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BOOK REVIEW

John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall. *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology*. Christian World-view and Integration Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010. Pbk. ISBN 0-8303-2813-3.

The non-psychologist might be excused for assuming that *Psychology in the Spirit* is written primarily for psychologists and has little to say to those engaged in other forms of ministry. While this assumption is understandable, it is only partly correct. The authors, a theologian and a psychologist, develop a Christian vision for psychology that is rooted in the proposition “there is something about the nature of the person and the process of doing psychology that is more epistemically and ontologically fundamental than the theoretical product” (71). Indeed, this proposition informs three key arguments: the quality of the character of the person doing psychology shapes the outcome (71–72), the process used to relate psychology and Christianity is fundamental (72), and the process of doing psychology from a Christian perspective needs to include Christian values and realities (72–73).

Viewed as a whole, *Psychology in the Spirit* maps the authors’ personal and professional journeys through the fields of theology and psychology (chs. 2–3), outlines the location and contours of their current thinking (chs. 4–17), and charts their vision for teaching psychology in Christian graduate schools (ch. 18).

Section I (chs. 3–5) attends to foundational concerns, beginning with a reflection on the relationship between psychology and theology (ch. 3). Next, the authors identify Christian values and realities that inform their approach, highlighting the doctrines of creation in *imago Dei*, sin, redemption and

transformation (ch. 4). Their understanding of the *telos* or goal of redemption, namely the transformation of the person, informs their discussion of the link between the spiritual transformation of the psychologist and the practice of psychology (pp. 84–88, and ch. 5). The authors' reflection on the person of the counselor is refreshing as well as convincing and is reminiscent of recent discussions on the role of personal formation in the seminary curriculum (see Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006, 100–126).

Section II explores and contrasts the epistemic assumptions and methodologies of contemporary psychology and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Chapter 6 provides a much needed reflection on the difficulties posed by the use of modern scientific methods to explore values, ethics, and mental objects, affirming that Scripture is a legitimate datum of science (p. 131). As a result, the authors seek to build a science of values shaped by both the biblical texts of Ecclesiastes (ch. 7) and Job (ch. 8) as well as findings derived from modern neuroscience (ch. 9). The manner in which the authors employ this combination of biblical and scientific source material illustrates how their approach differs from traditional approaches to integration. Specifically, the reader observes how a combination of biblical data and a scientific understanding of mental processes are employed in a process of theological reflection to explore and engage the topic. Through this discussion they provide compelling evidence for the model. In addition, the authors engage a key dimension of the seminary curriculum, the development of interpretive frameworks for ministry (cf. Foster et al., 70–99). As a footnote to this discussion, I have found the framework outlined in chapter 9 useful to advance clinical discussions, both with Christ-followers and non Christ-followers, that focus on values.

Section III moves the reader into the heart of the transformational model beginning with a reflection on the unique role and authority of Scripture in understanding the human person (ch. 10). Next the authors outline a Christian understanding of persons that offers fresh reflections on theological

anthropology (ch. 11), utilizes Attachment Theory to reflect on how people relate both to each other and God (ch. 12), and engages in theological reflection on the *telos* of self-awareness, namely, repentance and union with God (ch. 13). In addition, the authors' discussion of psychopathology, sin, and the demonic (ch. 14), combined with their reflections on the nature of health and wholeness (ch. 15), clearly demonstrate how a biblically informed theological anthropology shapes a Christian definition of health and psychopathology. As a whole, Section III persuasively illustrates how the process of theological reflection is fundamental to being a Christian psychologist.

Section IV (chs. 16–17) explores a third component of the seminary curriculum, that is, *praxis* (Foster et al., 156–86), delineating points of connection between the transformational model and the practice of soul care. These chapters build on and consolidate what has been said about the practical work of spiritual formation in previous chapters and map how the model may be applied in practice while leaving the reader to creatively flesh out the details. Thus, *Psychology in the Spirit* extends the discussion beyond the study and practice of psychology and into the realm of practical theology, noting both the possibilities and challenges posed by the use of Transformational Psychology to inform the work of soul care and spiritual direction.

Finally, the authors discuss the implications of their approach for curriculum design in Christian universities and seminaries (Section V, ch. 18). While the discussion is basically an agenda for training Christian psychologists, their comments and vision raise important considerations for those who train pastors, chaplains, and pastoral counselors.

In conclusion, the authors have effectively proven their proposition, demonstrating that Christian beliefs have a valid place in academic discussions concerning personhood, human nature, psychopathology, and psycho-social well-being. Indeed, the authors present a model for doing psychology that is rooted in Scripture and a biblical-theological understanding of the nature of the human person. Thus, *Psychology in the Spirit* is an important extension of the conversation on the integration of psychology and theology and is a welcome addition to the

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literature. Indeed, it is a text that needs to be read not only by those studying psychology but also anyone doing advanced studies and research in the field of practical theology.

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