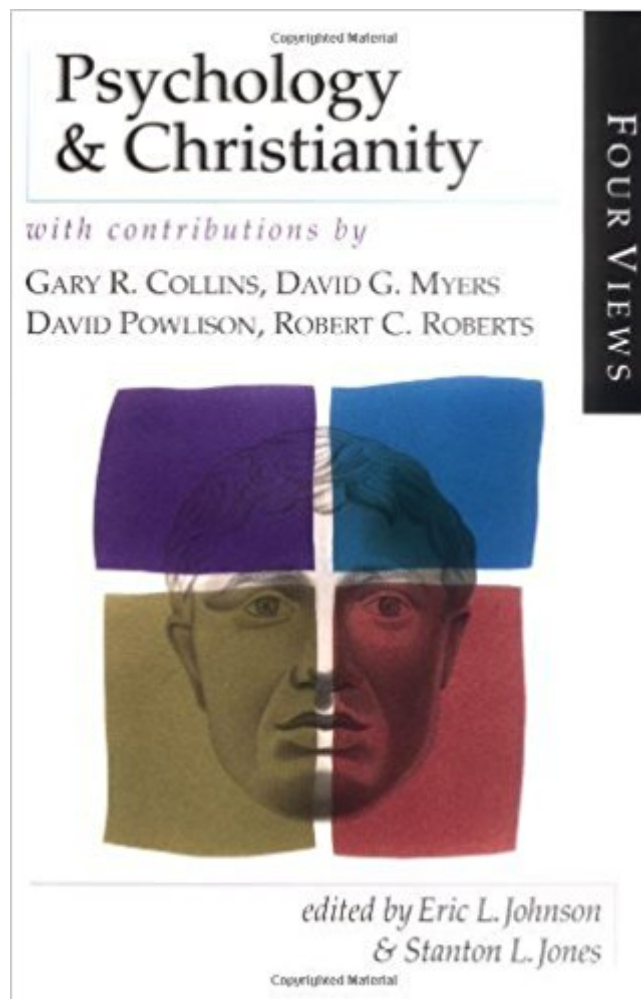




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Psychology & Christianity: Four Views



Synopsis

Psychology has exploded across the academic and popular landscape in the last hundred years. Dozens of schools of thought have arisen and thousands of books have been written on the nature of our personalities, our development, our relationships and our inner well-being. All of this has been of interest (and sometimes of concern) to Christians because of the importance we place on a correct understanding of human nature. Psychology often seems disconnected from, if not antithetical to, Christian perspectives on life. How do we relate our cherished Christian beliefs about persons to what secular versions of psychology tell us? In this book are gathered four models of the relationship of psychology and Christianity. David Powlison (Westminster Theological Seminary) offers the biblical counseling model. The levels-of-explanation model is advanced by David G. Myers (Hope College), while Gary Collins (former executive director of American Association of Christian Counselors) introduces the integration model. The Christian psychology model is put forth by Robert C. Roberts (Baylor University). Each of the contributors responds to the other essayists, noting points of agreement as well as problems they see. Editors Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones also provide an introduction to the history of Christians and psychology as well as a conclusion that considers what might bind the four views together and how a reader might evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of each view.

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Customer Reviews

Overview: In *Psychology & Christianity: 4 Views*, editors Johnson and Jones layout for the reader four views of modern Psychology in the Christian arena. The bulk of this book is dedicated to articles written by proponents of these four views, one author per view. After each articulation of a view, the detracting view-holders give a short response and critique to the article. This main portion of the book is preceded by an introduction to the views, a brief history of Christians in psychology, and proceeded by some concluding remarks: all of which is co-authored by the editors. It is important to point out that all four views are authored by professed Christians who are striving, in different ways, to apply Biblical wisdom to their field of expertise. It is the differing ways of applying scripture to the field of Psychology that give rise to most of the differing opinions of the authors. This review will attempt to summarize each of the views under four titles: the scientist, the professional, the scholar, and the pastor. It is very likely that the authors of the papers would not label themselves as such, but these seem helpful for categorization.

The Scientist: The first view that is presented is the "levels-of-explanation" approach. This view is espoused by David Myers, who is characterized in this review by the image of a scientist. In picturing such a man, images of Galileo, Newton, and Kepler might come to mind. The scientist of the view is striving for complete neutrality as he discovers the facts. The emphasis is on observing the world and coming to impartial conclusions based upon what has been scientifically observed. As a Christian, this scientist knows that all of nature has been created by God and reflects His rationality. Knowing this, the Christian scientist strives to know the very mind of God through close observation of His created order. Hunches are not enough for the scientist, he must check every supposition against reality to see if it is correct or false. The scientist strives for empiricism. His guiding verse for this is Deut. 18:22, "when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously." He seeks to judge all psychological claims by this same standard: truth is best verified by predictive power.

What of theology and the Bible. Those are to be kept separate from the scientific process. To protect from collaboration, two witnesses to a crime are best kept separate until they give their testimony. So too, the Bible is best kept out of science. The Christian scientist talks about these two as differing methods for discovering truth. It is his delight when one of these sources independently corroborates the other. This is to be preferred over one guiding and supporting the other.

In

summary, psychology is a science and the psychologist is a scientist. The Christian psychologist is best thought of as a Christian scientist. As Kepler, he is able to "think God's thoughts after Him" and glorify Him with this pursuit.

The Professional: The second view that is presented is the "integration" approach. This view is presented by Gary Collins, who is characterized in this review by the image of a professional. One might imagine a carpenter, a farmer, or (as one critic suggested) a plumber. Such a man is motivated to do the best that he can in his profession unto the glory of God. As such, he uses the Bible wherever it is appropriate. As the carpenter can swing his hammer in love, motivated by the glory of God, beginning his day in prayer, and ending it in worship: so too can the Christian psychologist in the integration model. The Bible can perhaps be used at some point during the day in evangelism to coworkers and clients, or to provide a good work ethic; but it isn't an appropriate tool for the task at hand. It does not deal with the specifics of depression or OCD. "The right tool for the job" or "whatever gets the job done," is the cry of the professional. He is not a scientist who views the Bible as a contaminate that might ruin the whole process, but it is certainly not the most helpful thing to have at the jobsite. Instead of the method, the Bible provides the motivation. In fact, if the Bible is brought out too much at the jobsite, instead of correct domain-specific knowledge, it will cause the professional to look less qualified in the eyes of his peers. Instead, the professional must prove himself competent in the field in which God places him. For the professional psychologist, this just happens to be the counselor's armchair. The Holy Spirit is useful to such a psychologist as he is guided by His presence: just like everyone else is, whether butcher, baker, or candlestick maker. This is the Biblical approach the author claims, because it is the approach all must take at the jobsite.

In summary, psychology is a profession and the psychologist is a professional. The Christian psychologist is best thought of the same as a Christian professional in any field. As Eric Liddell in the *Chariots of Fire* any professional is able to feel God's good pleasure as he is performing well and unto the Glory of God.

The Scholar: The third view that is presented is the "Christian Psychology" approach. This view is espoused by Robert Roberts, who is characterized in this review by the image of a scholar. The author, as a scholar, is a student of history, philosophy, the sciences, and most importantly, the Bible. As such he has a wide view of what it means to be a psychologist. He isn't limited by this century's view of psychology but goes back to those long deceased to help inform him in the best way to counsel a patient. His task, he claims, is to "retrieve the psychology of the past." His heroes in this regard include Baxter, Edwards, Kierkegaard, and the desert fathers. One of the favorite concepts of such a scholar is the notion of tradition. Of course the Bible is the foundational source of good tradition, but the tradition handed down over the centuries cannot be ignored either. Anything that pulls away from the tradition that

has been built over thousands of years can be viewed as a rival to that tradition. However, while he maintains the importance of tradition, the scholar strives to be relevant to his time. He does not write and study only for the sake of his own knowledge. Instead he reframes what he learns so that it is digestible by his peers and contemporaries. His goal is to put the old substance in a modern form. In doing so he attempts to toe the line between "perverting the substance" and "failing to attain the form." At the end of the day, the Biblical scholar can look much like a pastor, although perhaps more academic and bookish, and a little less pastoral. Psychology is to him a tradition and he is the student of that tradition. The Christian psychologist is best thought of the same as a Christian scholar, rightly dividing Christian tradition from its deviations: in doing this, he is able to see the hand of God throughout the ages.

The Pastor: The fourth view that is presented is the "Biblical Counseling" approach. This view is espoused by David Powlison, who is characterized in this review by the image of a pastor. This man does not dare to give his own opinion in any matter, but instead trusts in the Word of God above all else as the source of truth. He believes that; "the entirety of human 'psychology' takes place God-referentially whether or not we are aware of it." Any psychology which is not the psychology of the Bible is a rival and a false psychology. This is not to say that God's truth can only flow from the scriptures, much of it is common sense to man as its truth is written on his heart and discernable in the natural order. However, intense scrutiny of this order will invariably miss the overall context and framework which God has revealed to us in the historic-redemptive narrative of scriptures. All other knowledge must be able to fit into the grid and framework provided to us therein. Of course, as a pastor, all knowledge is useful for leading and shepherding the people of God, curing the soul, and converting the lost. The pastor sees competing and modern views of counseling as other professions encroaching into his office as shepherd of the flock and is gravely concerned when others try to fill this role outside of the precepts of the Bible. In summary, psychology is the functioning of the human soul and the psychologist is a shepherd to that soul. Therefore, the Christian psychologist is best thought of as a pastor, and the non-Christian psychologist is often seen as a usurper. The pastor-counselor is able to glorify God in psychology insofar as he rightly discerns the Word of God to those he counsels.

Concluding remarks: This review has tried to give an adequate representation of the four views by putting them into four vocational categories. As such, some squashing was necessary. However, if this review is compared to the book being reviewed, many of the phrases that are not direct quotes are paraphrases of actual content found in the essays. Some important points have been skipped, but this review should give you an adequate summary of the four views presented in *Psychology & Christianity*.

A thoughtful and well-balanced look at four different integration systems. It was an enjoyable and easy read. Anyone struggling with how to incorporate their Christian faith into their Psychology or counseling practice, will find this book helpful, but I would encourage you to wait a little while because the authors are in the process of putting out a new version that includes a fifth view, which I am looking forward to.

Bought for my daughter's college class. It did the job.

This was an awesome book, that I also needed to read really quickly. I had to read it and write an essay about it to get into grad school. I received really quickly, and got admitted into school, and now am enjoying classes!

Great experience!

I used it as a reference book. Very good! I would recommend buying it and keeping it in your library!

This text was required for a class I am taking but is a great resource for anyone considering any type of counseling, pastoral care or intensive discipleship.

The editors state in the "Acknowledgements" section of this 2000 book, "Christians have taken different positions regarding the extent to which they should have anything to do with modern psychology, some embracing it wholeheartedly, others rejecting it just as vigorously, and many others falling somewhere in-between. Few opportunities have arisen for Christians to dialogue publicly about these differences, the value of psychology in general for Christians, and the problems involved in psychological study and counseling practice for people of faith. We have been delighted to work on just such a dialogue." (Pg. 9) Participants are David G. Myers ("Levels-of-Explanation" view); Gary Collins ("Integration" view); Robert C. Roberts ("Christian Psychology" view); and David Powlison ("Biblical Counseling" view). After each essay explaining one position, the others offer a brief response to it. [There is now also an updated version of this book, with a fifth view added: *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*.] One essayist states, "Everett Worthington has suggested that writings about the interdisciplinary integration of psychology and theology have occurred in three waves. The first was prior to 1975 and included Paul Meehl, Paul Tournier, Richard Bube, and Gary Collins. Worthington's list should have included Clyde Narramore, whose

lonely pioneering efforts set the stage for much that would follow in the United States. Narramore's contribution has been lost in discussions of integration, perhaps because he was not a scholar writing for professional publications. Instead he worked as a practitioner as popularizer, becoming the first to make psychology respectable in the evangelical community... a second wave of integrationists... addressed the integration of psychology and theology with vigor... Worthington suggests that since 1982 the development of integration models has slowed to a trickle." (Pg. 104-105) Collins notes, "When we meet or work alongside non-Christian professional colleagues, we do not merge into their worldviews and hide our Christian perspectives under a cover of psychojargon and heady theorizing. Neither do we disrespect our secular colleagues by insensitively bombarding them with theologies and catchy evangelism efforts. Instead, we are like Paul in Athens. He reasoned with the religious leaders..." (Pg. 108) He asks, "Why is psychology still one of the most popular courses even on Christian college campuses? Psychology is popular and worth studying because more than any other discipline it is committed to understanding people." (Pg. 109-110) The editors note in conclusion, "After reading a book like this, it's easy to come away frustrated: four sincere and intelligent Christians expressing four different views, on some points saying virtually opposite things... In the extreme it can lead to a kind of despair or at least indifference---apparently it doesn't really matter what Christians think... But the underlying goal of psychology is loftier than affirming personal preference: it aims at truth... So though intelligent Christians differ, it doesn't mean there is no point to telling the truth." (Pg. 243) This book (or its updated version) are "must reading" for anyone wanting to compare the various perspectives of Christians to psychology.

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