

# Introduction

Charles L. Zeiders, Psy.D.

Psychologists can measure normalcy, define madness, develop therapeutic paradigms, and list the nuances of human nature with utmost precision. We have biofeedback, psychometrics, psychoanalysis, cognitive therapy, positive psychology, behavior modification, and a host of deeply promising projects in the research and development pipeline. To be sure, our discipline has advanced accurate understanding of the soul's essential properties and has scientifically harnessed this knowledge to clinically mitigate the deep agony of the human mind. But, despite our advances and genuine effectiveness, our discipline remains incomplete. Theoretically, scientifically, and therapeutically, we fall short of the fuller effectuality that awaits us. We need Christ.

It is through the Christian revelation that psychology will find its maturity. In our incorporation of the divine breakthrough recorded in the New Testament, our theories will become more true, because we will develop them in the light of Truth. Our therapies will become more powerful, because we will submit them to the source of Power. Our knowledge of human nature—as good but fallen, redeemed through Jesus, loved by a powerful, active triune God—will have tremendous impact on our disciplinary pursuits. Because God created humanity, all psychological science implicitly situates research data in relation to the creator. Because the sovereign God heals, we can submit our therapeutic interventions to his sovereignty and enjoy a therapy the nature of which is saturated by grace. Cognitive or dynamic interventions can become so imbued with divinity that the clinician's technique and the patient's receptivity uncannily unfold toward health. For psychology there are blessings afoot. And these blessings stem from our recognition that the Clinical Christ—the activity of the God of the Christian revelation throughout the realms of our discipline—desires to redeem, relate, heal, love, and empower us. The Clinical Christ seeks to bring us individually and corporately into a level of exuberant wholeness that is ultimately endless and utterly wonderful. The Clinical Christ is the Lord of the transformative psychology of *Christian Holism*. The chapters of this book explore different aspects of the Clinical Christ, *Christian Holism*, and their implications.

A group of colleagues and I have spent years experiencing the Clinical Christ in our practice of *Christian Holism*. From our spiritual/clinical experience, we felt an obligation to develop a theology of psychotherapy. Under the auspices of the Institute for Christian Counseling and Therapy, we formed the *Think Tank for Christian Holism*. The Think Tank consisted of three licensed psychologists, a minister and pastoral therapist, and an author and publisher of religious books—all practicing Christians and veterans of psychological and spiritual practice. From our efforts emerged the following tenets of Christian Holism:

*The Central Tenet of Christian Holism is that the Holy Spirit is present and active during treatment.*

*Next:*

- *Christian Holism is centered in Jesus Christ. The entire process of psychotherapy is explicitly under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Treatment is conducted in His name.*
- *Christian Holism concerns itself with placing psychological theories and interventions at the disposal of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Christian Holism views the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and a valid source of inspiration and guidance for psychotherapeutic treatment.*
- *Christian Holism thinks of creeds and catechisms as powerful statements of core beliefs, core convictions, which help to position the intellect in such a way that the entire person may develop openness to the presence and healing reality of God.*
- *Christian Holism is ecumenical.*
- *Christian Holism distinguishes itself as a psychological perspective in its conviction that men and women are made in the Image of God.*
- *Christian Holism facilitates reconciliation with God, with self, with those in the human community and creation.*
- *Christian Holism places social science under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Under Christ's dominion, treatment relies on natural therapeutic processes and supernatural grace to accomplish healing.*
- *Christian Holism employs both "secular" (psychological and relational-ethical) and "sacred" (spiritual-biblical) interventions to participate in the Holy Spirit's Ministry to the client.*

- *Christian Holism is practiced by a therapist who provides sanctuary in which the client's healing process can unfold.*

If it is God's will, may *Christian Holism* inform your practice and guide your healing.

In *Christian Holism*, therapeutic forgiveness ranks among the most powerful clinical activities, and the Clinical Christ blesses such work with special healing favor. Jesus knows that our capacity to heal, communicate with God, and receive God's full blessing, greatly depends upon our capacity to forgive. That is why he tells us to forgive so we will be forgiven (Lk 6:37), to forgive others their trespasses (Mt 6:12), and to forgo our retribution requirements to a seemingly absurd degree (Mt 18:21-22). Research and scientific models bear out that unforgiveness is pathogenic: chronic anger adversely affects health (Kaplan, 1992); anger plays a role in decreased immune functioning (Herbert & Cohen, 1993); and stress from chronic unforgiveness imbalances the nervous system, causing physical and psychological problems (Newberg, d'Aquili, Newberg, deMarici, 2000). Conversely, forgiveness is curative: a growing body of research evidence points with increasing conclusivity that forgiveness positively correlates with measures of physical, psychological, and social health (Worthington, Berry, & Parrot, 2001). Plus, scientific and clinical evidence supports the position that forgiveness effectively treats a wide range of psychiatric disorders (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). My own work in this area is based on a psychospiritual interpretation of Jesus' teaching in Mt 5:21-26. I find that my clients' *Will to Punish* those who have trespassed against them, imprisons them in the woundedness others inflicted upon them. When, through hard clinical work, these courageous people intentionally insert a *Will to Forgive* their trespassers over their *Will to Punish* them, the healing grace of God reaches the wounded portion of their soul and restores them. Sometimes the healing that follows forgiveness is dramatic, leaving clients in a euphoric state of grace with divinely inspired optimism. This predictable outcome of implementing the teachings of Jesus Christ, I have come to call *The Resurrection Effect*. (See p. 37 for a greater discussion of forgiveness, *The Resurrection Effect*, and the activity of the Clinical Christ.)

Christian spiritual psychology knows that forgiveness is the great healing deed of the Christian religion. When, through intense therapeutic effort and faith in God, a patient forgives, she heals. Similarly, shedding the alienating, pathogenic weight of sin by repentance and acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the health of reconciliation with God can be enjoyed. In fact, clinically and as a matter of theory, forgiveness appears to be a stepping stone to all types of reconciliation: reconciliation with self, others, and God. In my practice of *Christian Holism*, I have come to see that reconciliation itself is both a path and destination. As a path, reconciliation is moved forward in every corner of life by the God of love. As a destination, reconciliation is the end-game of the human condition and appears to be inexpressibly wonderful: To love and to be loved by God and to enjoy him forever. (See p. 69 for meditations on reconciliations.)

Dreams are another arena in which the Clinical Christ makes himself manifest. Therapeutically, dreams offer a wonderful corrective to a problem of human nature. During our tribulations, we sometimes cannot hear the wisdom of the greater parts of our soul, nor can we listen to the voice of God. But, just as God arranges his infinite consciousness into three persons to enjoy self reflection, the human spirit is similarly constructed. In dreams, the disparate aspects of our souls convene to converse and heal the whole person. Clinically, I have come to appreciate that dream activity occurs with the Holy Spirit witnessing, understanding, and even arranging the dream. Dreams are charismatic gifts, given by the Holy Spirit to bless the individual and the Christian Community (Savary, Berne, & Williams, 1984). Interpreting a dream under the guidance of the Clinical Christ, a patient will place a hand upon his heart and—inspired by the dream's healing message—exclaim, like Jacob (Gen 28:16), “Surely God was in this place and I did not know it.” (See p. 87 for an exploration of dreams and the Clinical Christ.)

An experience of energy sometimes accompanies prayers for Christian clients in the clinical setting. Pilgrims to holy sites like Medegordje or the Toronto Airport Church (original site of what is now known as the Toronto Blessing) often report that an energetic phenomenon accompanies their worship. Charismatics also experience divine energies moving through them and healing them. Just as God healed the hemorrhaging woman via the dynamic healing energy that flowed from Jesus (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48), the Clinical Christ continues to offer his healing energy in the clinical arena at his discretion for our good. As a clinician, I find it moving how—at the concluding prayer of an intense therapeutic hour—I and my client sometimes feel the very energy of God palpably blessing, healing, and encouraging the patient forward with sensible, dancing power. (See p. 105 for an exploration of energy and the Clinical Christ.) Clinically, God's power can be felt.

Over the years, practicing *Christian Holism* and experiencing the healing activity of the Clinical Christ, I have come to appreciate God both as a person and as a clinical reality. Experiencing God as a person, I find that he wants my patients to heal, and wants me to be successful in helping them. God really cares and is clinically competent and wise and powerful. That is why in *Christian Holism*, Jesus is Lord of therapy, the Holy Spirit is clinically present, and the Father loves the enterprise. In the context of this reality, I find that God is an activist; that is, God does things that help the therapeutic process. God might inspire me to recall a long lost bit of psychodynamic theory which perfectly illuminates how a patient might heal, or God might answer a prayer for the healing of a chronic condition with such decisiveness that both I and my client struggle to understand the Trinity's loving use of power and gratuitous generosity. Experiencing God as a clinical reality, I have come to rely on him, as I do my cognitive-behaviorism. An empiricist, I have come to appreciate that scientific evidence exists to support the incorporation of prayer into the clinical setting. Not only that, but emerging science supports that notion that spiritual activity blesses people on a host of health-outcome indicators. Such science has import in the training of clinicians and even scientifically informs the Church, regarding how she might draw inspiration from social science to renew her own healing ministry with confidence. (Three chapters in this book examine these themes, beginning on p. 117.)

As you read this book, may God bless you with his truth and protect you from my errors. May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you always—inspiring you by his dynamic presence and clinically empowering you to be an agent of his healing.

Charles L. Zeiders, Psy.D.  
Licensed Psychologist  
Chairman, *Think Tank for Christian Holism*  
The Feast of *Corpus Christi*  
Bryn Mawr, PA  
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