accurate when he notes that our agency must be understood in Trinitarian and thus in Christological terms. That is my theme all along. He then asks, joining his voice to a chorus of concern: Is our agency healed or replaced? To which my answer is "Yes!" Our agency is replaced in that Christ for us stands in our stead. Our agency is "in



Christ.” However one works out atonement, it surely involves substitution (not only or even centrally as penal substitution!). There is an atoning exchange at the heart of God’s action in and as the man Jesus for us. The result is that we are healed, becoming new persons, born again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3). And this is God’s doing and it is wonderful to our eyes (Ps 118:23 and Mark 12:11)

In closing, once again I thank you all for this colloquium. I pray that readers will enjoy and be instructed by what we set out to do, albeit I think more questions and issues have been raised than solved.

Correspondence concerning this response should be addressed to Rev. Andrew Purves, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 616 N. Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. Email: apurves@pts.edu.

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# Talking to God: Psychological Correlates of Prayers of Praise and Gratitude

Gregory R. Schneller

*McMurry University*

John Eric Swenson, III

*Hardin-Simmons University*

*Prayer may be conceptualized as communication with God. The present study investigated two types of prayer: praise/adoration and gratitude/thanks-giving. Giving praise and expressing gratitude are fundamental human communication patterns used to express approval, give encouragement, and motivate. To date, psychological research on expressions of praise and gratitude has focused primarily on interpersonal interactions, with little investigation of the person-God interaction. This paucity of research on human expressions of praise and gratitude to God stands in contrast to clear, recurring admonitions in scripture that people should engage in such expressions. This paper describes a survey of professing Christians regarding their communication of praise and gratitude to God, and how such prayers relate to life satisfaction, personality traits, and dispositional gratitude. Praise and gratitude are found to be similar, but not identical, constructs which are positively related to what are generally considered to be positive personality characteristics.*

*Keywords: Prayer, Praise, Gratitude, Christian, Psychology*

The importance of praying to God is a central principle within the Christian faith. Scripture exhorts people to pray consistently (Luke 18:1, New International Version; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), with determination (Colossians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:1), and with various types of prayers (Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6). Survey research bears out that the vast majority (90%) of Americans, Christian or otherwise, *do* pray (Poloma & Gallup, 1991) and most (72%) pray regularly (Gallup Report, 1993). Although prayer has been a behavior of intermittent interest to psychologists for over a century, the past two decades have witnessed an increase in the psychological literature on the correlates and impact of prayer.

Prayer has been defined as “any type of spiritual communication to and/or with God” (Baesler, 2003), and various authors have noted that prayer involves communication within a relationship (Baesler, 1999; Whittington & Sher, 2010). Indeed, from both psychological and theological points of view, it may be said that a central purpose of prayer is to facilitate the relationship of people with God, yet research on prayer often has not focused on the person-God relationship. Instead, there tends to be a focus on pragmatic outcomes of praying—what prayer can do for the one who prays. Prayer has been linked to both mental and physical well-being. For example, research

has indicated that prayer helps people to cope with stress (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; Pargament, 1996, 1997), maintain a sense of hope (Ai, Peterson, Tice, Bolling, & Koenig, 2004), understand and manage illnesses (Bearon & Koenig, 1990; Pargament & Hahn, 1986), endure the grief of losing loved ones (Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Loveland, 1968), and manage physical pain (Turner & Clancy, 1986; Yoon & Black, 2006).

One limitation of many studies of prayer is that prayer has frequently been treated as a unidimensional construct. In other words, questions such as, “Do you pray?” and, “How often do you pray?” have been assumed to adequately operationalize prayer as a behavior. However, such definitions of prayer have been criticized as not adequately representing the multidimensional prayer activities in which a believer may engage (Baesler, 2002; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). There have been a variety of taxonomies demarcating types of prayer; these have arisen from various sources, ranging from monasticism and mysticism to modern factor analysis (see Baesler, 1999 for a review). Baesler (2002) notes that some forms of prayer involve greater activity on the part of the person praying, such as thanksgiving/gratitude, praise/adoration, confession, and supplication/petition/intercession. Other prayer types are more receptive in nature, including

contemplation, meditation, reflection, stillness, and even ecstatic experiences of mystical union. Obligatory/ritual prayer, such as reciting required prayers at specific times throughout the day, also constitutes an important variety of prayer (Whittington & Sher, 2010). The present study holds to the definition of prayer as communication with God, and investigates two of these types of prayer: praise (adoration) and gratitude (thanksgiving). The following sections will briefly review some of the psychological research findings on praise and gratitude, both as psychological constructs and as types of prayer.

### Research on Praise

Giving and receiving praise is a fundamental human communication pattern. Praise is used to express pride, give encouragement, and to motivate. Much psychological research has focused on the communication of praise between two persons. For example, researchers have examined the impact of parents' praise on the development of independence (Wang, Wiley, & Chi-yue, 2008), symptoms of depression (Cuellar & Johnson, 2009), and motivation (Zentall & Morris, 2010) in their children. Likewise, effective praise techniques for use in classroom learning have been identified (Dweck, 2007; Merrett & Thorpe, 1996). Attention has also been given to the use of praise as a motivator in employment settings (Wernimont, Toren, & Kapell, 1970). The impact of praise on the person-God relationship has received much less research attention, however.

Instructions to give praise and adoration to God abound throughout the Old Testament, with examples in the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 8:10, 10:21) and prophetic books (Daniel 2:19-21; Habbakkuk 3:2-4; Isaiah 40:10-12; Jeremiah 20:13). The Psalms are especially rich in exhortations to communicate praise to God (e.g., Psalm 9:11, 30:4, 47:5-7, 150:6). Jesus also made it clear that praising God is an expected part of the spiritual life (Luke 17:17-19; Matthew 21:15-16). Instructions to praise are scattered throughout the epistles (Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13; 1 Peter 2:9) and in the book of Revelation (5:11-13; 19:5). The importance of praising God has also been addressed by such medieval mystics as Bernard of Clairveaux (n.d.) and Teresa of Avila (1852, p. 109), reformers such as Martin Luther (1986, p. 67) and John Calvin (1845, p. 35), great evangelists such as Charles Spurgeon (1995), and a host of modern-day Christian authors (e.g., Crabtree, 2011; Highfield, 2008; Omartian, 2004; Youssef, 2002).

Although no previous psychological research on prayer has been conducted using the specific term "praise", several studies have included "adoration" as a category of prayer. Adoration has been defined as prayer which focuses on the worship and praise of God, without specifically addressing personal needs,

or circumstances (Laird, Snyder, Rapoff, & Green, 2003; Whittington & Sher, 2010). Given this definition, it appears that prayers of adoration and praise are synonymous. Using factor analytic techniques, Laird, et al. (2003) identified adoration as one of five distinct types of prayer, the other types being thanksgiving, supplication, confession, and reception (contemplative). All five types were positively intercorrelated. Greater frequency of adoration prayers was related to the belief that prayers have an effect on people's lives. Adoration was also positively correlated with intrinsic (but not extrinsic) religiosity using Allport and Ross' (1967) Religious Orientation Scale. Whittington & Sher (2010) studied the same five types of prayer, as well as an additional category of obligatory ritual prayers. They reported that adoration prayers were positively correlated with the other five prayer types. In addition, adoration prayers were positively correlated with an optimistic outlook, having a sense of meaning in life, greater life satisfaction, and amount of spiritual support. Using regression analysis, the authors found that prayers of adoration are significant predictors of both optimism and a sense of meaning in life.

A study of the relationship of prayer to chronological age and intimacy with God also included adoration as a variable (Baesler, 2002). The frequency of each of five different types of prayers (adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, and contemplation) was found to be positively correlated with age. Each type of prayer was also entered into a regression analysis predicting relational intimacy. In the full sample, adoration proved to be the best predictor of relational intimacy with God. For middle aged adults, adoration was by far the best predictor of intimacy with God, with thanksgiving also a significant predictor. However, in younger (college aged) adults, thanksgiving most strongly predicted relational intimacy with God, followed by supplication. The data supported Baesler's (2002) hypothesis that the types of prayer engaged in by Christians may change with age, with younger Christians more likely to use supplication and older Christians using more God-focused prayers (adoration and contemplation).

### Research on Gratitude

As with adoration/praise, the Bible is also replete with exhortations to express gratitude to God, with terms like grateful, thanks, and thanksgiving appearing extensively in the Old Testament (e.g., Jonah 2:8-10; Leviticus 7:12-14; Psalm 118) and the epistles (1 Corinthians 10:15-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Colossians 3:15-17; Philippians 4:5-7). Within the gospels, Jesus repeatedly sets an example of offering grateful thanks to God for blessings received (e.g., John 6:11; Luke 22:18-20). The importance of expressing grateful thanks to God has also been emphasized by Christian

authors throughout the centuries (e.g., Justin, n.d.; Vaughn, 2005; Wesley, 1844).

With the advent of the positive psychology movement, there has been a burst of research and writing on the topic of gratitude in the past two decades. Gratitude itself appears to be a multidimensional construct, which may be construed as a personality disposition, an affect, a behavioral habit, a virtue, or an attitude (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003). Much of the research on gratitude has treated it as a stable disposition. Gratitude has been linked with a host of positive psychological variables, including life satisfaction, vitality, subjective happiness, optimism, hope, and the belief that life is comprehensible and meaningful (Lambert, Graham, Fincham, & Stillman, 2009; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). It is also positively related to agreeableness and extraversion, which are generally viewed as desirable personality characteristics. Dispositional gratitude has been found to be inversely related to a number of negative psychological variables: envy, materialism, neurotic personality style, negative affect, anxiety, and depression (McCullough, et al., 2002; Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). Gratitude as a behavioral habit has also been investigated—inducing gratitude in experimental participants resulted in them being more optimistic, feeling better about their lives, experiencing increased positive affect and decreased negative affect, and being more likely to help others (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). See Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2010) for a current, comprehensive review of the relationship of gratitude to personal well-being.

Gratitude has been linked to religious participation. Higher levels of grateful emotions have been found in persons who go to church, pray, and read the Bible with greater frequency, who have more religious friends, and experience more spiritual transcendence and relationship or unity with God (Emmons & Kneezel, 2005; McCullough, et al., 2002). There is also evidence that longitudinal increases in gratitude are related to more frequent attendance at worship services (Krause, 2009). However, these studies did not specifically ask about prayers of gratitude or what people were doing at church which may have facilitated gratitude. Greater feelings of gratitude toward God have been found to moderate the harmful effect of stressful life events, at least for older persons (Krause, 2006).

We are aware of only a few studies to date in which prayers of thanksgiving/gratitude have been a focus. As previously mentioned, thanksgiving is one of five distinct types of prayer revealed by factor analytic techniques (Laird, et al., 2003). These authors found that prayers of thanksgiving were positively correlated with both the frequency of praying per week and the duration of prayers. That is, those who

prayed longer and more often were more likely to include communication of gratitude to God in their prayers. Prayers of thanksgiving were also positively correlated with each of the other types of prayer (adoration, supplication, confession, and reception) and with hopefulness. Laird, et al. also found prayers of thanksgiving to be positively correlated with extrinsic religiosity and with the belief that prayers have an effect on people's lives. Whittington & Sher (2010) report that prayers of thanksgiving significantly predicted life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism. Those higher in thankful prayers indicated experiencing greater meaning in life and receiving more spiritual support. Again, thanksgiving prayers were positively related to other types of prayer (adoration, supplication, confession, reception, and obligation). There is also some evidence that the frequency of expressing thanksgiving through prayer increases with age (Baesler, 2002). Finally, based on the outcome from a non-controlled study with a very small sample, Stanley (2009) suggests that prayers of gratitude may impart physiological benefits, specifically cardiac coherence.

### Study Hypotheses

The present study examined self-reported patterns of expressing praise and gratitude to God as they related to personality, life satisfaction and worship habits. We began with the assumption that praise and gratitude are overlapping, though not identical, constructs. Based on this assumption and previous research on gratitude and adoration/praise, we identified four research hypotheses:

1. Expressions of praise and gratitude toward God will be related, but not identical constructs.
2. More frequent expressions of praise and gratitude to God will be associated with more frequent worship participation.
3. Persons who more frequently express praise and gratitude toward God will have higher levels of life satisfaction.
4. Persons who more frequently express praise and gratitude toward God will have higher levels of dispositional gratitude, agreeableness, and extraversion, and lower levels of neuroticism.

We also determined to explore the relationship of praise and gratitude expressions to the demographic variables of gender, age, denominational affiliation, though no specific hypotheses were formed regarding these possible relationships.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Because this was an exploratory study, we wanted to investigate a group of Christian believers who were

likely to be introspective. For a sample, we selected members of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS). Invitations to participate in this online survey were mailed to 1,150 CAPS members and 295 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 26%. With regard to sex, the sample was relatively balanced (53.5% females; 46.5% males). Participants were asked to indicate which decade of life they were in, and the breakdown was as follows: 9.8% in their twenties, 16.8% in their thirties, 20.3% in their forties, 31.1% in their fifties, 17.8% in their sixties, and 4.2% were 70 or older. As would be expected with members of a professional organization, our survey respondents were well-educated. The educational breakdown was as follows: Master's level = 44%, Doctorate level = 43.7%, Bachelor's level = 9.9%. Fewer than 2.5% of participants fell in all other degree categories. Participants were widely distributed among a variety of Christian denominations. The four largest groups were Non-denominational (18.8%), Baptist (18.1%), Presbyterian (9.4%), and Roman Catholic (5.2%). There were fewer than five percent of respondents in all other Christian denomination categories. The majority of participants (57.4%) indicated they attend worship once per week, while 13.9% attend twice per week and 14.9% attend more than twice per week. A minority of respondents (11.9%) attend less than once per week. In response to the item, "I view my Christian faith as central to my professional identity", 91.2% of participants responded "strongly agree" or "agree."

### Survey

**Praise and Gratitude questionnaire.** For the purposes of this study, we created a questionnaire to assess patterns of expressing gratitude and praise to God. Participants were asked to provide separate estimations of how often they express praise to God and gratitude to God. Because we were interested in whether praise and gratitude differ, we also asked participants to respond to three forced-choice items about when they are more likely to express praise and gratitude to God: in good or difficult situations, when alone or with others, and when experiencing negative feelings or positive feelings. We also asked by what methods (prayer, singing, etc.) participants express praise and gratitude. The praise and gratitude questionnaire may be seen on page 47.

**The Satisfaction with Life Scale** (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985). This five-item, self-report instrument is designed to provide a global assessment of participants' present satisfaction with their lives. Items are in a seven-point, Likert format ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Research with the scale has demonstrated internal consistency of  $\alpha = .87$ , two-month test-retest reliability of  $r = .82$ , and evidence of convergent validity

correlations with other measures of subjective well-being ranging from .46 to .75 (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991).

**Gratitude Questionnaire-6** (GQ6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). This six-item inventory is a self-report measure of a grateful disposition. Items are in a seven-point, Likert scale with response choices ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The authors' factor analysis indicates the GQ6 items represent a single factor with internal consistency of present evidence for good internal consistency of  $\alpha = .82$ . Validity evidence for the GQ-6 abounds, with both convergent and discriminant correlations indicating that the measure relates as expected to instruments measuring positive affect, prosociality, and spirituality. GQ-6 scores also correlate significantly but moderately ( $r = .33$ ) with observer ratings.

**Personality Mini-Markers** (Saucier, 1994). This inventory is a brief measure of the Big Five model of personality, assessing the personality domains of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness. It consists of 40 trait adjectives (energetic, cooperative, sympathetic, etc.), each of which are rated on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from Extremely Inaccurate to Extremely Accurate. Factor analysis of the Mini-Markers scale reveals the same five-factor structure as longer measures of the same personality model. Factor scores derived from the Mini-Markers instrument correlated between .92 and .96 with factor scores obtained from a full, 100-item measure of the Big Five model. Although reliability estimates for the brief Mini-Markers scale were somewhat lower than for longer measures of the Big Five, the instrument still demonstrates good internal consistency, with coefficient alphas ranging from .78 to .90 for the five factors.

Personal and professional demographic information was also gathered from participants, including sex, age, church denominational affiliation, frequency of worship, and professional education.

### Procedure

Data were collected using a professional online survey service. Potential survey participants, identified via the CAPS mailing list, were contacted by e-mail to invite them to complete the survey. To preserve anonymity, we did not obtain participants' IP addresses. A second invitation to participate was sent sixteen days after the initial invitation. The survey remained open for another month, at which time data collection was ended.

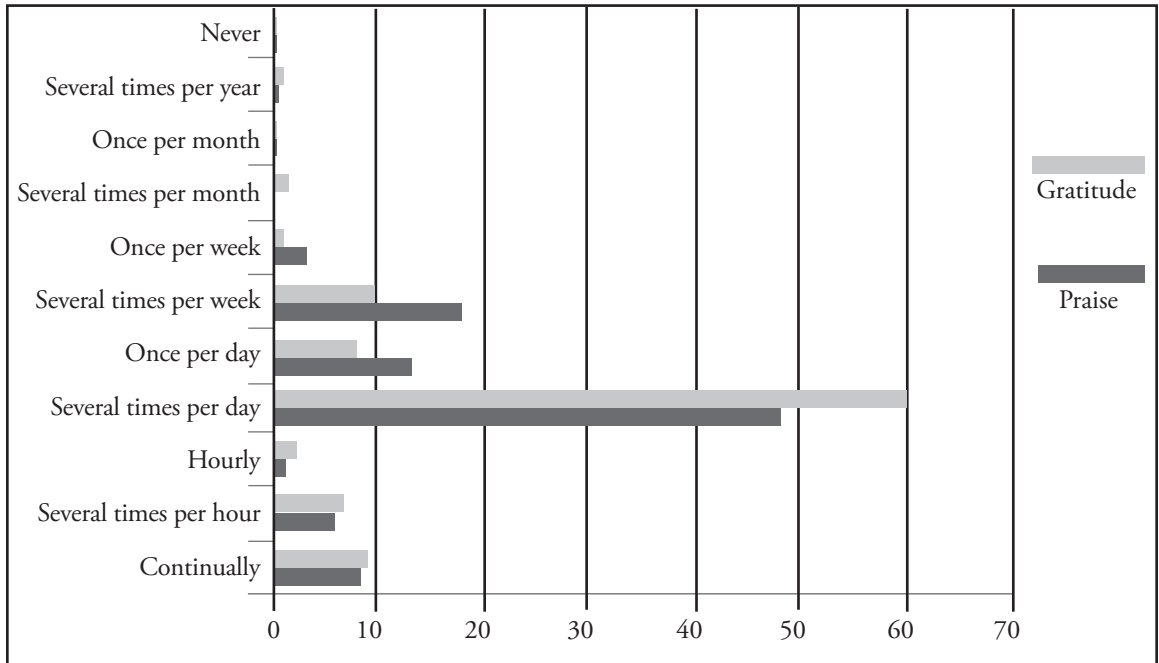
### Results

**Hypothesis 1: Expressions of praise and gratitude toward God will be related, but not identical constructs.** This hypothesis received support from research findings. Participants estimated how often



**Figure 1**

Respondents' estimates of the frequency (in percentages) with which they express praise and gratitude to God.



they express praise and gratitude toward God. As can be seen in Figure 1, expressions of praise and gratitude ranged from “never” to “continually,” with modal responses of “several times per day” for both praise and gratitude. A quick perusal of Figure 1 shows that frequency of expressions of praise and gratitude to God were similar, and Chi-square analysis revealed a significant relationship between frequency of praising and expressing gratitude to God,  $\chi^2(100, N=284) = 860.0, p < .001$ . The Goodman and Kruskal Gamma correlation indicated that this relationship was positive, with the tendency for those reporting higher levels of praise to also report higher levels of gratitude,  $\Gamma = .841, p < .001$ .

Despite indications of a strong relationship between expressions of praise and gratitude, several of our findings suggest they are not identical constructs. Agreement between the two rating sets was moderately low (Cohen's  $\kappa = .398$ ), indicating that individual participants often did not provide equivalent estimates of their frequencies of praise and gratitude expressed to God.

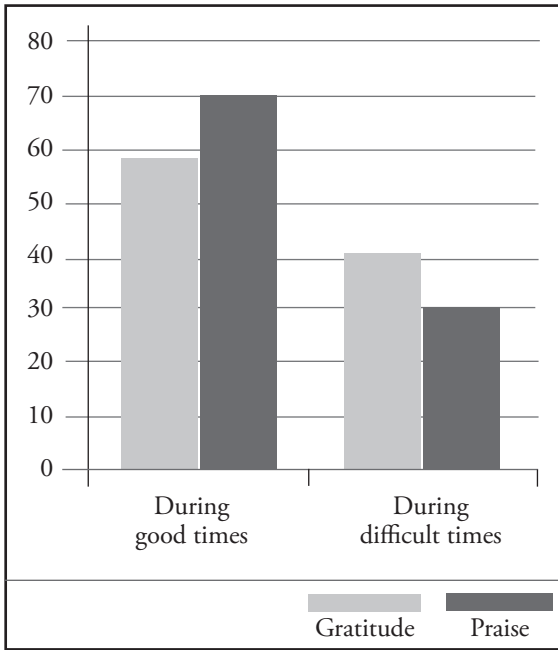
Further comparisons of praise and gratitude come from the three forced-choice survey items which asked participants to indicate in which situations they are more likely to express praise and gratitude to God (see Figures 1-3). Overall, participants were more likely to express praise and gratitude during good times (rather than difficult times), when alone (as opposed to with others), and when feeling positive (rather than negative) emotions. However, in each case, the percentage

of respondents for praise differed somewhat from gratitude. Praise was significantly more likely than gratitude during good times,  $t(267) = 3.051, p < .01$ , and when experiencing positive feelings,  $t(274) = 2.489, p > .05$ . Gratitude was significantly more likely than praise when respondents were alone,  $t(276) = 6.146, p < .001$ .

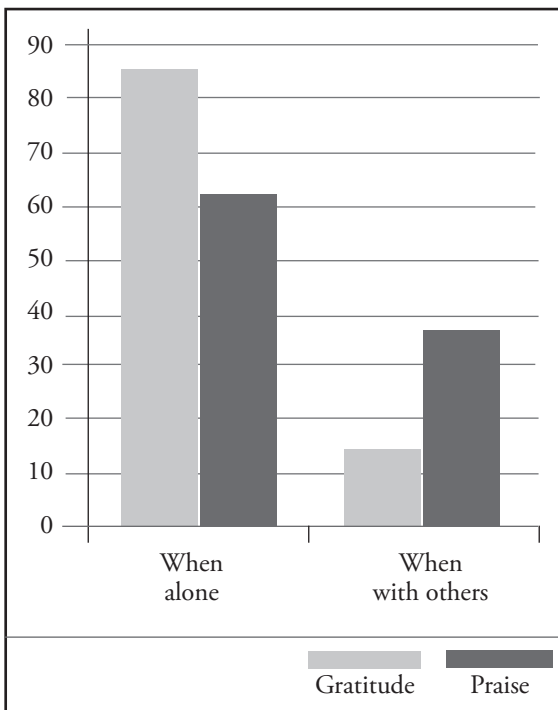
**Hypothesis 2: More frequent expressions of praise and gratitude to God will be associated with more frequent worship participation.** This hypothesis was supported. A chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between frequency of worship attendance and frequency of praising and expressing gratitude to God. Possible responses for frequency of worship were as follows: more than twice per week, twice per week, once per week, three times per month, twice per month, once per month, and less than once per month. Possible responses for frequency of praising and expressing gratitude may be seen in Figure 1. As predicted, the relationship between these variables was significant, with frequency of praising God being higher in those reporting worshipping more often,  $\chi^2(60, N=272) = 159.2, p < .001$ . For gratitude, a significant positive relationship was also found with frequency of worship positively associated with frequency of expressing gratitude,  $\chi^2(60, N=272) = 107.8, p < .001$ .

**Hypothesis 3: Persons who more frequently express praise and gratitude toward God will have higher levels of life satisfaction.** We were interested whether those who express praise and gratitude on a

**Figure 2**  
*Percentage of respondents who are more likely to express praise and gratitude to God in good or difficult times.*



**Figure 3**  
*Percentage of respondents who are more likely to express praise and gratitude to God when alone or with others.*



more frequent basis differed from those who expressed them less often. We decided on a fairly stringent cutoff, separating participants into two groups—those who praised God more than once per day, and those who praised God once per day or less. Our rationale was that gratitude and praise are part of some routine, daily prayers (e.g., saying grace before a meal or reciting the Lord’s Prayer), and we wanted to know if those who go beyond a single daily expression of praise or gratitude differ from those who do not.

Hypothesis 3 received partial support. Comparisons were made using t-tests (2-tailed). Respondents who expressed gratitude to God more than once per day reported higher global life satisfaction,  $t(277) = 3.15, p < .01$ . However, the amount of praise of God was not significantly related to global life satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4: Persons who more frequently express praise and gratitude toward God will have higher levels of dispositional gratitude, agreeableness, and extraversion, and lower levels of neuroticism.** This hypothesis, which was partially based on previous research findings, was supported. Participants were again separated into two groups—those who praised God more than once per day, and those who praised God once per day or less. Comparisons were made using t-tests (2-tailed), and it was found that those who praise God more than once per day had more grateful dispositions on the GQ6,  $t(278) = 3.44, p < .001$ , were higher in Agreeableness,  $t(274) = 2.84, p < .01$ , higher in Extraversion,  $t(274) = 3.62, p < .001$ , and scored lower in Neuroticism,  $t(274) = -4.01, p < .001$ .

Similar comparisons were made for expressions of gratitude. Not surprisingly, those who express gratitude to God more than once per day were found to have more grateful dispositions on the GQ6,  $t(277) = 4.97, p < .001$ . They were also higher in Agreeableness,  $t(273) = 2.56, p < .05$ , higher in Extraversion,  $t(273) = 2.86, p < .01$ , and lower in Neuroticism,  $t(273) = -3.96, p < .001$ , than those who expressed gratitude once per day or less.

No specific hypotheses were made for the relationship of praise and gratitude expressions with sex, age, and denominational affiliation. It was found that the amount of praise and gratitude participants expressed to God was unrelated to their sex or denominational affiliation. Frequency of praise was unrelated to age, but there was a significant association between expression of gratitude and age,  $\chi^2(50, N=275) = 72.3, p < .05$ , with respondents in their 50’s reporting more gratitude than those in other decades of adulthood.

Finally, in response to our query about methods by which participants express praise and gratitude to God, five methods were identified as most common. A full 99.7% of participants said they use informal prayer, 92.5% used singing, 80.7% used reading/

reciting scripture, 72.2% used communion/Eucharist, and 66.4% used formal/structured prayer. Four methods were fairly infrequent (reciting creeds/liturgy, 23.7%; speaking in tongues, 24.7%; movement/dance, 20.3%; playing an instrument, 20.0%), and all other methods were endorsed by less than 10% of respondents.

### Discussion

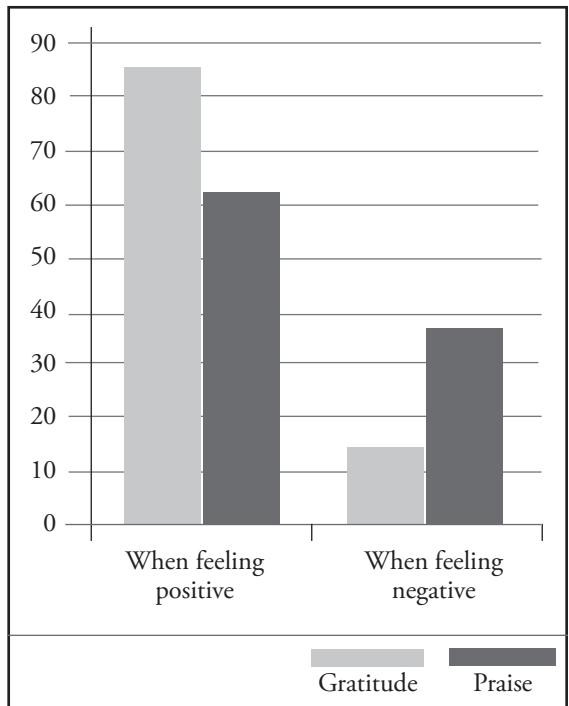
Although praise and gratitude are often used interchangeably in the everyday conversation of Christians (e.g., “I praise God that I received a good test report from the doctor.”; “I thank God because he is so loving.”), the data support our first hypothesis that these types of prayer communication are not precisely the same. As would be expected, prayers of gratitude were more strongly related to having a grateful personality than were prayers of praise. Praise was more strongly related to desirable life situations and positive feelings, raising the possibility that praise is a more affect-laden activity than expressing gratitude. Though both types of prayer tended to be solo activities, by comparison praise appeared to be more public, perhaps because praise occurs more frequently than gratitude in public worship (especially hymns and worship songs).

In what way do expressions of praise and gratitude to God differ? Several authors have noted that some prayers are more self-focused, while others are more God-focused (Baesler, 1999; Whittington & Sher, 2010). They view confession and supplication as prayer types targeted toward one’s own needs, while they identify thanksgiving, adoration, and reception (contemplation) as more focused on the character of God. Perhaps all prayer types may be placed on such a continuum, with primarily self-focused prayers at one end and mainly God-focused prayers at the other. We suspect that, by comparison, prayers of gratitude would include more of a self-focus than prayers of praise. Giving thanks involves at least some focus upon oneself because benefits to the self have been received from God. This receipt of a positive personal outcome from another is part of the fundamental definition of gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). For example, the simple activity of “saying grace” before a meal involves recognition that God has provided something of personal value. In contrast, prayers of praise/adoration tend to focus more on God, with less reference to one’s own needs (Whittington & Sher, 2010). For example, offering praise to God because he is good is primarily a positive recognition of God’s character, even if secondary benefit to humans may arise from God’s goodness. It could be argued that one might even praise God for his attributes (such as holiness) from which negative emotional outcomes might be anticipated (e.g., feeling convicted of one’s own sin).

Baesler’s (1999) Interpersonal Christian Prayer

**Figure 4**

*Percentage of respondents who are more likely to express praise and gratitude to God when having positive feelings or having negative feelings.*



model posits that the natural course of spiritual development entails a move from self-oriented prayer towards God-oriented prayer. In an analysis of Hebraic prayer practices, Maxwell (2004) also implies that God-oriented prayer is more spiritually developed. He likens the difference between self-focused and God-focused prayers to gears in an automobile. First gear prayers involve much usage of first-person pronouns and consist mostly of petitions for one’s desires (“Keep my children safe while they are at school, Lord.”). Second gear prayers include greater consciousness of God’s accessibility and an increase in directly addressing God. By contrast, third gear prayers involve “declaration and affirmation of who God is and what he has done.” The Old Hundredth Doxology (“Praise God from whom all blessings flow...”) is an example familiar to many Christians. We suspect that prayers of gratitude to God constitute second-gear prayers, while prayers of praise fit best with Maxwell’s third gear. However, this assertion awaits further empirical validation.

Our finding that frequency of worship attendance was related to frequency of gratitude and praise of God is consistent with the previously mentioned research on grateful dispositions (e.g., Emmons & Kneezel, 2005). Four methods of expressing praise

and gratitude to God frequently endorsed by our participants are highly consistent with public worship services: singing, reading/reciting scripture, communion/eucharist, and formal/structured prayer. However, our data also clearly indicated that one-on-one expression of praise and gratitude to God is modal. It may be that the positive correlation between worship and praise/gratitude is driven by a third variable such as intrinsic religiosity. This also awaits empirical verification.

In the present study, those who offered gratitude prayers more often displayed higher global life satisfaction (on the Satisfaction with Life Scale) than those who thanked God less often. This is consistent with the previously mentioned research findings linking dispositional gratitude to life satisfaction. However, those reporting a higher frequency of praise prayers were not higher on this global index of life satisfaction. One possible explanation for this disparity is that expressions of gratitude to God may be more strongly linked to a person's global cognitive appraisal of how well his or her life is going, whereas praise of God may be more likely to accompany situationally-based affect. Lending support to this interpretation is our findings that praise is significantly more likely than gratitude when feeling positive and significantly more likely during good times in life.

Our findings suggest that the personalities of those who praise God more frequently tend toward positive affect (lower neuroticism and higher extraversion), a desire to seek out and maintain mutually supportive relationships (higher extraversion and higher agreeableness), and thankful recognition of blessings received (higher dispositional gratitude). A very similar personality pattern emerged for those who express gratitude to God more often. What exactly is the nature of the relationship between personality and the tendency to praise and thank God? One interpretation is that having this personality configuration facilitates ongoing communication with God. For example, the drive within the extravert toward frequent interpersonal communication may result in more expressions of praise and gratitude to God than would be found in the introverted personality. However, this may be an overly simplistic conclusion. It has been proposed that extraverts and introverts may differ in how they seek to draw near to God, with introverts gravitating to quiet, reflective, contemplative spiritual practices (McHugh, 2009). It may be that more unobtrusive, secluded modes of praising and thanking God (such as meditation, journaling, and silent prayer) are central to the spirituality of introverts, whereas more vocal, demonstrative expressions (singing, lifting hands in praise, movement or dancing) fit well with the person high in extraversion. In keeping with the exploratory nature of our study, we inquired in a very general way about methods of expressing

praise and gratitude to God, but future research could focus on development of a more sensitive, sophisticated measure of ways in which people express praise and gratitude to God.

An alternate way of understanding the present results is that praise and gratitude behaviors may actually shape personality. It is possible that habitually engaging in grateful thanksgiving ("give thanks in all circumstances", 1 Thessalonians 5:18) and praiseful adoration ("continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise", Hebrews 13:15) actually shapes the character of the one who is praying. As noted above, inducing experimental participants to think grateful thoughts daily over a three-week period resulted in more optimism, affective benefits, and altruistic behavior (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Although such outcomes do not necessarily connote personality change, they do suggest that building a long-term gratitude (and perhaps praise) habit can bring about change in one's outlook and interactions with the world. Future research could investigate whether helping believers to develop the spiritual discipline of praise and gratitude prayer might actually result in positive personality change.

How might the human communication of praise to God compare with person-to-person praise? We suggest that the reasons for praising God and for praising other people bear a strong similarity, and may include both influential and expressive elements. It was previously noted that most psychological research on interpersonal praise has focused on its influential use in classroom and employment settings. Interpersonal influence involves trying to change another's behaviors (manipulation) or opinions (impression management). A factor-analytic study of manipulation tactics identified 11 strategies, one of which is Charm (Buss, 2006). Charm includes using praise as a form of flattery to get what one wants. Research suggests that impression management strategies include Ingratiation, a component of which is praising others to curry their favor (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Just as praise may have an influential use in attempting to modify other people's behaviors or opinions of us, it may also be used as a means of trying to influence God to give us what we want or to improve God's opinion of us. Although the attempt to change the mind of a changeless God may at first blush seem somewhat shallow, scripture contains numerous accounts of this influence-based use of praise. Abraham praised God's righteousness, Moses emphasized God's power and might, and Hezekiah stressed God's holiness and creative power when they were attempting to convince God to act according to their wishes (Genesis 18:23-25, Exodus 32:9-12, and 2 Kings 19:14-19, respectively). Indeed, when asked by his disciples how they should pray, Jesus modeled praising God as an important first step (Luke 11:2, "hallowed

be your name”).

Apart from attempting to influence others, it appears that another purpose of praise is the expression of emotion. Interpersonally, we may spontaneously praise someone as an expression of awe or joy when that person has performed an admirable feat, overcome a significant adversity, or displayed beauty or character traits which stir positive emotions in us. Moreover, giving praise is a natural expression of the emotional experiences of love and intimacy. Again, this pattern of interpersonal praise is mirrored in the relations between people and God, and scripture is replete with examples of praise as an expression of emotions such as awe (Psalm 104), joy (Isaiah 12), love (Psalm 139), and intimacy (Matthew 11:25-27).

Attempting to operationalize and measure praise and gratitude expressed toward God presents interesting conceptual challenges. For example, are these constructs best defined in terms of the cognitive beliefs which underlie them, the affect experienced while engaging in them, or the ways in which they are expressed behaviorally? Given the highly educated sample we were surveying in this study, we anticipated there could be substantial theological and psychological disagreement about what precisely constitutes praise and gratitude. For the purposes of our study, we conceptualized praise and gratitude as behavioral communication toward God (see the questionnaire instructions on page 47), but beyond that we intentionally left the definitions of these terms ambiguous, allowing participants to define praise and gratitude for themselves. There is some precedent for this approach; positive psychology researchers have successfully measured happiness by allowing participants to define that construct, rather than defining it for them (e.g., Diener, 1994). A disadvantage of this approach is a potential lack of uniformity in how participants understand the constructs. For example, what exactly do people mean when they report that they praise God? They may be referring to prayerfully communicating praise to God based on God’s attributes (“God, I praise you for your loving-kindness!”). Or, they may simply be making an affective statement regarding their beliefs about God (“I praise God for being so loving!”). More concrete operationalization of praise and gratitude expressions in future research may permit us to better understand when praise and gratitude constitute communicative prayer, and when they do not. It may also open the way to researching the motivations behind expressions of praise and gratitude to God (attempts to express emotions, enhance relationship with God, manipulate/control God, etc.).

Because the present research design was cross-sectional and retrospective, our data may miss potentially meaningful changes in prayer habits over time, and participants’ recollections of their praise and gratitude may be subject to memory biases. For example,

# PRAISE & GRATITUDE

## —QUESTIONNAIRE—

The following questions inquire about two important elements of communication toward God: Giving Praise and Expressing Gratitude. In this section, the term “God” will be used generally to refer to the Father, to Jesus, and/or to the Holy Spirit.

1. How often do you GIVE PRAISE to God? (check one)\*
  - Continually
  - Hourly
  - Several times per day
  - Once per day
  - Several times per week
  - Once per week
  - Several times per month
  - Once per month
  - Several times per year
  - Never
  
2. I am more likely to GIVE PRAISE to God: (circle one per bullet)\*
  - When alone *or* When I am with others
  - During good times *or* During difficult times
  - When I have positive feelings *or* When I have negative feelings
  
3. In what ways do you GIVE PRAISE and/or EXPRESS GRATITUDE to God? (check all that apply):
  - Informal prayer
  - Formal/structured prayer
  - Reading/reciting scripture
  - Reading/reciting creeds or liturgy
  - Communion/Eucharist
  - Singing
  - Playing a musical instrument
  - Speaking in tongues
  - Movement/dance
  - Prophecy
  - Other (please specify)

*\*For these items, participants were also asked to make similar ratings for expressing gratitude to God.*



people who are presently undergoing a “dark night of the soul” brought on by life circumstances (e.g., death of a loved one) may describe their praise and gratitude habits very differently than what was typical for them prior to their present spiritual season. Longitudinal data on people’s expressions of praise and gratitude to God are needed. Implicit in some prayer taxonomies is the notion that as believers develop spiritually they progress from using mainly active prayers (such as petition and intercession) to include more relationally, emotionally engaged prayers (e.g., contemplative and mystical) (Baesler, 1999). There is evidence that children mostly use more active types of prayer (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967). Also, the frequency of adoration prayers has been found to correlate positively with age (Baesler, 2002). However, longitudinal studies of gratitude and adoration prayer practices are missing.

The present study has several limitations. First, this research was conducted on a non-representative sample; our participants were Christian, highly educated, and limited to members of a relatively narrow professional group (mental health and ministerial workers, academics). Generalization of the present results would require replication with a more diverse sample. Moreover, our survey return rate was relatively low (26%). Self-selection on the part of our participants may have resulted in a sample of people who were particularly interested in issues of prayer practices, which would influence the way they responded. It is also important to acknowledge that the present data provide only correlational information. While it is tempting to infer that prayer increases life satisfaction or that personality style influences prayer habits, such claims would go beyond the present data. We are not aware of any prior research on prayer which establishes causal relationships, although some prior authors have certainly implied that greater frequency of prayer produces better mental and physical health, rather than vice-versa.

We conclude this paper where we began, with the acknowledgement that prayer is communication occurring within a relationship with God. Our study focused on prayer, personality, and life satisfaction, but did not include explicit measurement of the quality of participants’ relationships with God. A logical next step in research on praise and gratitude will be to examine how these types of communication with God (as well as other types of prayer, such as petition, confession, and contemplation) relate to a sense of intimacy or attachment to God.

**Gregory R. Schneller, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at McMurry University in Abilene, TX, and a licensed psychologist. His research interests include investigation of types of prayer, Christian psychotherapy ethics, and

integration of Christian disciplines into the higher education classroom. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gregory R. Schneller, Ph.D., McMurry University, Box 86, McMurry Station, Abilene, TX 79697. Email: Schneller.greg@mcm.edu.

**John Eric Swenson III, Ph.D.**, is a licensed psychologist and Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology and Clinical Mental Health and Marriage and Family Counseling at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. His research interests include ethics and the integration of Christianity in psychotherapy and also in the classroom. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: John Eric Swenson III, Ph.D., Hardin-Simmons University, HSU Box 16115, Abilene, TX 79601. Email: Johneric.swenson@hsutx.edu

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# Pastoral and Christian Marital Therapies: Complementary and Divergent Traditions

Kelvin F. Mutter

*Family Counseling and Support Services, Guelph, Ontario,  
and McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario*

*The Clinical Pastoral Education and the Christian counseling movements represent two approaches to the integration of theological reflection with secular counseling theory. Each movement has its own history and literature. As a result, there is a tendency to view these traditions separately, and in the process, to lose sight of specific points of convergence and divergence. This article compares a representative cross-section of the marital therapy literature within the Pastoral and Christian counseling movements, demonstrating that the developmental trajectories of these movements parallel developments within the field of couple therapy. Next, this article provides a brief overview of the history of Pastoral and Christian marital therapy research, highlighting three phases of research: assumed validity, borrowed/ implied evidence, and demonstrated evidence. The article concludes with seven significant observations which arise from this survey.*

*Keywords: Marriage Counseling, Marital Therapy, Christian Counseling, Pastoral Counseling, Christian Marital Therapy, Pastoral Marriage Counseling.*

As a formal discipline, Pastoral Counseling is rooted in the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) movement and arose out of Anton Boisen's use of the case-study method for teaching theological students how to minister to individuals with mental illness (Gerkin, 1997). One key factor that differentiates Pastoral Counselors from ministry generalists is the extensive clinical training that Pastoral Counselors receive. The field of marital counseling as a distinct practice began with the establishment of the first marriage counseling centers in Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia in the 1930s and the emergence of marriage preparation programs (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). This development differentiated marital counseling from the work of other professions: i.e., doctors and clergy. Towards the late 1950s, at the same time as both the CPE and the marriage counseling movements were showing signs of growth, the Christian counseling tradition emerged as another voice in the therapeutic conversation (Johnson & Jones, 2000).

Given that the maturation of these three counseling traditions occurred during the latter half of the 20th century, it is appropriate to ask, "In what ways were the pastoral (CPE) and Christian approaches to marital counseling influenced by the emerging field of marital therapy?" In addition to answering this question, this article identifies points of divergence between Pastoral and Christian marriage counselors and explores trends within both counseling traditions, including the recent expansion in Pastoral and Christian Psychology

tian marital therapy research.

## SCOPE

The primary focus of this study is on writers who utilize epistemologies that include both empirical knowledge as well as knowledge derived from divine revelation and theological reflection. Two things separate the CPE and Christian counseling approaches to integration: the extent to which the work of integration focuses on the lived experience of the client(s), and the philosophical and theological assumptions and values of the practitioner (i.e., conservative, liberal, etc.).

Pastoral (CPE) counselors approach the task of integration through the lens of practical theology (Anderson, 2001). As a result, they move beyond a theological engagement of the *a priori* and findings of psychology and psychotherapy and discussions of integrating faith principles within the practice of psychotherapy, to include theological reflection on the life of the individual or couple (e.g., Graham, Walton & Ward, 2005). Recent pastoral texts on marriage and pastoral counseling tend to embrace postmodern constructs (e.g., Doehring, 2006; Thatcher, 1999) while evangelicals who write about marriage and family identify the challenges posed by postmodernism (e.g., Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008).

Christian marriage therapists (e.g., Crabb, 1982; Narramore, 1960; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011; Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a, 2002) employ *inte-*



*grationist* methodologies similar to those employed by other Christian counselors (e.g., Collins, 2000). Mention, however, needs to be made of other attitudes toward the integration of psychology and theology: i.e., Biblical Counseling (Adams, 1979; Powlison, 2010), Christian Psychology (Roberts, 2000), complementarian approaches (Ingram, 1995; Myers & Jeeves, 1987; van Deusen Hunsinger, 2001), and Transformational Psychology (Coe & Hall, 2010).

The Biblical Counseling movement (Adams, 1979, 1983; Powlison, 2010) is non-integrationist and privileges the psychological wisdom found in scripture. This movement has an identifiable literature base relating to the work of marital counseling that is largely atheoretical in that questions related to the systemic nature of the marital relationship and/or the developmental phases of the marital relationship are not developed. As a result, the Biblical Counseling approach occupies a minor place in this study.

The Christian Psychology movement draws on the scriptures and the historical writings of the church while remaining open to psychological frameworks that resonate with the perspective of Christian psychology (cf. Roberts, 1997) and empirical research that investigates questions of interest to the movement (Roberts, 2000). While there is no readily identifiable body of marital counseling literature that is representative of the Christian Psychology movement, the classical literature of the church has much to say about a Christian view of marriage and its application to marital difficulties (cf. Hunter, 1992; Mutter, 1996; Oden, 1994, p. 96-118). Important sources for reflection on the subject include biblical commentaries (e.g., Calvin, 1959; Chrysostom, 1914; Luther, 1973) and theological treatises (e.g., Aquinas, 1997; Augustine, 1955; Chrysostom, 1983; Smith, 1975; Tertullian, 1951). In the absence of a body of therapeutic literature, this approach to integration is not included within the present study.

Complementarian approaches are those which propose that psychology, science, and theological reflection (faith) are distinctly different but complementary domains of knowledge and understanding, each offering its own perspective on behavior: e.g., Levels-of-Explanation (Myers, 2000; Myers & Jeeves, 1987), systemic complementarity (Ingram, 1995), and van Deusen Hunsinger's (2001) interdisciplinary map. Viewed from this perspective, theological reflection on marriage and the scientific study of human relationships offer different ways for understanding healthy and dysfunctional relationships. While complementarian approaches to integration do not appear in the Christian marriage counseling literature, given the fact that these models are amenable to working with data derived from the natural sciences combined with the attention being paid in the secular literature to the connection between neuroscience and human

relationships (e.g., Fishbane, 2007) it is conceivable that at least some future Christian marriage counselors may employ a complementarian approach to the work of integration.

Transformational Psychology (Coe & Hall, 2010) is less about the practice of psychotherapy than it is a lens for ordering the way we think about the work of psychology and psychotherapy. Transformational Psychology incorporates and integrates themes present in the literature of the Biblical Counseling, Christian Counseling and Christian Psychology movements (Coe & Hall, 2010). In its current state of development, this model focuses on the individual rather than relational systems. The authors' use of Objects-Relations Theory and Attachment Theory suggests it may be possible to extend the application of this model to include couples therapy. However, there is no evidence to suggest this work is currently being done.

Finally, this review focuses on established patterns or models for counseling couples that have been employed within the conservative, liberal, and postmodern Christian traditions. Thus, while the vast body of pastoral and Christian self-help literature on marriage (cf. Arp & Arp, 1997, 2004; Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Narramore, 1961; Parrott & Parrott, 2002; Thomas, 2000; Smith, 2010; Wright, 1982a, 1988) may serve as major resources for members of the clergy who do marriage counseling, this paper concentrates primarily on couple counseling models rather than the self-help literature.

## **A BRIEF DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF PASTORAL AND CHRISTIAN MARITAL THERAPY**

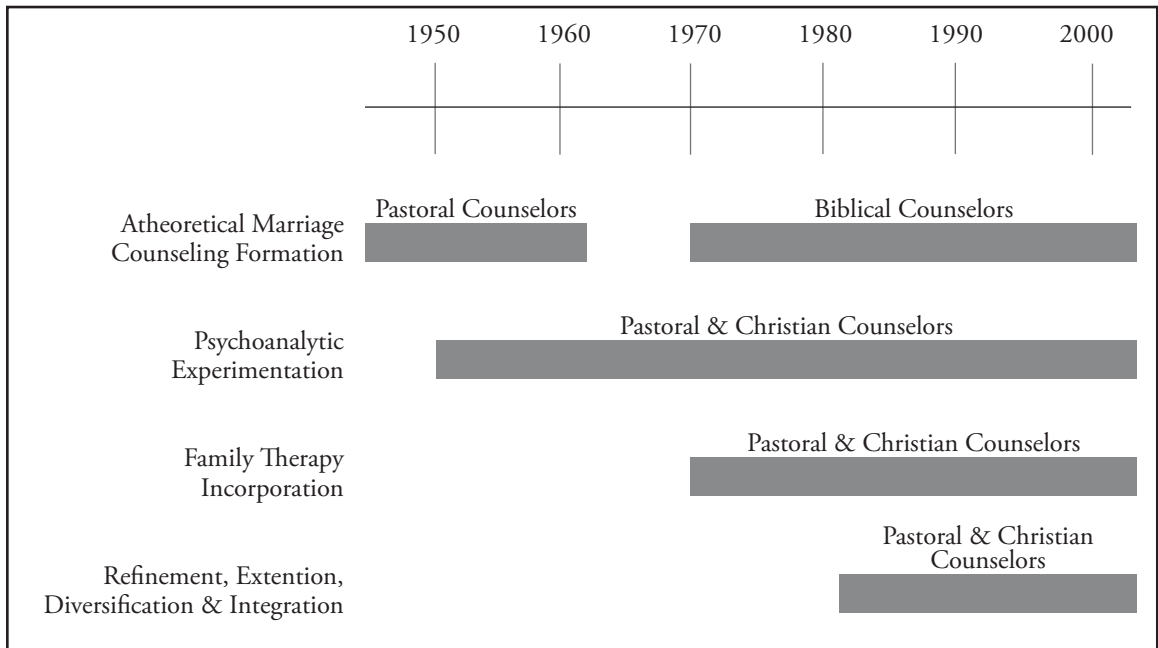
To the extent that key theoretical emphases distinguish one group of therapies from another and that these emphases emerge during specific periods in the development of the disciplines of Pastoral (CPE) and Christian marital therapy, Gurman and Fraenkel's (2002) concept of developmental phases is a useful heuristic. The present review, however, suggests a need for a slight modification of this construct to reflect the fact that within the faith-informed traditions the emphases of earlier stages seem to persist, even with the emergence of new therapeutic meta-narratives. This is represented by the timeline in Figure 1.

### **Differentiation and Atheoretical Marriage Counseling Formation**

Differentiation and atheoretical marriage counseling formation describe two aspects of the emergent field of marriage counseling: e.g., the establishment of marriage counseling as a separate counseling discipline and the absence of an identifiable theory on which to ground its counseling practices (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). The CPE literature from this phase suggests several points of contact between the early marriage



**Figure 1**  
*Themes in Pastoral (CPE) and Christian Marital Therapy*



counseling movement and the CPE movement, not the least of which is the involvement of clergy in marriage training programs (Goodwin, 1964; Goodwin & Dorfman, 1965). Thus, the literature presents pastoral marital counseling as ancillary to the primary professional commitments of the clergyman (e.g., Bigham, 1952). A major emphasis of these pastoral counselors is the provision of pre- and post-nuptial counseling, as well as marriage and family guidance or education.

Very little of the Christian marriage counseling literature reflects this developmental phase; possibly because the Christian counseling movement was not sufficiently differentiated from mainstream psychology for it to have developed its own body of marriage counseling literature. A few early Christian marriage counselors, however, describe practices that are consistent with those of the early marriage counselors: e.g., they employ a behavioral focus; focus on communication skills; focus on developing conflict resolution skills; and suggest the use of group therapy to address marital dysfunction (Wichern, 1979; Williams, 1977). As with the early secular practices, these approaches lack a theory of marriage or intervention to ground their practices.

Whereas the CPE and Christian counseling movements would soon look to psychoanalytic theory to inform the work of marital therapy, two vestiges of this first phase remain. The first is observable in the work of ministry generalists (e.g., non-CPE practitioners) who, in response to the needs of their congregations, provide pre-marital and marital counseling as

an adjunct to their pastoral care (Akagi & Bergen, 2004; Weaver, 1995). This practice demonstrates the overlapping interests of ministry generalists and marital therapists. As a general rule, ministry generalists (a) lack formal training in counseling theory and practice (Firmin & Tedford, 2007) and (b) later desire additional training related to human sexuality, marital and family concerns, and divorce (McRay, McMinn, Wrightsman, Burnett & Ho, 2001). As a result, it is reasonable to infer that the theory of marriage employed by ministry generalists is less fully formed than the theories used by those who specialize in counseling couples.

A second vestige may be seen in the work of Adams and other Biblical Counselors who argue that healthy marriages result from a biblically-based understanding of marriage (Adams, 1979, 1983) that includes the couple living in submission to God (Jones, 1998) and a commitment to faithful Christian discipleship (Tripp, 1997). This theologically informed but atheoretical view of marriage sees marital problems as rooted in an unbiblical view of marriage (Adams, 1979, p. 131ff, 1983); problems in communication (Powlison, November 9, 2010; Smith, August 25, 2009, September 11, 2009; Tripp, 1998; Vernick, 1994); sinful life patterns (Adams, 1983; Powlison, April 26, 2011; Smith, December 2, 2009; Vernick, 1994); and the negative influence of external relationships (Adams, 1983).

### **Psychoanalytic Experimentation**

In the absence of a theory to guide the practice of marital therapy, practitioners turned to the psychoanalytic tradition to inform their understanding of the couple relationship (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Johnson & Lebow, 2000). It is during this developmental phase that the Christian counseling movement establishes itself in the therapeutic conversation about marriage. Reflective of both the nascent nature of their respective traditions and the prominence of psychoanalysis within the counseling field is the fact that a number of the early CPE and Christian writings on marriage incorporate psychodynamic concepts, but do not necessarily identify their sources (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Writers Cited by Pastoral Counselors*

John Bowlby	Bermudes, 1973; Rolfe, 1985
Erik Erikson	Muncy, 1983; Trokan, 1998
Sigmund Freud	Allport, 1952; Lussier, 1965
Carl Jung	Rutledge, 1962
Melanie Klein	Gau, 2011
Donald Winnicott	Gau, 2011

Hudson (1961) and other pastoral counselors (i.e., Rutledge, 1962; Lussier, 1965; Trokan, 1998) employ a variety of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic concepts in their understanding of marital dysfunction: e.g., an inability to trust stemming from childhood experiences; defense mechanisms; attachment; insecurities and anxiety; obsession-compulsion; pseudo-independence; character disorders; the emotionally aloof spouse; the role of transference and counter-transference in the therapeutic relationship, women whose identities are suffocated by their roles as wives and mothers; and one partner marrying an idealization or imago of a parent. Whereas some writers argue that pastoral counselors need to have a foundational understanding of the practice of psychotherapy and dynamic psychology (Goodwin & Dorfman, 1965; Hudson, 1961), Karpf (1956) advises that in the absence of a diagnosis by a competent psychiatrist, a counselor should assume the counselee is normal. Finally, Lussier (1965), a psychiatrist, makes the case for co-operation between psychiatry and pastoral care when he affirms the role of spiritual direction

in the life of the counselee; noting that “regressively infantile (unconscious) motivations can be gradually rid of their emotional drive by the impact of moral motivations which grow out of real and lived spiritual dedication” (p. 66).

Perhaps the earliest example of psychoanalytic experimentation in Christian marital counseling is seen in the writings of Narramore (1960) who combines the practical guidance characteristic of the family guidance movement with concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory. Specifically, Narramore considers the role of negative experiences in a person’s family of origin and transference in the development of marital distress. Crabb’s (1982) approach to marital counseling, with its blend of scripture, psychodynamic theory, and cognitive psychology, also reflects an attempt to experiment with selected concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory.

**Family Therapy Incorporation**

The shift from the intra-psychic to the interpersonal is characterized by the use of concepts and methods drawn from family systems theory to guide the work of marital therapy (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Johnson & Lebow, 2000). While it is difficult to pinpoint when family therapy concepts begin to shape Christian marriage counseling practices, this shift may be noted in the CPE literature. Pattison (1972) suggests that clergy can use general systems theory to help churches create healthy relational systems for supporting couples and families. This shift to incorporate family therapy concepts is also seen in Taggart (1973), whose review of the marriage and family literature notes themes and concepts of interest to pastoral counselors, and Fairbanks (1974), who notes that in many instances marriage counseling involves family counseling. Of note is the fact that the Pastoral and Christian counseling professions parallel each other with both traditions drawing on the writings of a range of family systems writers (see Table 2).

Thus, the Pastoral (CPE) and Christian marriage counseling literature focuses on the importance of treating the relational system. In addition, the literature highlights the following systemic concepts: adaptability and cohesion (Parrott & Parrott, 1996); the influence of birth order (Mitchell & Anderson, 1981); boundaries (Oliver & Miller, 1996; Rogers, 1979; Worthington, 1989); communication as a transactional process (Oliver & Miller, 1996); differentiation of self (Glad, 1999; Lawson, 1985; Oliver & Miller, 1996; Parrott & Parrott, 1996; Rogers, 1979); intergenerational processes (Parrott & Parrott, 1996); the nuclear family emotional system (David, 1979); and, triangulation (Butler & Harper, 1994; Butler, Gardner & Bird, 1998; David, 1979; Mitchell & Anderson, 1981; Parrott & Parrott, 1996).

Two prominent authors, one reflecting the pasto-

**Table 2**

*Family Systems Writers Cited by Pastoral and Christian Marriage Counselors*

	<i>Pastoral Marriage Counselors</i>	<i>Christian Marriage Counselors</i>
Nathan Ackerman	Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; van den Blink, 1972	
John Bell		Tweedie, 1973a, 1976
Luigi Boscolo (Milan School)		Friesen & Friesen, 1989
Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy		Lawson, 1985; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011
Murray Bowen	Augsburger, 1986; Clinebell, 1981; Ghunney, 1993; Glad, 1999; Mitchell & Anderson, 1981; van den Blink, 1972	Butler & Harper, 1994; Butler et al., 1998; David, 1979; Guernsey, 1996; Lawson, 1985; Parrott & Parrott, 1996; Rogers, 1979; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011
James Framo	Glad, 1999	Lawson, 1985; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011
Jay Haley	Mitchell & Anderson, 1981	Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Tweedie, 1973a, 1976; Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Cloe Madanes		Worthington, 1989, 1999
Salvador Minuchin	Clinebell, 1981; Hansen, 1988; Mitchell & Anderson, 1981	Worthington, 1989, 1996, 1999
Virginia Satir	Clinebell, 1975, 1977, 1981; Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Crocker, 1984; Mitchell & Anderson, 1981; van den Blink, 1972; Wood, 1979	Lawson, 1985; Oliver & Miller, 1996; Tweedie, 1973a, 1976; Worthington, 1989, 1999
Carl Whitaker	Mitchell & Anderson, 1981; Wurster, 1983	Lawson, 1985
Lyman Wynne	Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970	Worthington, 1999

ral tradition and one reflecting the Christian counseling tradition, serve as examples of the incorporation of family systems theory. The first, Howard Clinebell, created an approach to marriage that is attendant to personal needs, mutually affirming, relationally focused and developmentally oriented (Clinebell, 1975, 1977, 1981; Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970). The particular influence of family systems theory is seen in Clinebell's use of concepts drawn from the writings of Ackerman, Bowen, Minuchin, Satir, and Wynne. The second writer, H. Norman Wright, is known both for his self-help books on marriage as well as texts on premarital counseling (Wright, 1982b) and marital therapy (Wright, 1995a, 1996, 2002). Wright's use of family systems theory focuses primarily on the marital behavioral system rather than the affectional system.

Thus, healthy marriage is defined in terms of a set of interactional processes (i.e., caring, communication, and conflict resolution) and commitments between two individuals.

Cognitive-Behavioral therapies figure prominently in the Christian marital therapies (see Table 3) where, first of all, there is a belief that behavioral change leads to a change in feelings (Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Harley, 2010; Stanley, Trathen & McCain, 1996; Wright, 1995a). Second, it is believed that behaviors are changed by changing thinking (Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Wright, 1995a). Third, it is believed that an improved awareness of the effect of couple interaction (often through improved communication) leads to behavior change (Eggerichs, 2004; Oliver & Miller, 1996; Stanley et al., 1996; Wright, 1995a).

**Table 3**

*Behavioral Marital Therapists Cited by Christian Marriage Counselors*

Norman Epstein	Worthington, 1999
John Gottman	Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Parrott & Parrott, 1996; Worthington, 1989, 1996, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Neil Jacobson	Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011; Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Robert Liberman	Worthington, 1989; Wright, 1995a
Gayola Margolin	Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Howard Markman	Parrott & Parrott, 1996; Stanley et al., 1996; Worthington, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Gerald Patterson	Worthington, 1999
Clifford Sager	Friesen & Friesen, 1989
Richard Stuart	Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Tweedie, 1973a, 1973b, 1976; Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a
Robert Weiss	Collins, 1980; Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Worthington, 1999

Fourth, behavior change is effected through the use of contingency contracting (Tweedie, 1973a, 1976). These contingency contracts recognize that behavior may be shaped by emotions, cognitive factors such as values and cognitions, and social factors such as family, friends, and, church (Wright, 1995a). Five, changes in behavior are understood to contribute to changes in insight (Stanley et al., 1996; Wright, 1995a). Finally, there is an acknowledgement of the implicit covenant or contract that characterizes each marriage (Harley, 2010; Parrott & Parrott, 1996).

**EMERGENT TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN AND PASTORAL MARITAL THERAPY**

At the end of the 20th century, Pastoral (CPE) and Christian counselors, alike, needed to find ways to respond to shifts in society’s understanding of the nature of marriage and increasing rates of cohabitation and divorce. In 2003, a special issue of the *Journal of Psychology & Theology* explored the challenges and opportunities of supporting healthy marriages in this environment. This issue reflected on the following themes: the state of Christian marriage; potentially helpful theological-philosophical models; the role of marriage preparation and education programs in strengthening marriage; the role of the community (i.e., churches) in strengthening marriage; and, the

importance of well-researched models of intervention (e.g., Burchard et al., 2003; Edwards, 2003; Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003; Parrott & Parrott, 2003; Ripley, 2003; Schumm, 2003; Silliman, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Worthington, 2003). The themes and trajectories highlighted in this issue of the JPT were reflective of trends that were occurring within the field of marital therapy: Refinement, Extension, Diversification, and Integration (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002).

**Refinement**

The need for refinement is highlighted by Johnson and Lebow (2000), who identified a need for theories that explain the interactional patterns of intimacy and distance and by Gurman and Fraenkel (2002), who commented on the need to differentiate marital therapy from individual therapy and family therapy. Within the broader field of marital therapy, refinement is evident in the following approaches: Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT), Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT), Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT), and, the re-emergence of Psychodynamic Couple Therapy (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002, Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Worthington, Lerner & Sharp, 2005). These models are research-based and employ effective tools for working with couples.

The need for refinement is evident in the Pastoral

**Table 4***References to Empirically Supported Marital Therapies by Pastoral and Christian Marital Therapists*

	<i>Pastoral Marriage Counselors</i>	<i>Christian Marriage Counselors</i>
Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT), i.e., Gottman, Jacobson	Hunt, 2001; Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002	Edwards, 2003; Eggerichs, 2004; Parrott & Parrott, 2003; Schumm, 2003; Sells & Yarhouse, 2011; Silliman, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Worthington, 1989, 1999, 2003; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008
Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT), i.e., Baucom, Epstein		Sells & Yarhouse, 2011; Worthington, 1999
Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT), i.e., Greenberg, Johnson	Bailey, 2002; Craig, 2000; van Alstine, 2002;	Edwards, 2003; Hart & Hart-Morris, 2003; Verseveldt, 2006; Worthington, 1989, 1996, 1999; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008

and Christian counseling traditions where previously the tendency had been to focus on methodology rather than develop a meaningful theory of marriage and intimacy to guide the use of techniques (Clinebell 1977; Crabb, 1982; Wright, 1995a). Thus, Worthington (1989) called for “an integrated theory of the marriage that considers three levels of analysis: individual constructs; the operation of the marriage as a unit (or system); and the position of the married couple in the family cycle” (p. 19). The move towards refinement within the Pastoral and Christian marital therapy literature is evident in three ways.

First, some Pastoral and Christian marital therapists incorporate concepts and methods drawn from the newer empirically validated theories of marital therapy (see Table 4).

A second dimension of refinement is a move to locate the practice of Pastoral and Christian marital therapy within the dual contexts of Christian theology and the ministry setting of the local church. Those who have emphasized the context rather than the content of counseling argue that Pastoral Counseling happens within the context of the community of faith and is shaped by that community (Giblin, 1993; Patton & Childs, 1993; Treat & Hof, 1987).

A third evidence of refinement may be seen in Worthington's writings. Worthington (1989) articulated a theory of marriage that sought to outline a Christian understanding of both the marital bond and marital interactions. Specifically, Worthington's theory of intervention is based on an understanding that the marital system serves to meet four basic human needs – commitment, intimacy, effectance (i.e., the need to produce discernable effects), and forgiveness. Worthington (1999) refines his model of interven-

tion, noting that marital therapy seeks to correct weaknesses in love, faith, and work. These books not only reflect a core vision for marriage, they set forth a system of intervention in which techniques are related to the theory, prescribed and standardized, varied and individualized, and are applicable to specified points in therapy (Worthington, 1989). Unlike previous approaches to Christian marital therapy, Worthington's (1999) Hope-Focused model enjoys the benefit of research to support its efficacy (Burchard et al., 2003; Ripley, 1999; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Turner & Ripley, 2007; Worthington, McCullough, Shortz, Mindes, Sandage & Chartrand, 1995; Worthington & Ripley, 2002; Worthington, Hight, Ripley, Perrone, Kurusu & Jones, 1997).

### **Extension**

Extension involves the application of marital therapy theory beyond the strict confines of addressing marital adjustment. This occurs when marital therapy is used in the treatment of mental health concerns such as depression and alcoholism (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). In the Christian counseling literature, Sweatman's (1999) research highlights the role marital satisfaction plays in the process of cross-cultural adjustment, noting an inverse correlation between the incidence of depression in first-term missionaries and their reported level of marital satisfaction. A second area of extension found in the general counseling literature is seen in the use of marital therapy in connection with the treatment of physical and public health concerns. This is seen, for example, in studies of pregnant women tested for HIV infection that suggest a direct correlation between the quality of a couple's relationship and the likelihood the woman will return for her



test results, participate in HIV perinatal programs, and engage in behaviors that prevent the transmission of HIV (e.g., Semrau et al., 2005). The incidence within society of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, mental health disorders, not to mention the incidence of serious medical conditions such as HIV and the emotional impact of trans-border migrations on people, provide opportunities for pastoral and Christian counselors to employ marital therapy as an adjunct to individual treatment approaches, such as responsibility oriented and/or insight oriented therapy.

A third area of extension is the development of marriage preparation, marriage enrichment and divorce prevention programs for couples (Noval, Combs, Wiinamaki, Bufford, & Halter, 1996; Rolfe, 1985; Stanley, 2003), a development which is part of a broader trend toward prevention programs in mental health (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). The central premise of these programs is that rather than wait until the relationship is so seriously distressed the couple is on the verge of divorce, the couple engages in therapy with a view to making a good relationship better. Programs such as PREP (Laurenceau, Stanley, Olmos-Gallo, Baucom, & Markman, 2004; Markman et al., 2004; Stanley, Rhoades, Olmos-Gallo, & Markman, 2007), PREPARE (Larson & Olson, 1989), SYMBIS (Parrott & Parrott, 2003), and Worthington's Hope-Focused Marital Enrichment model (Burchard et al., 2003; Turner & Ripley, 2007; Worthington, 1999; Worthington, Ripley, Hook & Miller, 2007) are supported by a growing body of research evidence indicating an increased likelihood of marital stability among those who take part in these programs. While Christian counselors have contributed significantly to the development of marriage preparation programs, the use of these programs by clergy re-locates the practice of pre-marital and marital therapy within the community of faith, is consistent with pastoral and Christian values with respect to marriage (permanency, resiliency, communication, forgiveness, and reciprocity), and provides a much needed resource that is readily accessible to the community (Murray, 2006; Silliman, 2003).

### **Diversification**

Diversification refers to a broadening of the philosophical foundations of marital therapy to include other worldviews (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002, Johnson & Lebow, 2000). This process is very similar to the process of theological integration practiced by Pastoral and Christian therapists in that a perspective other than psychology serves to broaden and/or critique the clinician's understanding of accepted clinical wisdom. In addition to the role played by the three perspectives discussed by Gurman and Fraenkel, i.e., feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism, this discussion also identifies a fourth diversifying factor,

Christian spirituality.

**Feminism.** Much of 20th century feminism focused on abuses of power within society, including marriage and family life. Feminist theologians have highlighted the ways in which patriarchal interpretations of biblical texts relating to marriage can have a negative effect on women (Fiorenza, 1983; Martin, 1991). The influence of feminism is most evident within the Pastoral Counseling (CPE) movement (Doehring, 1992; Neuger, 1992). Clinebell (1973) argued for liberated marriages that are free of the restrictions that come from socially constructed expectations, socially defined behaviors, and gender-based stereotypes. Among mainstream counselors, the influence of feminism is seen both in the way marriage is conceptualized as well as in the way marital problems such as abuse are addressed (Avis, 1992; Goldner, 1998). While theologians and therapists agree as to the importance of identifying and addressing problems stemming from abuses of power within marriage, compared to the volume of literature devoted to this subject in the broader counseling community, there seems to be a paucity of recent Pastoral and Christian counseling literature on the subject of abuse (Barry, 2003; Rotunda, Williamson, & Penfold, 2004). Thus, there is a need to address the use of violence within marriages (Tracy, 2007) and to employ a theology of marriage that is less concerned with establishing a Christian structure for marriage than it is in highlighting how a spiritually transformed life results in marital health and mutually respectful behavior (cf. Yarhouse & Sells, 2008).

**Multiculturalism.** North Americans live in a society that has been shaped by, and continues to be shaped by, the legacy of immigration. Gurman and Fraenkel (2002) identified that multicultural perspectives on marriage have been largely hidden within sources that provide a multicultural perspective on families (e.g., McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano, 1982). At first glance, awareness of the role of culture in marriage is either implied within the Pastoral and Christian multicultural counseling literature (Lee & Kane, 1992) or is unaddressed by the major marriage counseling texts (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Crabb, 1982; Worthington, 1989, 1999; Wright, 1995a). Indeed, there appears to be an embedded assumption that North American Christian perspectives on marriage are readily transferrable to other cultural contexts. This is illustrated by the history of translating Christian marriage texts into other languages (Crabb, 1993; Crabb, 1999; Wright, 1995b; Worthington, 2007).

On closer inspection, however, there are at least three ways in which the Christian counseling community demonstrates cultural awareness with respect to marriage. First of all, there are those who have written about the issues faced by missionary couples and,

by extension, expatriate couples living abroad (e.g., Rosik & Pandzic, 2008; Sweatman, 1999). In light of geo-political realities, there is a need for further reflection on the effects of forcible evacuations, cultural violence, trans-national migrations on marriages, and how these relate to a couple's spiritual belief system. Secondly, the Christian counseling literature explores marriage within specific cultures: African-American couples (McCreary, 1998), Asian-American households (Hung, 2006), the Korean community (McMinn et al., 2001), and Hispanics (Garzon & Tan, 1992). Given the role of the church in the non-Caucasian and non-North American communities, this dimension of marriage merits further exploration by Christian counselors. Third, several studies have focused on bi-cultural marriages involving Christian couples: i.e., Filipinas married to North American Caucasian husbands (Pfeil, 2007) and Greek Orthodox intercultural couples (Joanides, Mayhew, & Mamalakis, 2002).

Among Pastoral (CPE) counselors, the influence of culture in marriage is acknowledged by those who write about intercultural, interfaith and interracial marriages (e.g., Duncan, 1992; Frame, 2004). Augsburger (1986) considers the role of culture in marital and family relationships, enculturated values such as polygamy, as well as the fact that marriage is frequently a relationship between groups rather than individuals. The role of extended family relationships is also illustrated in Leslie's (1995) reflections on a Malaysian couple. Other cultural themes present in the pastoral literature include discussions of African marriage traditions (e.g., Kapolo, 2001), male-female relationships and the problems of patriarchy (Augsburger, 1986), and the challenges faced by immigrants (van Beek, 1996). Finally, a small body of literature explores culturally sensitive approaches to marriage preparation, marital enrichment, and marriage counseling (e.g., Kapolo, 2001; Uka, 1991).

In summary, while neither the pastoral nor the Christian marital therapy traditions are sufficient in and of themselves to provide Pastoral and Christian counselors with a broad perspective on counseling couples from other cultures, each of these traditions offer insights that complement the other. Among the gaps that require further attention is the counselor's need to reflect critically about the role culture plays in his/her assumptions about marriage and how these relate to working with those who are culturally different.

**Postmodernism.** Postmodernism has had a significant impact on the field of marital and family therapy and is especially evident within constructivist theory (Watzlawick, 1984), social constructionist theory (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988), narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), and short-term marital therapies (e.g., Donovan, 2003). The post-

modern mindset invites the counselor to practice humility and to function as a collaborator rather than an expert (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). While Collins (2007) identified postmodernism as a significant trend that cannot be ignored by Christian counselors, postmodernism remains unaddressed in much of the Christian marital therapy literature. The picture is different in the Pastoral Counseling literature, where writers not only interact with postmodernism, they incorporate its constructs in their writings (Doehring, 2006). VanKatwyk (2003), for example, notes that a couple's narrative reveals the meanings they make of their lives, clues concerning their courage to live, and the ways in which they look beyond the limitations of their experience.

Postmodern thinking has also reshaped society's views on marriage. This is seen, for example, in a re-definition of the nature of marital commitment away from covenant towards a focus on personal fulfillment (cf. Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Thatcher, 1999). Next, postmodernism reframes the couple dyad to include constellations other than a man and woman living in a covenanted and legally sanctioned relationship: i.e., unmarried cohabiting couples (Means-Christensen, Snyder, & Negy, 2003; Searight et al., 1997); mixed orientation couples (Nugent, 1983; Yarhouse & Kays, 2010); and, same-sex unions (Connolly, 2004; Martell & Prince, 2005).

A review of the Christian therapy literature reveals a paucity of material on common-law heterosexual relationships (Payne, 1986). Similarly, while Christian counselors have explored questions related to addressing same-sex attraction within heterosexual couple's therapy (Clark & McKheen, 1994; Yarhouse & Pawlowski, 2003), there is an absence of material on same-sex unions: a fact which reflects conservative Christianity's view that same-sex sexual relations are sinful (Cole, 2000; Njino, 2004; Nwaigbo, 2004). In contrast, there is a trend within the Pastoral Counseling (CPE) tradition to, on the one hand, support and minister to people in same-sex relationships (Hunt, 2001) and, on the other hand, affirm same-sex unions (Marshall, 1995).

In summary, the Pastoral and Christian marital therapy traditions represent two different response trajectories to the challenges posed by postmodern constructs of marriage. In addition, the literature suggests that these traditions differ in terms of their appropriation of postmodern therapeutic methodologies.

**Faith, Religion and Spirituality.** One form of diversification Gurman and Fraenkel (2002) do not discuss, but which is central to the work of Pastoral and Christian counselors, is the manner in which faith, religion, and spirituality inform, frame or define the nature of marriage, the practice of marital therapy, and the work of the therapist. Thus, in a manner similar to the way feminist challenges assumptions

concerning power; or multiculturalism challenges embedded ethnocentricities within Western counseling theories; or postmodernism challenges Western epistemological assumptions; theological perspectives on marriage challenge the embedded limitations of theories whose epistemic horizons are confined to the material universe and our human capacity to make meaning out of our experience. On a conceptual level, Pastoral and Christian writers incorporate crucial theological themes related to marriage into their work (cf. Crabb, 1982; Wall & Miller-McLemore, 2002; Worthington, 1989, 1999). These theological foundations inform Pastoral and Christian perspectives concerning human nature (i.e., *homo in imago Dei*), the nature of marital commitment, the way these traditions view marital dysfunction, the ultimate goals of marital counseling, the processes and techniques of healing and transformation, and the role of the therapist in the change process (Crabb, 1982; Worthington, 1989). Beyond this, however, Christian marriage is embodied theology which reflects God's dealings with the couple (Thomas, 2000). Viewed in this light, marriage finds its meaning in the God who not only creates and gives meaning to the individual, but who is ontologically relational and thus gives meaning to the structure and purpose of marriage.

Just as feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism create new ways for doing therapy, so also Christian reflection on the practice of marital therapy moves beyond the counselor's use of spiritual values to critique and refine his/her theory of practice and incorporates the use of spiritual interventions within clinical practice (cf. Belcher & Benda, 2003; Decker, 2001; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004). This is seen in an acknowledgement that the clients' faith, religion, or spirituality is part of a collaborative process that draws upon the couple's understanding of marriage and themselves as persons-in relationship (e.g., Hunker & Gencoz, 2005; Marks, 2005). Thus, Pastoral and Christian marital therapists have a concern for the spiritual well-being of both partners which is based on an assumption that spiritual well-being contributes to relational or marital well-being (Giblin, 1993; Worthington, 1989). Indeed, Bauman (1998) postulated a bi-directional relationship between marriage and spirituality noting that a couple's spirituality may be an important resource for improving their marital relationship, and their experience of marital intimacy may serve to improve their relationship with God.

Second, marriage is seen to be a context for spiritual growth, a place for practicing spiritual disciplines, as well as a spiritual discipline in its own right (cf. Conver, 2002; Nedumaruthumchalil, 2009; Worthington, 1989).

Third, religious and spiritually-oriented clients are receptive to therapists who meaningfully incorporate the client's spiritual values within the thera-

peutic process (Ripley, Worthington & Berry, 2001; Worthington, Dupont, Berry, & Duncan, 1988). Client perceptions of a clinician's values have been shown to have a direct effect on the therapeutic outcome (Goodwin & Cramer, 1998; Ripley et al., 2001). To this end, Christian therapies employ, when ethically appropriate, techniques or interventions rooted in the spiritual direction tradition of the Christian church (e.g. Eck, 2002). Thus, Decker (2001) has proposed the use of joint prayer by Christian couples in pastoral or explicitly Christian marital therapy, Johnson (2001) describes the implicit use of scripture in marital counseling, and several writers seek to promote forgiveness and reconciliation (Batson & Shwalb, 2006; DiBlasio, 2010; Hargrave, 2010; Holeman, 2003). Elsewhere, Ripley and Worthington (1998) identified six ecclesiastical techniques that may be used with positive effect in marital therapy: direct reference to scripture, encouraging the client to read books by Christian authors, prayer (with and for the couple), training in righteous marital behavior, Christian fellowship, and promoting forgiveness. It is noted that the significance of using spiritual techniques is not in the number of interventions used, but rather when and which spiritual interventions were used (Worthington et al., 1988). Finally, the spiritual guidance interventions that appear to have the greatest effect are those that focus on forgiveness (of others and God) and the assigning of spiritually focused homework (Worthington et al., 1988).

## INTEGRATION

The movement toward intra-disciplinary integrative clinical theory and practice parallels related developments in individual psychotherapy (cf. McMinn & Campbell, 2007) as well as family therapy (e.g., Kilpatrick & Holland, 2007; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008, ch. 12). One approach to intra-disciplinary integration is to combine existing models for treating relationships: i.e., Rovers' (2005) integration of Bowen systems theory with communication approaches, Emotionally Focused Therapy, and Contextual Therapy. Other approaches combine couple therapy with treatment modalities that are not intrinsically relational: i.e., use of brief therapy (Headrick, 1987; Thomas, 1999; Worthington, 1999; Wright, 2002); the combined use of Attachment Theory and Bowen Systems Theory (Guernsey, 1996); and, the incorporation of theory and research on human sexuality into couple therapy (e.g., Rosenau, Sytsma & Taylor, 2002)

## HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN AND PASTORAL MARITAL THERAPY RESEARCH

Prior to the late 1980's all forms of marital therapy were under-researched (e.g., Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Sprenkle, 2003). Since that time, an ever expanding body of research has developed to support clini-

cal practice (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002), including the practices of Christian marital therapists (Ogle & Hasz, 2004; Ripley & Worthington, 1998). The developmental trajectory of Pastoral and Christian marital therapy research may be characterized in terms of: *assumed validity*, *borrowed/implied evidence*, and *demonstrated evidence*.

**Assumed Validity.** Historically, many published Pastoral and Christian marital counselors did not pro-

vide research evidence in support of the methods and models they proposed. Instead, there was an embedded assumption that the methodologies employed or advocated by the author were valid and effective (e.g., Crabb, 1982; Guernsey, 1996; Joy, 1996; Narramore, 1960; Stewart, 1961; Treat & Hof, 1987; Tweedie, 1976).

**Borrowed/Implied Evidence.** Borrowed evidence refers to when one author employs research evi-

**Table 5**

*Marital Research Conducted by Doctoral Students at Selected Christian Graduate Schools in the United States (1986-2011)*

Marital resiliency	Allen-Peck, 2011
Marital conflict	Walker, 2005
Military marriages	Bacon, 2010; Chandler, 2011; Hardwick, 2005
Marriage Education/ Enrichment	Byington, 2009; Choo, 2005; Combs, 1994; Crawford, 2009; Eggerichs, 2010; Jones, 1986; Keidon, 1988; Kemper, 2004; Lee, 2005; McCaghy, 2004; Ouyang, 2002; Perry, 2007; Stevens, 2008; Tillotson, 2008; Whitaker, 1993
Hope-Focused Marriage	Leon, 2008; Vaughan, 2001
Emotionally Focused Therapy	Bradley, 2001; Hart-Morris, 2000
Attachment in Marriage	Kloster, 2008; Widger, 2010
Religiosity / Spirituality in Marriage	Axton Brereton, 2010; Borland, 2011; Colbert, 2007
Forgiveness	Vaughan, 2001
Marital longevity	Hampton, 2008
Inter-cultural / Interracial marriages	Mair, 2002; Oyemaja, 2007; Renalds, 2011; Robinson, 2009; Vazquez, 1998; Yamada, 2006
Mental health / Mental Illness	Mazzio, 2010
Psychosomatic marriage	Sayre, 2001
Marriage & parenting an autistic child	Vogt, 2008
Dual-income marriages	Rowley, 1999
Effect of reading self-help literature (marriage)	Braswell, 1998

dence drawn from other writers to support the use of specific counseling interventions (Friesen & Friesen, 1989; Wright, 1995a). Thus, while specific interventions may be demonstrated to have empirical validity, neither the use of the intervention within a Pastoral (CPE) or Christian approach to marital therapy nor the model as a whole have been empirically validated. The use of implied evidence occurs when authors refer to a body of unpublished research in support of their model (e.g., Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970; Harley, 2010).

**Demonstrated Evidence.** In recent years a growing body of research data has accumulated in support of the work of Pastoral and Christian marital therapy. This research evidence takes at least four forms.

First, Pastoral and Christian marital counseling practices have benefitted from the results of funded university-based research programs such as those located at the University of Denver, upon which the Christian PREP program has been built (Stanley, Trathen & McCain, 1996), and Virginia Commonwealth University, which has evaluated the efficacy of the Hope-Focused counseling model (Burchard et al., 2003; Worthington et al., 1997).

Second, there have been a number of collaborative research partnerships involving faculty and students from seminaries, smaller Christian universities, and major university research programs. This research includes, but is not limited to: the effectiveness of marriage preparation programs (Baucom, Hahlweg, Atkins, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006; Ripley, Parrott & Worthington, 2000); therapy after one partner has an affair (Atkins, Marín, Lo, Klann & Hahlweg, 2010); relationship of marital stressors to mental health concerns (Meyer & Paul, 2011); and men's and women's experience of intimacy in marriage (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007).

Third, doctoral students at Christian graduate schools are producing studies that explore many aspects of the work of Pastoral and Christian marriage counseling. Table 5 summarizes the research which has been conducted by students registered at nine Christian graduate schools in the United States.

Finally, there is an expanding base of published research studies that examine specific therapeutic themes relevant to the work of Pastoral and Christian marital therapy (Table 6). While in many cases the research base in support of Pastoral and Christian marital counseling practices remains inadequate, it is heartening to have access to multiple studies that explore the role of Christian spirituality in marriage, the use of Worthington's Hope-Focused model, and the use of specifically Christian interventions in therapy.

## SUMMARY

Seven significant observations emerge from this review. First, the literature suggests that between

1960 and the present, the fields of Pastoral (CPE) and Christian marital therapy have been more similar, in terms of methodology, than they were different. Thus, even though the Pastoral and Christian counseling communities may have different approaches to the work of theological integration, and may occasionally reflect different theological emphases, when it comes to therapeutic methodology, both approaches exhibit similar developmental trajectories.

Second, it is evident that both Pastoral and Christian marital counselors have adopted methods and techniques employed within the general counseling community, a trend that is likely to continue. While in most cases this trend has strengthened the practice of spiritually oriented marital therapy, it must be remembered that therapeutic models are culturally embedded constructions that reflect the values of the culture from which they emerge. As a result, the use of new therapeutic techniques and perspectives requires a continued commitment to the process of theological reflection as these new models not only challenge cherished views of how to do therapy, but may also challenge the faith community's beliefs concerning the human condition and the nature of marriage and may in the process prove to be inadequate tools for fostering strong Christian marriages.

Third, unlike the secular marital therapy tradition, the use of pre-marital counseling and marriage enrichment programs has been a consistent practice strategy within both the Pastoral and Christian marital counseling traditions.

Fourth, while the Pastoral and Christian approaches to marital therapy exhibit evidence of refinement, extension, diversification and integration, the ways these counseling traditions have responded to the challenges of feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism are different. These differing trajectories are readily discerned in the way these traditions deal with questions related to domestic violence, cultural paradigms for marriage, the use of postmodern constructs to define marriage, and the use of postmodern therapeutic methodologies in marriage counseling. Looking forward, it is vital that therapists from both traditions engage the challenges raised by abuses of power within relationships, develop models of intervention for use within culturally diverse settings, and respond to new relational paradigms with spiritual integrity.

Fifth, the relationships between relational functioning and mental health, relational health and physical health, and relational health and public health are not well developed in either the Pastoral or Christian counseling literature. Indeed, the connection between Christian views of relational health, spirituality, and individual health (i.e., depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and serious medical conditions) is an important area for reflection, model development, and research.



**Table 6***Research Themes: Pastoral and Christian Writers*

	<i>Pastoral</i>	<i>Christian</i>
Practice patterns	Jones & Stahmann, 1994; Murray, 2006; Weaver, 1995	Lewis & Epperson, 1991; Hook & Worthington, 2009; Ripley et al., 2002; Wilmoth & Smyser, 2010
Evaluations of clergy-provided premarital and marital therapy	Stewart, 1977	Laurenceau et al., 2004; Markman et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2001
Role of religiosity in marital therapy		Belcher & Benda, 2003; Morrow et al., 1993; Ripley et al., 2001; Rose et al., 2008; Schaffner & Dixon, 2003
Use of explicitly Christian interventions in marital therapy		Beach et al., 2008; Butler & Harper, 1994; Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002; Wade et al., 2007
Therapeutic “fit”	Mutter et al., 2010	
Forgiveness-oriented therapy		DiBlasio, 2010; DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; Sandage et al., 2000; Wade & Worthington, 2003; Worthington, 1998; Worthington et al., 2000
Marital commitment	Galea, 1996, 2007	Ripley et al., 2005; Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006
Role of servanthood and sacrifice in marriage		Stanley et al., 2006; Whitton et al., (2007)
Religious commitment and marital adjustment		Lopez et al., 2011
Evaluations of marriage education / enrichment programs		Baucom et al., 2006; Hook, et al., 2011; Noval et al., 1996; Ripley, 1999; Ripley et al., 2000; Risch et al., 2003; Stanley et al., 2005; Worthington et al, 1989;
Evaluations of Worthington’s Hope-Focused model		Burchard et al., 2003; Turner & Ripley, 2007; Vaughan, 2001; Worthington et al., 1995; Worthington et al., 1997
Intimacy in Marriage		Patrick et al., 2007
Sexual infidelity (i.e., affairs, addictive behaviors)	Manning & Watson, 2007	Allen et al., 2008; Atkins et al., 2010; White & Kimball, 2009
Stress, mental health and relational well-being		Meyer & Paul, 2011
Substance abuse		Ripley, Cunion, & Noble, 2006
Domestic violence	Rotunda, Williamson & Penfold, 2004	Wang et al., 2009
Marriage and ministry	Humphreys, 2005	Rosik & Pandzic, 2008; Sweatman, 1999
Dual career marriages	Tribble, 1987	Perrone & Worthington, 2001

Sixth, it is heartening to read research in support of some of the marriage preparation and enrichment vehicles currently available to the Christian public, the role of spirituality in therapy, and the use of interventions that foster forgiveness. There is a need, however, for continued research that expands our understanding of Christian marital therapy by building on existing research and examining counseling models not already studied, including the use of randomized trials with two or more treatment conditions and wait groups (cf. Worthington, 2003). In addition, there is a need for research in the following areas: working with families affected by macro-systems issues (e.g., economic factors, civil unrest, etc.); and the role of communities of faith in supporting and stabilizing troubled marriages.

Seventh, in the past, the Pastoral and Christian counseling literature focused primarily on what may be defined as “normal couples.” As a result, there are a number of significant gaps in the literature with respect to counseling discrete populations: i.e., couples in a second marriage, couples in later life, couples (other than missionary couples) who have experienced immigration or other forms of social dislocation, and Christian couples where one partner engages in extramarital sexual activity. While in some cases a preliminary body of literature exists, e.g., counseling couples in later life (Arp & Arp, 2002; Arp, Arp, Stanley, Markman & Blumberg, 2000; Lantz, 1999; Pieper & Petkovsek, 1991; Wohlfort, 1991), there is a need to expand our ability to work with couples whose presenting problems are other than adjustment issues in early marriage, forgiveness and reconciliation, and/or the development of conflict resolution skills.

In conclusion, Pastoral and Christian responses to marital problems have matured as the knowledge base informing the practice of marital therapy has matured. Whereas earlier efforts could best be described as attempts to help couples cope, today’s practitioners have at their disposal methods of intervention which have the potential of fostering healing within the marital relationship. As we look to the future, the challenge will be to engage the disciplines of empirical research and rigorous theological reflection so as to provide clients and the Church the best of what is available.

**Kelvin F. Mutter, Th.D.**, holds M.T.S. and M.Th. degrees in Pastoral Counseling from Wilfrid Laurier University and a Th.D. (Practical Theology) from the University of South Africa. Dr. Mutter is a Clinical Fellow (AAMFT) and a Pastoral Counselling Specialist (CASC/ACSS). He is a therapist at Family Counselling and Support Services in Guelph, Ontario and an Adjunct Professor in Ministry Studies at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Kelvin F. Mutter, 8 Patton Drive, Cambridge,

Ontario, N3C 4J6, Canada. Email: kfmutter@gmail.com.

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## Review of Appleby & Ohlschlager (2013)

### *Transformative Encounters: The Intervention of God in Christian Counseling and Pastoral Care*

#### *Featured Review*

Appleby, David W. & Ohlschlager, George, Eds. (2013). *Transformative Encounters: The Intervention of God in Christian Counseling and Pastoral Care*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 390 pp.

Reviewed by **Timothy A. Sisemore**, Richmont Graduate University, Chattanooga, TN.

If the goal of a book is to get one to think, then Appleby and Ohlschlager's volume was a good one for me. It has a rare quality in having very strong strengths and some rather significant weaknesses. In a spirit of disclosure (seemingly appropriate given that both authors come to a point of personal disclosure about some of their presuppositions at points), as a Christian from the Reformed tradition, it is a study in contrasts to read a book with very strong charismatic leanings. I'll share an overview of the structure of the book then offer some of the more important pros and cons that I find in the volume.

The reader is oriented to the goals and plan of the book in a Foreword by Eric Johnson and opening chapter by the editors. The stress is on introducing approaches to Christian counseling that have an explicitly Christian dimension and focus largely on the conscious experience of God's acting in counseling sessions. The 19 counseling models presented are initially organized into transformative encounters most likely to be found in church counseling contexts, then those that might be found in churches or clinical settings, and finally those that are most likely to be found only in clinical contexts. I admit I had a bit of trouble understanding the categorization at points. For example, Tan's article on Spiritually Oriented Cognitive Behavior Therapy is seen as suitable for church or clinic but Vernick's piece on Christian Cognitive-Behavior Therapy is relegated to the clinical section. The models are varied and come from a variety of theological and counseling traditions.

There is, however, a discernible trend as the models move from more explicitly supernatural approaches (such as deliverance from the demonic) to ones that are less experience-focused yet still overtly Christian (coaching, for instance). Each of the editors takes a chapter at the end to structure the content of the book into

an overarching model. A brief review cannot list and summarize all of the models presented, but maybe they can be summarized by saying they consistently stress the explicit, literal presence of God in counseling sessions – often in miraculous and powerful ways – and an explicit dependence on God to “show up” to effect the change that occurs.

Appleby's categorization of the approaches is important. He categorizes models into Christian accommodative, Christian-saturated, and Christian-infused groups, with Ohlschlager and Johnson also working from these categories. Christian-accommodative models provide Christian content melded into secular models of treatment, fitting within the ethical guidelines for use by those working under a state mental health license. Christ-saturated models work from more explicitly Christian assumptions and beliefs though they incorporate some insight from secular psychology “diluting” (p. 345) their Christian distinctiveness with secular assumptions. These may focus on thought structures and beliefs in an effort to make them more consistent with Christian doctrine and belief. Finally, Christ-infused models stress the encounter with God in the moment, a supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit in the moment. Thus, the real movement of the order of chapters is from Christ-infused to Christian-accommodative, though there are some inconsistencies in this.

There are several important strengths in *Transformative Encounters* that merit our attention. First, this is a wonderful book for various counselors to learn the multiple models of more “Christ-infused” counseling being done, largely within the charismatic community (though Welch's chapter on Biblical counseling, e.g., is not charismatic in nature). There is a tendency in educational circles in particular to work only from the psychologically-derived models, and this is unfortunate. There is a place for Christ-infused approaches in many counseling settings and situations, and they flow from the vital history of the church being the place where counsel is received. This leads immediately into an important corollary of this observation: the book reminds us that counseling need not be “professional” in the sense of a state-licensed provider or a private office. There is place for a subsequent volume to explore the values of counseling within a church where church discipline, the supportive community, and mentoring

leadership offer resources beyond the 1:1 once per week model.

This leads to one of the most important features of the book in my estimation: Ohlschlager's appendix on keeping Christ in Christian counseling. His legal and ethical side is on display here, and he alertly warns readers of impending challenges to freedom to be Christian in counseling if one has a state license. I fully agree that many more Christians need to consider practicing counseling without a license and often under the umbrella of the church rather than sanctioned by the state. However, other Christians may be called to fight the battle of standing for Christ within the professional organizations (such as the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association). For example, I thank God for a session I attended at APA in 2014 where representatives of their Psychology of Religion and Spirituality division (mostly Christians and most notably Mark Yarhouse) presented information on Christian attitudes about sexual diversity alongside members of the division advocating for sexual minorities. This had moments of tension, but offered a wonderful presence of Christ in a spiritually arid setting. Some may be called to be such missionaries. They are greatly needed.

A high point for me was the nuanced and thoughtful discussion of forgiveness by Worthington and colleagues. This contrasts with my concern with the wording used by McDonald and Johnston in discussing Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (another strange placement as it is in the church or clinic section). While I am open to seeing it as effective, the statement that "Trauma treatment without EMDR is like surgery without the anesthetic" (p. 250) implies if you do not use their treatment, you are inflicting cruelty on your client. That seems a little strong to me.

The book stresses that counseling is a three-way encounter: client, counselor, and the Triune God. While the authors focus on the more explicit ways this is manifest in their transformative therapies, I cannot think of any Christian counselor of any orientation who would not agree with this. I also am grateful for the discussion of demons and deliverance. This is a very important issue that needs much more attention in the counseling community.

Yet there are some aspects of the book with which I differ. First, while I celebrate the focus on more charismatic techniques, there is at points an air of superiority toward those who might not use those techniques.

Therapeutic approach flows from God in a variety of ways (witness the diversity in the book itself), and the person who looks to God's still small voice in Christian-accommodative therapies should be seen as being as Christ-infused as the one who is performing deliverance from demons. To use physical health as a comparison, God can work through steady diet and exercise as well as he can through miraculous healings.

This also raises an important issue that is not really addressed in the book. While God being involved in the change process is vital, one of the ways Christian counseling may kowtow to the surrounding culture is by focusing on secular goals in life rather than spiritual. For example, while being healed from illness is wonderful and at times God's will, suffering is very often redemptive when it serves the furtherance of God's kingdom. Recent research makes clear that Christians are better at saying they serve God than in actually doing so, and counseling can be a place where, if we're not careful, we enlist God to help us "feel better" and not "be better". My take is that this moves beyond counseling into spiritual growth and sanctification, and many of the book's authors point to growth as a goal, but more might be said on how challenges facilitate growth. We are here to serve God, and counseling should orient us toward our purpose, not just help us feel better. Suffering is often important in that.

I also would prefer language be used more carefully at points. Several of the chapters talk about God "showing up". I know that is Christian-speak these days, but it implies if powerful things don't happen, God somehow didn't "show up". That seems strange when we believe in an omnipresent God. God's presence sometimes will be seen in silence, as in dark nights of the soul or as with Paul's thorn in the flesh. We should not limit God's presence to the dramatic. And when things are stuck, it may be more our missing something that God is doing than his being a "no show" for counseling.

For these nuanced concerns, there is much to be learned from the book, not the least of which is the multiple ways God may work for differing types of problems and through different counseling approaches. Christians who counsel need to give more thought to this breadth – and to the breadth of settings where we counsel, whether in church or clinic.

**Invitation:** Readers of *Christian Psychology* 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 book review editor of *Christian Psychology* is Lydia Kim-van Daalen. Her email address is lydiakim.vd@gmail.com