

Exploring biblical reformational theology as a normative perspective for Christian psychology

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The process and importance of dialogue between Christian religion and psychology are continuously an active area of debate amongst Christian counsellors and psychologists as witnessed by the diversity of opinions in the focus area. The aim of this article is to contribute to the enrichment of the theological interpretation of practices within the confines of a Christian psychological worldview. A Christian approach to anthropology is shaped by the Bible as basis for Christianity's intellectual and religious conducts. The article cultivates and encourages a holistic sense of cross-disciplinary reflection that enables psychologists to respond to therapeutic situations with faithful, theologically informed practice. It is recommended that psychologists with a Christian worldview should look at the Bible and the Christian intellectual and religious tradition as a normative perspective for their practice-related research across the field of Christian psychology. To justify the hermeneutic approach, a decision should be made about the interpretation of the interdisciplinary theory-praxis relationship with regards to a particular normative perspective for Christian psychology. It is the intent of this article to reflect an transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology, based on mutuality and respect where psychology could be enriched by a normative perspective that explores the theory-praxis interface with a biblical reformational theology that holds to the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God and redemption by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Verkenning van Bybelse reformatoriese teologie as 'n normatiewe perspektief vir Christelike sielkunde. Die proses en die belangrikheid van dialoog tussen die Christelike godsdiens en die sielkunde is 'n voortdurende aktiewe debatspunt tussen Christenberaders en sielkundiges soos die diversiteit van menings in die fokusarea getuig. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om 'n bydrae te lewer tot die verryking van die teologiese interpretasie van praktyke binne die grense van 'n Christelik psigologiese wêreldbeskouing. 'n Christelike benadering tot die antropologie is hoofsaaklik gevorm deur die Bybel as basis vir die Christelik-intellektuele en religieuse handeling. Die artikel kweek en moedig 'n holistiese benadering tot die kruisdissiplinêre refleksie aan wat sielkundiges in staat stel om tydens terapeutiese situasies 'n Christelik-teologiese ingeligte benadering te beoefen. Dit word aanbeveel dat sielkundiges met 'n Christelike wêreldbeskouing na die Bybel en die Christelik-intellektuele en godsdienstige tradisie as 'n normatiewe perspektief kyk vir hulle praktyk-verwante navorsing op die terrein van die Christelike sielkunde. Om die hermeneutiese benadering te regverdig, moet 'n besluit geneem word oor die interpretasie van die interdissiplinêre teorie-praxis verhouding met betrekking tot 'n bepaalde normatiewe perspektief vir Christelike sielkunde. Die artikel reflekteer 'n transversale model van kruisdissiplinêre dialoog tussen die Christelike godsdiens en die sielkunde en is gebaseer op wedersydse respek. Die sielkunde kan verryk word deur 'n normatiewe perspektief te ondersoek wat die teorie-praxis koppelvlak met 'n bybelse reformatoriese teologie wat die gesag van die Skrif, die soewereiniteit van God en verlossing deur genade en met geloof in Jesus Christus handhaaf.

Introduction

A normative perspective for Christian psychology does not take place in a vacuum, but rather addresses a particular basic structure of theological interpretation. It offers Christian counsellors and psychologists with a Christian worldview, anchored in the *biblical reformational* tenets of faith, a framework to support and guide clients when they bring religious experiences and issues into therapy and counselling. Christian psychology begins with, and is driven by, a Christian worldview that affirms the essential and sufficient core Christian principles. This involves a biblically based, Christ-centred and Spirit-filled professional who makes a distinctive contribution to helping people make sense out of their emotional pain and supporting them in their spiritual growth.

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For centuries, the role of religion in psychology has been a main topic for discussion and an essential consideration in recognising and assessing clients' brokenness and emotional pain. Although religion and psychology are diverse, they cannot be completely disconnected from each other and highlights the therapist's commitment to respect the client's spiritual and religious perspective. Jones (1994:197; 2007:155) states that in the quest for quality of care, '... we must not lose our understanding of how science and professional practice are infused with metaphysical, moral, and religious beliefs'. Religion and psychology distinguish their diverse stance towards each other, but also recognise the mutual ground upon which interaction and collaboration could take place in answering questions of vital human well-being.

This article is written from a distinctively Christian perspective and constitutes a call for an enriched relationship between the Christian religion and psychology based on a biblical reformational theology. Biblical reformational theology is based on the Bible as God's divinely inspired Word, as interpreted in the Christian creeds and reformed confessions. The article is undeniably encouraged by Jones (1994:197; 2007:155), whose aim was '... to stimulate a greater awareness within the psychological community of the importance and the extensiveness of religion to the scientific and professional objectives of contemporary psychology'. The article supports and encourages a holistic sense of cross-disciplinary reflection that could enable psychologists with a Christian worldview to respond to therapeutic situations with faithful, theologically informed, practice-related research based on a biblical reformational theology. According to Jones (1994:197; 2007:155), psychology '... could be enriched by a more explicit exploration of the interface of religion with its scientific and applied activities'.

Building on the two themes of promise and fulfilment and God's new covenant in Christ, Osmer (2008:28) developed a hermeneutical approach in which the 'four tasks of practical theological interpretation' are portrayed as facilitating participation in Christ's priestly, royal and prophetic mediation of salvation. Compared to Osmer's (2008:27) approach, this article will describe the role and influence of biblical reformational theology on Christian psychology by means of utilising the tradition of the threefold office of Christ. During the Reformation, the threefold office played an important role in the Christology of reformed theologians (cf. Heidelberg Catechism (HC), Q & A 31). The threefold office (*munus triplex*) of Jesus Christ is based upon the offices of prophet (*munus propheticum*) (Dt 18:14–22; Mt 13:57), priest (*munus sacerdotale*) (Ps 110:1–4; Heb 6:20; 9:11) and king (*munus regium*) (Ps 2:6; Mt 27:11). Osmer (2008:4, 28–29) presents the four tasks of practical-theological interpretation as a guide to obtain the variety of knowledge and skill in facilitating participation in the threefold office of Christ:

- The descriptive-empirical task is a form of priestly listening, grounded in a spirituality of presence (exploring the question: What is going on?).

- The interpretive task is a form of wise judgement, grounded in a spirituality of sagely wisdom (exploring the question: Why is it going on?).
- The normative task is a form of prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment (exploring the question: What ought to be going on?).
- The pragmatic task is a form of transforming leadership, grounded in a spirituality of servant leadership (exploring the question: How might we respond?).

Priestly listening grounded in a spirituality of presence

Osmer (2008:33–34) describes the descriptive-empirical task as a form of priestly listening, grounded in a spirituality of presence that requires '... a spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness within the presence of God'. Despite the importance of dialogue between Christian religion and psychology, Christian counsellors and psychologists repeatedly continue to encourage and nurture the separation of religion and psychology. According to Patterson *et al.* (2000:199), the dominant view in the Western world '... has been one of rational and logical thought. Science focused on the biological side of human beings, while religious institutions focused on the spiritual.' Jones (2007) concludes that:

Many psychologists, academic and applied, do not relate to religion as such; they maintain a stance of neutrality or silence toward it. For many, this is not a hostile stance at all, but rather is the most respectful position one can take toward that which one does not personally endorse or understand. (p. 137)

Regardless of the efforts to separate religion and psychology, Christian counsellors and psychologists with a Christian worldview have developed a growing interest in identifying the influences of religion and the interaction of faith and well-being to support and guide clients (cf. Tan 2011:11). Christian psychologists have made great progress in bringing together the disciplines of religion and psychology and engaged them as part of their determination to understand the interaction of faith and well-being. The progress and development of the relationship between Christian religion and psychology are evidence of health professionals' continuous efforts to increase religious and spiritual sensitivity (Pargament 2011:8). According to Petee, Lu and Narrow (2011:xix) and Lee and Newberg (2005:444), studies have confirmed the important interaction between religion and well-being when health professionals are incorporating faith with their health care to support and guide clients. This interaction between Christian religion and psychology exists because both approaches work with humans as physical, religious and psychological beings. Koenig (2009) describes religious beliefs that assist with psychological integration as follows:

Religious beliefs provide a sense of meaning and purpose in difficult life circumstances that assist with psychological integration; they usually promote a positive worldview that is optimistic and hopeful; they provide role models in sacred writings that facilitate acceptance of suffering; they give people a sense of indirect control over circumstances, reducing the need

for personal control; and they offer a community of support, both human and divine, to help reduce isolation and loneliness. (p. 285)

Over time, Christian approaches to psychology have developed ‘... a substantive overlap in the subject matter of religion and the science of psychology’ (Jones 1994:189). According to Patterson *et al.* (2000:200), a parallel shift has occurred and the ‘... separation and distinction between religion and psychology has been blurred’. Many religious people still prefer pastoral counsellors when they need help in coping with emotional problems. This attitude results from a complex blend of interpersonal, psychological, spiritual and environmental factors, but gradually, more people are also looking towards psychology to answer questions on the basic matters of human beings and the complex queries of emotional pain and suffering (cf. Koenig, McCullough & Larson 2001:12; Narramore 2007:21; Roberts & Watson 2010:174). According to Patterson *et al.* (2000:200), this substantive overlap has led to ‘... mental health providers searching for ways to successfully incorporate religion into their therapeutic paradigm in such a way that is compatible and complimentary’. Koenig (2009) describes an important approach to the dialogue between Christian religion and psychology as follows:

Clinicians need to be aware of the religious and spiritual activities of their patients, appreciate their value as a resource for healthy mental and social functioning, and recognize when those beliefs are distorted, limiting, and contribute to pathology rather than alleviate it. (p. 289)

It is vital that mental-health practitioners understand the impact of religious and spiritual concerns of their clients to achieve healthy treatment goals (cf. Allmon 2013:538; Roberts & Watson 2010:166). According to significant developments in Christian approaches to therapy and the overall impact of religion on psychosocial functioning, research findings have provided support for the efficiency and effectiveness of religion for general mental-health advantages in actual clinical settings of Christian therapy (cf. Collins 2007:42; Roberts & Watson 2010:166; Tan 2011:11). The research of Lukoff, Lu and Yang (2011:189) found that, when mental-health services incorporated religion as an important factor of recovery, ‘... religion is overwhelmingly associated with positive outcomes such as ameliorating the distress and problems of severe illness, including mental disorders’. By exploring Christian religion in counselling settings that promote the clients’ growth and well-being, one could help recognising the importance of the ways in which clients understand and approach their interpersonal and psychological functioning, emotional difficulties and quality of life.

Wise judgement, grounded in a spirituality of sagely wisdom

Osmer (2008:82) refers to the interpretive task as a form of wise judgement, grounded in ‘a spirituality of sagely wisdom’ that requires the interplay on a continuum

characterised by the three qualities of ‘thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment’. A spirituality of sagely wisdom puts aside the quest for certainty and the one true perspective, because it is a construct of knowledge from a particular perspective or position and fallible whilst perfect wisdom belongs to God alone (Osmer 2008:83; cf. Pargament 2011:19). Early in the 20th century, a continuing and maintained dichotomy existed between religion, theology and psychology (cf. Beck 2007:75–81; Entwistle 2010:10–12; McMinn 2011a:174). Theology and psychology were torn away from each other by anti-psychology religious leaders and anti-religion psychologists (cf. Beck 2007:80; Collins 2007:44; Losch 2005:280; MacArthur & Mack 1994:8; Pargament 2011:8).

In recent years, positive psychologists have begun to recognise that psychology dates back to beyond the 19th century, at least around 25 centuries back, to Plato and Aristotle in Greece (Peterson & Seligman 2004:10; Roberts & Watson 2010:149). They have begun to appreciate the wealth and depth of psychological reflection that is available from ancient sources and the inseparability of psychological functioning from moral and religious functioning (cf. Peterson & Seligman 2004:10). Roberts and Watson (2010:150) give a few examples of the variety in the long history of psychology, conditioned by the metaphysical commitments of the Epicureans, Platonists, Stoics and Sceptics and Aristotelians. According to Roberts and Watson (2010:150), the therapeutic orientation of Greek and Hellenistic ethics and psychology has become more evident along with the striking similarities between some of the ancient and some of the modern therapies.

To understand the recent debates between religion and psychology within the evangelical world, *Psychology and Christianity* by Eric Johnson (2010) is a helpful resource for understanding five core paradigms of Christian engagement with psychology. The core paradigms are represented in five views: levels-of-explanation approach, integration approach, Christian psychology, transformational psychology and biblical counselling (cf. Clinton, Hawkins & Ohlschlager 2011:12; Entwistle 2010:15; Greggo & Sisemore 2012:60–183). Each of the five views proposes a basic structure for psychological models to develop, interpret and evaluate their approach to anthropology within a biblically informed Christian worldview:

1. The *levels-of-explanation model* holds the view that the Christian religion and psychology are two diverse disciplines that offer complementary approaches to anthropology without any mixing or joining together of their unique research approaches and methodology.
2. The *integration model* holds the view that Christian psychologists should combine psychology and theology by integrating psychological research approaches and methodology with fundamental Christian faith. The model critically and constructively engages a Christian worldview with psychology but rejects any psychological research and methodology in conflict with the Bible as unacceptable and undesirable for integration.

3. The *Christian psychology model* emphasises an approach to psychology that is firmly constructed on a Christian worldview. It defines a psychological approach to anthropology as understood according to a historical and philosophical approach to Christianity and engages in empirical research from within the Christian worldview.
4. The *transformational psychology worldview model* focuses on the spiritual-emotional transformation of the counsellor or psychologist as the fundamental basis to do psychology through the power of the Holy Spirit. The transformational approach is grounded in reality, including realities understood by faith (e.g. sin, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, human soul), to learn and discover a new view of the transformed person that is driven less by one accepted psychological theory and tradition but open to the experience of the Spirit, truths from Scripture, the process of doing psychology and observation and reflection on the self and others.
5. The *biblical counselling model* highlights a distinctive approach and focuses on detailed biblical analysis, claiming that the Bible alone is the infallible and authoritative source of all relevant insight and disclosure in counselling. Biblical counselling applies Scripture to clarify and addresses difficult circumstances of life, and any dependence on extra-biblical resources is seen as being able to distort the biblical counselling endeavour to care and cure what goes wrong in personal and interpersonal life.

The five core paradigms contribute to approaching psychology within the theological interpretation and underlying framework of a Christian worldview. Johnson (2010:292) argues that ‘... it would be a serious mistake to assume that there is only one correct position amongst the five such that the others are wholly in error’. The five paradigms attempt to enable Christians to incorporate the best of each paradigm or view into the construction of a new, more comprehensive approach to psychology that transcends the limits of simple linear reasoning.

Through the centuries the Christian worldview, with its foundational grounding in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, has offered a rich description about the nature of human beings (cf. Johnson 2007a:198). One of the key challenges in the dialogical relationship between the Christian religion and psychology involves a solid theological basis to incorporate a biblical theology into therapy and counselling (Pargament 2011:12). A normative perspective for Christian psychology would be consistent with the assertion and emphasis on going beyond integration to develop a distinctly Christian psychology that is more substantially grounded in a biblical reformational theology. According to Jones (1994:188; 2007:142), religion does more than emphasise things about God: ‘... it structures our understanding of the context of our existence and asserts many things about the nature of human beings’. However, psychology with a Christian worldview is similarly not an independent therapeutic activity that functions apart from

God. According to Johnson (2007b:45), psychology with a Christian worldview is reliant upon God’s mercy ‘... to illuminate human understanding and reveal things about human nature through human reflection, research, and creative insight’.

Prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment

Osmer (2008:29) describes the normative task as a ‘... form of prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment: helping others hear and heed God’s Word in the particular circumstances of their lives and world’. Prophetic discernment is the activity of seeking God’s guidance amid the circumstances, events and decisions of life and of sifting through, sorting out and weighing the evidence before reaching a decision. Osmer (2008:131–132) refers to three methods to discern God’s Word in a particular time and place: (1) theological interpretation, (2) ethical reflection and (3) good practice.

Theological interpretation

Theological interpretation uses ‘... theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, and contexts, informed by a theory of divine and human actions’ (Osmer 2008:161). Theological concepts refer to the doctrine of God and divine matters as revealed in the Bible (Clinton, Hart & Ohlschlager 2005:31). A basic structure and underlying framework for Christian psychology (theory and praxis) should include theological concepts related to man’s ‘... creation in the image of God, the model of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit’ (Jones, Clinton & Ohlschlager 2005:54). This approach can resonate with Christian counselling views on the relationship between psychology and Christianity. Tan (2011:363) defined Christian counselling as counselling or psychotherapy conducted by a Christian who is Christ-centred, biblically based and Spirit-filled.

Biblically based

Important reformation themes, *sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo Gloria*, are grounded in the foundational doctrines and faith statements of a biblical reformational approach to Christian psychology. It builds on the foundation that involves the Bible as God’s divinely inspired Word, as interpreted in the Christian creeds and reformed confessions (Van de Beek 2012:311). The Bible serves as the vital guide for learning spiritual truths, for living in relationship with others and for enabling people to make behavioural changes (cf. Collins 2007:43; Roberts & Watson 2010:166). The complete inspiration and authority of the Scriptures entail that one uses the Bible not in a narrow-minded, prejudicial way, but that one acknowledges it as God’s revelation to man (Narramore 2007:31). According to Johnson (1992:348), the Bible’s status as revelation, written within the everyday world, ensures its abiding relevance for all humans in all ages.

Christian psychology developed an extensive hermeneutic approach to the study of human values, health and emotional welfare that deals with mental and physical health in relationship to religion and spirituality. It emphasises the crucial and central role of Christian theology, based on the Bible and Christian philosophical reflections on human beings (Johnson 2011:24). Christian psychology explores the Bible as canon or standard (Johnson 2007a:15, 188–190; Roberts & Watson 2010:155; Van de Beek 2012:299) against which psychology must be tested (Collins 2007:43; cf. Johnson 2007a:171, 190). For Christian psychology, the Christian tradition is the orienting guide (cf. Johnson 2007a:188–190) for research on the Christian and theocentric understanding of human nature.

The Bible has a normative primacy over Christian tradition. Vanhoozer (2005:234) states: ‘To practice *sola scriptura* is to treat Scripture alone as the “norming norm” and tradition as the “normed norm”.’ The Christian psychologist has the obligation to enter into the inspired viewpoints of the Bible and bring them into the reflective context of empirical research to obtain a comprehensive and extensive understanding of human nature. Johnson (1992:349) suggests that the scriptures possess a functional priority and offers a particularly relevant authority to a Christian worldview where psychological research will be primarily empirically based but imbedded in an extensive biblically informed vision of humanity. Johnson (1992:350–353; cf. McMinn 2011b:loc.1955) presents eight roles that the Bible might serve within Christian psychology: experiential, foundational, contextual, axiological, anthropological, canonical, dialogical and creative:

1. The Bible plays an *experiential* role and provides a fundamental source of wisdom to meet with God and grow in knowledge of him through experiencing the power of the Word of God in a personal relationship.
2. The *foundational* role of Scripture provides an adequate basis to ground human knowledge, basic assumptions and beliefs.
3. The *contextual* role understands the assumptions, meaning and purpose of creation and human nature within the context of God’s creative power and wisdom as found in the Bible. This Christian framework strives to see all psychological truth from within God’s world.
4. The *axiological* role discloses the values, principles and imperatives for humankind, derived from the Bible, to be incorporated into research, theory and practice.
5. The *anthropological* role of the Bible provides an awareness of the redemptive-historical narrative of human sin and divine redemption.
6. The *canonical* role of the Bible is important to Christian psychology because it is the Christian’s canon and provides a guideline, a rule, a criterion and a measure of the unchanging standard of truth.
7. The *dialogical* role of the Bible provides a deeper level of understanding through an exchange of values, principles and perspectives for dialogue as well as a comparison between psychological knowledge and

biblical revelation. A dialogue between psychological and biblical discourse allows the Bible to exercise a normative and transformational role as it works upon the findings and theories of psychology, without simply measuring the discipline of psychology or undermining the unique authority of the Bible.

8. The *creative* role of the Bible could provide a context for exploring new concepts, findings and theories that derive from the biblical outline of the Christian psychological community rather than exclusively from a psychological worldview.

The Bible, as the divinely inspired Word of God, and the Christian creeds and reformed confessions present a theological interpretation and underlying framework for research, theory and practice in Christian psychology. Christian psychology cannot relegate biblical teachings to the periphery of its psychological knowledge. Within a biblically informed Christian worldview, anthropology focuses on humanity’s origin, nature and relational responsibility to God, others and the self. The Bible describes human beings as a unit of body, soul and mind with physical and emotional needs (cf. Dt 6:5; Lk 10:27). The main purpose of anthropology in the Bible is not a biblical psychology or physiology, but to describe humans as created in God’s image but living as fallen people in a broken world (Gn 1:26–28). They are created in this image to represent God’s reign in such a way that something of God’s image and way of doing things are revealed (cf. Clinton, Ohlschlager & Centore 2005:32; Johnson 2007a:544).

In light of this divine act, humans are focused on God (*Coram Deo*) and dependent on their Creator. Although God created humans in Genesis 1:26–28 to bear his image (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ) and likeness (בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ), their relationship with God has been broken due to sin (cf. Jones, Clinton & Ohlschlager 2005:55; McKim 2001:61). Their fallen sinful nature has marred the image of God (Gl 5:16–17; Col 2:13–14) and has led to disobedience and the destruction of the relationship with God as well as conflict with fellow humans, the self and the environment (Rm 8:7; Eph 2:3–8; Belgic Confession (BC), art. 14 & 15; HC, Q. 3-11).

Despite the sin component of human existence and their broken relationship, God established a special relationship with his covenant people (Gn 15–17). The response of God to the fallen sinful nature of mankind is revealed in reconciliation and salvation through Jesus Christ as a gift from God to concretise God’s grace and faithfulness to his covenant (cf. Jn 3:16; Eph 2:14–19; BC, art. 14-26; HC, Q. 29-52). This restored image of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, calls upon the redeemed covenant people of God who have been created in God’s likeness to live an accountable restorative life (cf. Eph 4:17–5:20). Thus, as moral human beings, people live a life focused on God, addressed by the working of the Holy Spirit (Richardson 2005:153; Seamands 2004:21).

Christ-centred

The theological interpretation and underlying framework of a Christ-centred life is that the Christian's hope and trust is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers to be reconciled and forgiven by God (Eph 2:4–5; BC, art. 16 & 17). Johnson (2007b:42) states that Christian therapists must have faith in Christ as Lord of all professional and academic disciplines. The essence of Christian theology is based on the person of Jesus Christ as documented in the Bible (Col 1:26–27; Phlp 2:5–8; BC, art. 14-26; HC, Q. 29-52). Christology reflects Jesus Christ's miraculous birth, his person, his words and works, his death and the atonement, his resurrection, his ascension, his high priestly ministry of intercession and his second coming (Johnson 2007a:33). Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Heb 1:2), eternally existing with God (Jn 8:58), representation of the Father (Heb 1:3), and he declared that whoever had seen him, had seen the Father (Jn 4:9). In his incarnation, he took on human flesh and was born as a man, but he did not give up his divine nature to do so (cf. Van de Beek 2012:411). From his conception and birth to his death and resurrection, Jesus was both true God and true man. His work of substitutionary atonement and redemption (*soteriology*) for the sins of mankind was completed by himself in his death and resurrection (cf. 1 Pt 2:21–24). Two realities (cf. 2 Cor 5:18–19) made this substitutionary atonement necessary (Clinton & Hawkins 2011:31). Firstly, mankind was so lost in sin and corruption that they could do nothing to save themselves. Secondly, God's perfect holiness demanded a judicial remedy for sin, and Christ took upon himself the form of a servant and paid the deadly penalty for the sins of all mankind (cf. Phlp 2:5–11).

The appropriate goal of Christian psychology is to model or imitate the example of Christ. Tan (2011:371) and Johnson (2004:98) highlight that Christian spirituality focuses on the spiritual formation (Rm 8:29) of clients into deeper Christlikeness. This cannot be accomplished without spiritual development and constant daily knowledge and application of the virtues and truths of the Bible (cf. Clinton, Hindson & Ohlschlager 2001:x). According to Johnson (2004:107), the fundamental indicator of spiritual maturity is 'conformity to Christ' for Christ to enlighten the true self 'through the free and spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit'.

Spirit filled

Spiritual discipline with well-grounded biblical and theological foundations is essential to effective cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology. From the biblical reformational perspective, all transformation (conformity to Christ) comes from God (Rm 12:1–2), and it occurs through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Johnson 2004:100). God's self-revelation in the Bible confirms that growth and transformation depend on God as the sovereign. In the relationship between God and humans, God always provides his promises of love and caring through the pneumatological dynamics of the Holy Spirit (cf. Van de Beek 2012:411; Seamands 2004:14).

The crucial and central role of the Holy Spirit in Christian therapy is supported by Scripture (Jn 14:16–17; 16:8, 13; Ac 9:31; Rm 8:26–27; 1 Cor 2:10; Tt 3:5) that describes the Holy Spirit as the Counsellor, Comforter, Helper or Advocate (cf. Clinton & Ohlschlager 2005:16; Tan 2011:363; Van de Beek 2012:472). Only the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead to spiritual formation (BC, art. 11; HC, Q. 53). Human skills, methods and models, strategies and psychological tools serve as secondary instruments through which the Holy Spirit performs its work (cf. De Ruijter 2005:77; Van de Beek 2012:475; Worthington 2005:120). Narramore (2007) points out that:

Unique in many ways those of us ministering in the various areas of psychology have the opportunity of leading others into deeper spiritual truth. Unless we keep a vision of God's plan of salvation for the human race we will reverse our priorities and our professional endeavours will become sterile intellectual exercises that actually serve to defend against inner spiritual and emotional needs instead of becoming part of the redemptive plan of God. (p. 31)

The essential basis for spiritual development is the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf. Osmer 2008:29). The transformative work of the *parakletos* (παράκλητος) or representative of Christ (Jn 15:26), the Holy Spirit, strengthens and guides health-care professionals through the process of spiritual formation to comfort and encourage clients. Adams (1973:7) points out that at least three persons are involved in every counselling situation: the counsellor, the client and the Holy Spirit who is the Counsellor '*par exelance*'. Clinton and Ohlschlager (2005:15) described this counselling relationship from a distinctively Christian worldview with both vertical and horizontal dimensions. It is dyadic in its horizontal dimension between at least two persons, but becomes uniquely triadic due to God's presence (the Holy Spirit) in the vertical, spiritual transcendent dimension.

Christian counsellors require competence and training in counselling skills, but will first and foremost prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit as the Counsellor, Advocate and Helper (Tan 2011:35). Johnson (2004:97) describes spiritual formation as 'the human capacity for a relationship with God as revealed in Jesus Christ through the Spirit' and the faithful human response to divine providence. Calvin (Calvyn 1988:811; cf. Johnson 2007a:349) calls this religious tendency (psychic structure) in humans the '*sensus divinitatis*' or '*semen religionis*' to experience the presence of God (the biological: the brain; the psychosocial: the mind; and the ethical: the conscience).

Ethical reflection

Ethical reflection allows Christian counsellors and psychologists to test their present practices and norms against existing universal ethical principles (Osmer 2008:161). Christian counsellors and psychologists were frequently separated from each other because of the perceived danger of violating the boundaries of their professional ability to deal with religion and spirituality

'because matters of God fall into the realm of religion, and matters of religion should remain with clergy and theologians' (Morrison *et al.* 2009:184). On the one hand, clergy and theologians often compromise their integrity when they overtly reject psychology, but then smuggle its concepts into counselling (Collins 2007:43). On the other hand, Lee and Newberg (2005:445) also state that some researchers '... question the relevance and appropriateness of discussing religion and spirituality in the healthcare setting, fearing that it gives healthcare workers the opportunity to impose personal religious beliefs on others' and that essential 'medical intervention may be replaced by religious interventions'. This caution is in reality applicable because of the vulnerability of mishandling the Bible and exploiting the counselling and therapy efforts (Morrison *et al.* 2009:184; Tan 2003:17).

When Jesus commands his disciples (Mt 5:48) to be perfect (*teleios* – τέλειος) as their Father in heaven is perfect, he is defining a maturity, perfection or ideal that is the Christian standard for evaluating human functioning (Johnson 2007a:319). Calvin (cf. Calvyn 1988:113–114) states that true wisdom is of two kinds: knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves. This spiritual maturity can develop from the dialectic relationship with God and the self. Roberts and Watson (2010:164) refer to a practical Christian psychology that will be 'teleological' from the outset with 'telos' being the picture of human well-being that dominates the Christian psychological tradition. According to Clinton, Ohlschlager and Centore (2005:31), the ethical reflection of Christian psychology can be described by two essential perspectives: firstly, the foundation of truth and the standard by which everything else is evaluated is given in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:3) and secondly, an eternal perspective of life and hope in Christ is vital in a mental-health approach (Ps 42:5; Pr 34:18).

Christian psychology requires a description of the psychological nature of human beings according to the Bible and Christian philosophical thinking. This approach will differ from the assumptions and sometimes in the methods that sometimes dominate psychology, because the often-implied goal of the psychological establishment is to be as 'objective' as possible (Roberts & Watson 2010:164). The distinctive features of Christian psychology include statements about humanity's most important psychological characteristic that refers to God, the concept of the image of God, sin and salvation. The constructive relationship between Christian faith and psychology includes principled theory and research, professional practice and personal integration that utilises biblical theological teaching and Christian philosophical reflection on human beings but that are still relevant to mental health.

Christian psychologists have an important goal to explore human beings empirically in a manner similar to contemporary psychology and to practice such research in conformity with their broader commitments (cf. Pargament 2011:19; Roberts & Watson 2010:164). McMinn (2011a:270)

emphasises that historical and systematic theology, biblical understanding and Christian tradition are all valued and considered to be essential components of counselling. A comprehensive biblical worldview, with its theological roots and spiritual practices, consists of a clear Christian understanding of human emotion, thoughts and relationships (cf. Clinton, Ohlschlager & Centore 2005:36).

Looking from this vantage point allows a constructive relationship between psychology and Christian theology. The isolation of the two subject fields can be replaced by a model that inspires a holistic sense of effective cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology. Based on mutuality and respect, the development of a distinctively psychological theory, research and practice for the Christian community will be of primary importance. This approach could use the psychological insights of the Christian tradition and engaged modern research to evaluate and apply its findings from a Christian vantage point (Entwistle 2010:14; Johnson 2011:24). However, Johnson (2011:25) warns that some might worry that Christian psychology will result in a 'Christian intellectual ghetto' that would marginalise Christians in the field.

Good practice and normative reflection

According to Osmer (2008:161), good practice refers to the '... deriving of norms from good practice, by exploring models of such practice in the present and past or by engaging reflexively in transforming practice in the present'. Christian psychology, based on a biblical reformational theology, constitutes a call for an enriched relationship between Christian religion and psychology. In the commitment to the scientific method and academic study, counsellors and psychologists with a Christian worldview should be willing to move beyond their cultural dogmatism but decline to misrepresent clear teachings of the Scriptures to fit their own theories and biases (cf. Narramore 2007:31). Christian psychology will require an unbiased rereading of Scripture '... by people who are familiar with contemporary psychology and can therefore sniff out a biblical psychology that effectively speaks to present circumstances' (Roberts & Watson 2010:155).

A Christian psychology will need to standardise a methodology of validity to research through the norms specified in the Christian religious tradition. This cultivates and encourages a holistic sense of cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology that can enable counsellors and psychologists to respond to therapeutic situations with faithful, theologically informed practice. Christian empirical research operates within an explicit normative understanding or framework of a Christian worldview that faithfully reflects the Christian tradition in the research process. The validity of research in Christian psychology through specified norms involves, in the first place, the Bible, as interpreted in the Christian creeds and Reformed confessions as God's divinely inspired Word; secondly, Christianity's Bible-based intellectual and

ecclesial traditions; and thirdly, contemporary psychology. Research in Christian psychology implicates a psychological paradigm that is intellectually open-minded but accountable to the biblical reformational theology.

Cross-disciplinary dialogue

Cross-disciplinary dialogue can be described as 'a special form of rational communication in which the perspectives of two or more fields are brought into conversation' (Osmer 2008:163). The conversation between two or more subject areas can be done through four types of dialogue (Osmer 2008:163–164):

- Intradisciplinary dialogue focuses on the dialogue between the different perspectives within a single subject area and draws conclusions internally to the field.
- Interdisciplinary dialogue brings the perspectives of one subject area into conversation with another subject area.
- Multidisciplinary dialogue brings a number of subject areas into conversation simultaneously. The theories of different subject areas address different levels of interpretation in the field.
- Meta-disciplinary dialogue is a dialogue about the nature of a subject area, often found in the philosophy of science, the sociology of knowledge and rhetoric or argument theory. Meta-disciplinary dialogue articulates the status of a subject area.

Cross-disciplinary dialogue can take a variety of forms (Osmer 2008:164). Through the use of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary dialogue in the cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology, three models (with diversity in each model) have emerged in contemporary theology to define and describe the relationship between the subject fields (cf. Osmer 2008:164–173).

- Correlational models portray the cross-disciplinary dialogue as one of a number of mutual influences to demonstrate the relationship between Christian religion and psychology. In the correlational model, Christian religion and psychology enter into a mutually influential relationship. Christian counsellors and psychologists carefully listen to contemporary psychologists, learn from them and contribute to the dialogue. According to Osmer (2008:165), three variations of the correlational model have emerged: the method of correlation, the revised method of correlation and the revised praxis-method of correlation.
- Transformational models of cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology can be described as a conversation between people who speak different languages (cf. Osmer 2008:168). Christian religion and psychology have their own distinctive subject matter but can transform what is learned from each other by replacing their own distinctive subject matter in a different disciplinary context. According to Osmer (2008:168), two versions of the transformational model have emerged: the Chalcedonian approach guides the dialogue by the theological grammar of the

Christological formulations of the Council of Chalcedon, and the ad-hoc correlational approach uses literary and hermeneutical theories that are helpful to theology or discard it in an ad-hoc way.

- Transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue pictures the relationship of the disciplines as an interacting network of different fields and contends that the human quest for intelligibility is strengthened by rational communication across this network' (Osmer 2008:171). The transversal model, formulated by researchers such as Schrag and Van Huyssteen (cf. Müller 2013:3), assumes a more fluid and dynamic understanding of the interdisciplinary relationship between Christian religion and psychology and explores different values and perspectives that may overlap at various levels of intersection (cf. Van Huyssteen 2006a:9). According to Osmer (2008:172), the transversal model is person and perspective specific and '... explores areas of overlap and divergence in a concrete dialogue between particular people and perspectives'. The transversal network explores ways in which Christian religion and psychology can share the common resources of rationality and give more attention to the pluralism found in each subject field (cf. Müller 2013:3; Osmer 2008:172; Van Huyssteen 1999:282–286).

Van Huyssteen (2006a) describes a departure point between the different disciplines and states:

In this multidisciplinary use of the concept of transversality there emerge distinct characteristics or features: the dynamics of consciousness, the interweaving of many voices, the interplay of social practices are all expressed in a *metaphor* that points to a sense of transition, lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting, and conveying without becoming identical. (p. 19)

Transversality is the term used within the post-foundational notion of rationality '... that enables meaningful communication between the diverse disciplines' (Müller 2013:3). The post-foundational approach distances itself from both the subjective fundamental (universal rationality) approach and the non-fundamental relativism (diverse rationality) approach (Müller 2013:3; 2011:2; Van Huyssteen 1997:2–4). According to Van Huyssteen (2006a; cf. Müller 2013:4), a post-foundationalist notion of rationality points toward plausible forms of interdisciplinary dialogue:

A postfoundationalist approach helps us realise ... that we are not the intellectual prisoners of our contexts or traditions, but that we are epistemically empowered to cross contextual, cultural, and disciplinary borders to explore critically the theories, meanings, and beliefs through which we and others construct our worlds. (p. 25)

Christian religion and psychology cannot operate in isolation within the post-foundational approach (Van Huyssteen 1999:282–286). Van Huyssteen (1997:4; 2007:421) states that 'transversal reasoning' discovers an epistemic space where interdisciplinary evaluation is possible. This approach assumes that, in order to construct a concrete dialogue, definite areas of overlapping should be sought in

the relationship between Christian religion and psychology. Müller (2011:3) points out that the post-foundational approach, '... although also hermeneutical in nature, moves beyond mere hermeneutics. It is more reflexive and situational embedded in epistemology and methodology.'

Transforming leadership, grounded in a spirituality of servant leadership

Osmer describes the pragmatic task as a form of transforming leadership, grounded in a spirituality of servant leadership (Osmer 2008:29). He focuses on the forming and enacting of '... strategies and actions that are undertaken to influence and shape events towards desired goals' (Osmer 2008:10). Potential strategies and actions to establish a dialogical relationship between Christian religion and psychology will inevitably depend on the willingness of counsellors and psychologists to become theologically literate and for theologians and pastors to become psychologically literate (cf. Jones 1994:195; 2007:150). A mutual dialogical approach implicates a close relationship with the Bible and Christian traditions to re-contextualise the cross-disciplinary theory-praxis relationship between Christian religion and psychology (cf. Johnson 1992:352).

As a result of the mutually reflective post-foundational discourse, Christian religion and psychology can be enriched to obtain a comprehensive and extensive understanding of human nature (cf. Van Huyssteen 2007:419). A constructive, cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology '... flows out of a deep appreciation for theology and a profound personal transformation caused by a life in Christ' (McMinn 2011a:31). Emphasis on Christian faithfulness should help to highlight differences between the Christian tradition and contemporary psychologies (Roberts & Watson 2010:167).

In order for Christian religion to be incorporated in cross-disciplinary dialogue with contemporary psychology, theologically informed counsellors and psychologists that hold a Christian worldview '... should view religion as one facet of human nature that requires special attention, sensitivity, and appropriate training' (Jones 1994:196; 2007:151). This expands the transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue by proposing a post-foundational approach to the interdisciplinary dialogue (Müller 2009:199; 2011:3; 2013:3; Van Huyssteen 1997:4). A biblical worldview or perspective may nurture the development of a plausible Christian hypothesis and a psychological dynamic that contribute to the enrichment of mental health and psychological adjustments (cf. Roberts & Watson 2010:167). This involves the post-foundational approach to distinguish between religious and psychological health issues within the subject field of Christian psychology that are also theologically accountable (cf. Van Huyssteen 1997:4). A detailed exegesis of the Bible would enrich Christian psychology when the Bible is approached with

real questions that impact on health professionals and their calling as servants in the field of Christian psychology.

The primary motivation behind the Christian-psychology model is that health professionals are enabled to incorporate a transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue in psychology, one based on the Bible and Christian traditions, by developing new hypotheses, research programs, psychological theories and clinical practices in areas where a Christian worldview makes a difference. In the cross-disciplinary dialogue with psychology, '... theology will act as an equal partner with an authentic voice in a postmodern situation' (Müller 2013:4). The goal of Christian psychology is not only to alleviate symptoms or heal clients' emotional problems but also to deepen spiritual maturity and restore their relationship with God (Clinton, Ohlschlager & Centore 2005:35; Tan 2011:357).

The relationship between Christian religion and psychology '... is less a matter of integration of the two into each other's framework, scientifically or intuitively, and more a matter of ... mutual illumination' (Ellens 1997:193). It is rather a source of transversal knowledge in which human nature is revealed and 'tested against the norm of revealed biblical truth' (Collins 2007:43) in a post-foundationalist interdisciplinary dialogue. This phenomenological and theistic approach expands the body of knowledge about humans and results in a cross-disciplinary team approach to increase the effectiveness of care in all aspects of human existence.

Christian psychologists can incorporate the transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue to re-contextualise psychology and understand the complex reality of human nature from within the redemptive-historical narrative of human sin and divine redemption as it is revealed through God's creative power, wisdom and grace in the Bible. It is a process of meeting clients in the depth of their experience and leading them to become people who are both spiritually and psychologically whole. According to Clinton, Hawkins and Ohlschlager (2011), it includes helping people:

... deal with severe loss, conflicts, and disorders, but it has one ultimate concern: helping clients become more like Christ and grow into a deeper intimacy with God and with one another. (p. 11)

Conclusion

Christian religion and psychology are becoming increasingly relevant and effective to help clients with both spiritual and emotional growth by recognising their Christian values and assisting them to make sense of their emotional pain and social problems. The article offered counsellors and psychologists with a Christian worldview anchored in the biblical reformational tenets of faith a framework to support and guide clients when they bring religious experiences and issues into therapy and counselling. The isolation of the disciplines of Christian religion and psychology can be replaced by a model that is inspired by a holistic sense of effective cross-disciplinary dialogue that breaks away from

a silo mentality and collaborate in a transversal model to incorporate biblical theology into therapy and counselling.

The proposed normative perspective for Christian psychology involves a transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue that is intellectually open-minded but accountable to the biblical reformational approach to theology (biblically based, Christ-centred and Spirit-filled). *Semper reformanda* [reformed and always reforming] is an important reformational norm or principle and gives a broad challenge to Christian psychology to engage in constructing a transversal cross-disciplinary paradigm that takes into account the Bible, as divinely inspired Word of God, the Christian creeds, reformed confessions and Christian traditions to offer a rich description about the nature of human beings.

The development in the interdisciplinary transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue between Christian religion and psychology explores important reformation principles and faith statements, which are essential attributes of the normative perspective for Christian psychology. Van Huyssteen (2006b) describes the post-foundational notion of rationality within the transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue and states:

In this wide reflective equilibrium, we finally find the safe but fragile public space we have been searching for, a space for shuttling back and forth between deep personal convictions and the principles that finally result from interpersonal judgements. (p. 148)

This article proposes a normative perspective that constitutes an enriched relationship between Christian religion and psychology, and describes the post-foundational role and guidance of biblical values on Christian psychology. Christian counsellors and psychologists should also explore the Bible and the Christian intellectual and religious tradition as a normative perspective for their practice-related research across the field of Christian psychology and practical-theological interpretation. A transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue, based on mutuality and respect, can enrich the interdisciplinary theory-praxis interface through the embracement of a normative perspective that explores a biblical reformational theology, which emphasises the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God and redemption by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

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