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RUNNING HEAD: Human

Being Human
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Abstract

Humans are complex, many faceted beings that function as wholes. Christians are diverse, but most believe that persons are created, fallen, potentially redeemed, imperfect, finite, dependent,

nd worth. Fallenness means that we are finite, contingent, deceivers, and fall under God's just condemnation. However, we can be redeemed, sanctified, glorified, find meaning and purpose and overcome aloneness. Conversion brings access to new resources, motives and aspirations. Christian beliefs provide a basis for an ethic that transcends race and culture, stewardship over personal and material resources, attitudes and activities related to interpersonal intimacy and sexuality, processes for personal transformation by coming to know the truth and live truly, and finding meaning and joyfulness in living. These Christian beliefs sometimes subtle and other times profound implications for the way we understand human problems such as psychopathology, and strategies and goals for human solutions such as psychotherapy goals or outcomes.

Being Human

People are complicated. Not in the sense that they are difficult to deal with (though that may be true too). People are multidimensional beings, “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). People are concerned with time and meaning, concerns which are thought to be uniquely human. Except for those who are yet too young, and those who are seriously impaired, humans are concerned at some level with several basic questions: what exists, how do I know it, how does it work, who am I, and what is good and bad (or right and wrong). In this sense we can say that everyone has a worldview. Not quite the same as religion, worldviews and religions are none-the-less closely related. Worldviews provide the basis for our understanding of who we are and of the world around us. In the words of Bevan and Kessel, “ideologies . . . are like sand at a picnic; they get into everything” (1994, p. 506). Worldviews are acquired with our mother’s milk, and largely formed before we are able to speak. They exist at a level deeper than language, so are difficult for us to know and understand, yet form the context in which all other knowing develops, including scientific and theological knowing. (Table 1 identifies basic worldview questions).

 Insert Table 1 about here

Humans are complex. Psychologists are interested in human development, emotion, sensation and perception, personality, intellect, cognition, neuropsychological functioning, and so on. Christian theologians, too, recognize human complexity. Christian views differ; theologians disagree on many points. Any attempt to describe a Christian view of humanness must somehow wrestle with this additional difficulty.

Many Christians have thought of persons as comprised of body and spirit, others of body, mind, and spirit. Still others have thought of persons in more complex ways. Yet other theologians emphasize human unity, the notion that while we are multidimensional, persons function as wholes in which the various dimensions are inseparable and intricately intertwined.

This latter view seems most helpful here. While we can divide up human functioning into somewhat distinct aspects for the sake of analysis and investigation, such distinctions are ultimately arbitrary, and distort human functioning to some degree or other. For purposes of our discussion in the following material, human functioning is described as a biopsychosocial and spiritual unity, though even that description is too simplistic.

Other important themes regarding humanness which have been raised by Christians include the notions that persons are created, fallen, potentially redeemed, imperfect, finite, and dependent. Intertwined with these themes is the theme of hope. Hope in the possibility of transformation in this life. But also hope in the promise of a new creation in which all that we deplore and abhor in the present creation will be made new and set right. Christians believe that persons are also bearers of the image of God. We will briefly examine each of these themes in turn. Because whole books have been written on these topics from various Christian perspectives, here we will only be able to emphasize salient points related to other concerns which follow later in this volume. Table 2 provides an overview of the aspects of human nature which are of significance to us here.

 Insert Table 2 about here

Biopsychosocial and Spiritual Unity

Humans function as integrated wholes. As was suggested in Chapter 2, we can and must divide science into a variety of fields for the purpose of investigation, but need also to recognize that this process is somewhat arbitrary, and inevitably distorts the underlying unity or relatedness of all knowledge. In a similar way, human functioning has a unitary quality which makes all fractionation arbitrary. In addition, fractionation inevitably leads to some distortions. Still, it is necessary to examine different aspects of human functioning one at a time due to the limitations of human capacity for knowing. While other aspects of human functioning can be delineated (such as chemical and physical), here we will be concerned primarily with the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects.

Biological. Humans are biological creatures. In this respect they are animal-like (Koteskey, 1991). The fact that humans share similarities in their animal processes to many other organisms provides the basis for comparative psychology. In comparative psychology the functioning of non-humans is studied with the aim of discovering principles of human functioning. As noted earlier, some scientists assume that humans came about through evolution from non-humans.

Christians are somewhat divided on the issue of evolution. While Christians generally affirm that God is responsible for creating all that exists, some believe that God may have used--or actually did use--evolutionary processes to accomplish His purposes. This model is often referred to as theistic evolution. Other Christians strongly reject evolution (e.g., Johnson, 1995). They point out that the assumption that time and chance resulted in the emergence of what we know without divine action is inconsistent with Christian beliefs, and that scientific the evidence for evolution is weak or missing.

Much has been said in the creation-evolution debate. Two additional points are important for our discussion here. First, evolution posits similarities among species due to phylogenetic origins. In contrast, creationism emphasizes that humans and animals were created by a common maker to live in a common world. Each of these models, and theistic evolution as well, implies we can expect to find similarity across species. The second point is that comparative psychology is thus consistent with creation, theistic evolution, and evolution. While there are other points at which the creation-evolution debate may have important implications for psychology, the study of animals to learn about humans is supported by both creation and evolution. Many in the integration movement seem to have overlooked this important point (e.g. ??).

Humans are animal-like in their biological functioning. Investigators suggest that there is far greater similarity than difference at the level of dna. There are also many similarities in the biological processes of consumption, absorption, digestion, and elimination. There are similarities in biological structures and functions, including skeletal, and glandular, and reproductive functions.

Psychological. The view that humans are psychological means that they function as whole organisms in response to events around them. This capacity is not limited to humans, of course. It is also true of pigeons and planaria, both of which have been used as subjects in psychological research. The fact that humans function psychologically is important here because it makes us a legitimate focus of psychological investigation.

That we are the focus of psychological study is somewhat disquieting to many. Unless we adopt a reductionist viewpoint, however, psychological study of persons does not negate their spiritual or moral significance. While some psychologists contend that humans are “nothing but” behaving organisms, the point here is merely that humans “are” behaving organisms.

The precise boundary between biological and psychological functioning is difficult to draw. Noam Chomsky, for example, believes that human biological endowment includes an innate language faculty. According to Chomsky, this innate faculty includes a set of language principles which form the basis for all human languages. This is known as the “theory of universal grammar” (Chomsky, 19).

Social. Humans are also, I believe, inherently social or relational beings. First, humans cannot exist without the care of others during critical phases of life, especially the first few years after birth. Thus humans have instrumental dependency on each other. They need each other for basic care functions. There are stories of an occasional person who is an exception, such as the wolf-boy of Avignon. But these remain stories. Even the stories are exceedingly rare.

Beyond the instrumental needs, humans need each other socially and relationally. Children who are not given adequate social interaction, even when well-fed, tend to become sick and die (). Object relations theorists propose that the need for relationship is a basic human need.

Even relationally, humans share features in common with non-human organisms. Whales, dolphins, apes, horses, and dogs all show elements of social behavior. Whether these are social in the same sense as for humans is more problematic. To some degree such social behaviors among non-human organisms may be related to biological functions such as getting

food (dogs hunt in packs) and safety (a band of horses is less vulnerable to predation than a lone horse).

The study of language in a variety of animals is ongoing. Based on current evidence there seems to be some rudimentary support for language or language-like behavior among the apes, and possibly among sea mammals. Some believe that even some birds have rudimentary symbolic or language behavior beyond the mere capacity to mimic the sounds of others. Huge differences remain, however.

Perhaps here we see the principle that differences in degree become differences in kind. There are a number of examples. Water, cooled to 35 degrees fahrenheit is cold water. Cooled to 30 degrees it becomes a solid, ice. Similarly, rocks heated moderately are hot rocks. Heated further they become magma. Is it possible that the differences in humans and non-humans are both differences in degree and differences in kind?

From the perspective of Christian theology, also, humans are viewed as social beings. One aspect of the image of God is relatedness. Following creation of the first human, God said “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). In the end, none of the living creatures proved to meet that need, so God formed a woman. Adam’s response to her paralleled and surpassed the responses of men and women to each other which continue to this day. They were so ideally suited to each other that it was proposed that they become “one flesh” and thus parallel the unity among the God-head.

Christians are called to live in harmony (Phil 2:1-2), to serve one another in love (Gal 5:13), to look out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4), to be “members together of one body” (Eph 3:6). This latter notion of members together implies unity of purpose, but diversity of function, just as the organs of a person’s body are distinct in design and purpose yet work together for the benefit of the whole.

Finally, Christians believe that those who are of the household of faith have a new sense of belonging. Where they were once rejected by God (Jn 3:18), now they are “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6 NKJV), children of God (1 Jn 3:1-2), and fellow-heirs with those of the household of Israel (Eph 3:6).

Spiritual. Earlier it was noted that humans are bearers of the image of God. Theologians agree that this is a distinctively human characteristic. The question for psychologists, and thus for integration, however, is how human spirituality plays itself out in human psychological functioning.

From a psychological perspective, humans are distinguished first by their complexity. This complexity is manifested in language, social organization, and in the extensive use of tools and technology. Humans are also distinct, so far as we can ascertain psychologically, in terms of their interest in the meaning and purpose in life; in ethics, values and morality; and in their concern for a relationship with the gods--or God--and an immaterial reality.

Research has demonstrated that persons who find meaning and purpose in life are better able to endure the hardships of life and less likely to experience mental health problems (). Bufford and Johnston (1982) noted that Christianity offers a source of meaning and purpose in life. Other spiritual and religious approaches can also offer meaning and purpose. But what better way to find them than in relationship with the Ultimate Other, who both created us for relationship with Him and calls us to His service. Christians believe they were “created for good works” (Eph 2:10).

Meaning and Purpose

Humans are thought by some psychologists to be inherently relational. Human existence may require some sense of meaning and purpose. At least for most humans, relationship is a fundamental source of meaning and purpose

Christians believe that humans, as contingent, dependent, finite creatures best find meaning and purpose for their existence in relationship with their creator. While the capacity for relatedness emerges in the infant-mother relationship in childhood, the most essential and primary human relationship is with the ultimate object, God. In turn, this capacity for object-relatedness reflects the presence in humans of the image of God.

the presence in humans of the image of God.

David Elkins (1999), reflecting on the importance of spirituality, stated:

Contemplation, meditation, prayer, rituals and other spiritual practices have the power to release the “life force” in the deepest levels of the human psyche, levels that *secular* interventions cannot reach. Indeed, new evidence shows that religious and spiritual interventions can help when everything else has failed.

I encourage clients and students to first figure out what moves them deeply--whether it's Beethoven, Garth Brooks or the Grateful Dead, a hike in the mountains, or a day in an art gallery. Then, I help them design a regular, structured program to incorporate these activities into their life. (Elkins, 1999; p. 45; italics original)

Finding the Good Life

It seems that in some form or other the search for the good life is a universal human concern.

Emmons (1999) in The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns proposed that this search is essentially a spiritual search.

Visions of the good life vary. Some picture it as a banquet table with an inexhaustible supply of delectables and an insatiable appetite. Others picture it in terms of accomplishments--the perfect painting or sonata, the ultimate marathon or 1500 meters, or in innumerable other forms. For others the good life is an unlimited harem and boundless capacity to enjoy its delights.

Christians describe the good life in varied ways as well, but their visions of the good life tend to take on a somewhat different quality than those suggested above. For Christians the good life is described in ways such as the following:

“ righteous, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”

“Godliness with contentment”

humility

service

spiritual fruits such as self-discipline

living a quiet life

humility

Clearly, any vision of the good life is rooted deeply in the answers each individual gives to the “big 5” questions of life. Said differently, meaning and purpose are found deeply embedded in our understanding of what exists, how it works, how we know it, what is right and wrong, and who we are as persons. The good life is essentially a value statement about what is meaningful to me or someone else.

Created

A Christian worldview includes belief in creation, as we noted earlier. Christians believe that humans are not self-existent, and that they are not merely the product of time + chance + evolution. Christians affirm that persons are created by God, though they differ in their beliefs about how God carried out the creative process.

Worth

Christians believe that each person has deep worth. Sometimes we refer to this as the “sanctity of life.” Synonyms include sacred, holy, set apart. For Christians, human worth is extended to the tiniest child--even the tiniest unborn child--and to the leaders of nations and businesses, to the frail elderly, and to those stricken with dreaded diseases such as Hansen’s Disease (leprosy) and AIDS, as well as to exquisitely-muscled athletes in the prime of life.

In our culture worth is established by the price someone is willing to pay for a given object. An original Mickey Mantle baseball card has little inherent worth. It is just a small square of cardboard, much like many others. Only the photograph and printing distinguish it from a stack of other, almost worthless, baseball cards. The fact that it may bring hundreds or even thousands of dollars is related to what someone else is willing to pay to obtain it from me.

Human worth may be gauged in a similar way. The Christian conviction that God sent His only son to die for me--for you--means that I, and you, have inestimable worth. We may not feel like it. We may not believe it. But our worth has been established by the price that God paid.

Image of God

The good news about humans, many Christians believe, is that humans are unique in all of creation because humans are created in the image of God (often referred to as *imago dei*).

Precisely what is involved in the image of God is a matter of some debate. Three principle views have been advanced: (1) the *relational view*, which understands the image of God as the human capacity to enter into relationship with God and other humans; (2) the *functional view* understands the image of God to consist of human dominion, rulership, or stewardship over creation; (3) the substantive or *structural view* understands the image of God to mean that humans possess finite counterparts of God's infinite attributes such as knowing, power, and conscious presence. It seems possible that these three aspects are inter-related dimensions of human functioning, and that the image of God includes all three aspects of structure, function, and relationship. Certainly, humans have all of these characteristics and can be distinguished from non-human organisms on each of them.

Most Christians believe that the image of God remains even when it is defiled, distorted, or marred. Each person's spiritual significance remains despite the devastation of the human fall into sin.

The notion of image of God implies that God is symbolically and spiritually present whenever a person is present since that individual bears his image. The presence of the image of God means that whatever is done to a fellow human is done to God as well. In this way all human relationship is imbued with the holy, sacred, and divine. To honor another is to honor God. Conversely, to dishonor 'even the least of them' is to dishonor God himself (Mt 25:31-46). This has important implications for how Christians understand persons, as well as how Christians are called to treat their fellow-humans. Christian views about ethics grow from this notion of honoring God in the ways we relate to those who bear his image.

Imago dei is thought to incorporate both male and female, perhaps even to be more complete in the presence of both. This is especially symbolized in the marital union. In marriage husband and wife become "one flesh" much as God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are one.

Image of God, but Fallen

There is also bad news about us as humans. We are not perfect--far from it. Reading through the recent literature on the family and individual problems in our society (e.g., Bradshaw), one could get the impression that everyone came from a dysfunctional family, even that every person

is dysfunctional. We got this way, Bradshaw and others propose, because we learned it from our families as we grew up. Freud suggested at the end of the 19th century that humans had an inherent capacity for seeking for themselves gratifications which could only be satisfied at the expense of others (Freud, 1961). At the middle of the twentieth century Reisman described persons as members of a “sick society” (Reissman, 19).

It is this pattern which Christians have in mind when they describe persons as “fallen.”

Christians believe in evil, that evil is personal, and that each of us participated in evil in both inadvertent and by choice. Fallenness implies a built-in bent toward evil and destruction, even toward self-destruction. Christians believe that this pattern is both inherited and learned from our parents (Deut 5:7-10). Christians believe the bent toward evil can be reversed, but reversed finally and fully only through the power of God.

The word “dead” is used in the Bible to describe the human condition (Eph 2:1-7; Rom 5:15, 8:10; 2 Cor 5:14). But it is a sort of living death. Physical life goes on, but it is a kind of nightmare existence. Death is used in several ways in the Bible, including physical, spiritual, and eternal death. Here, spiritual death is characterized by following the course of this world, coming under the influence of the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), and indulging carnal desires. It’s chief feature, however, is being cut off from God, the source of all life, and unable on our own to do anything about it.

Because of the fall, humans are faced with several adverse influences, all of which make us less than we might have been. First, there is human fallenness. Beyond that, the whole world system is tainted. Many Christians also believe that a fallen spirit being, Satan, is a personal force toward evil as well. These influences are sometimes simply referred to as the world, the flesh, and the devil. Together, Christians believe, these influences make us helpless to ultimately solve our own problems. Human fallenness and the influence of world, flesh, and Devil has several important implications for Christian counseling, as we shall see later. Because of this condition, Christians believe, humans abide under the judgment of God, condemned to death for falling short of the standard God set (Jn. 3:17; Ro 2:1-16). (See Os Guinness, The Dust of Death)

Human fallenness is manifested in a number of ways, Christians believe. Among these are finitude, contingency, imperfection, and self-deception.

Human Finitude. Humans are finite beings, Christians believe. Finitude has several important implications. First, it means we have a limited human capacity to know. Christians also believe that the human capacity to control events in our world, events in our universe, is limited. While God has entrusted humans with stewardship over His creation, He remains the chief steward.

Human Contingency. Christians generally hold the view that persons are not self-existent or immortal. This implies that we do not have immortal souls (a Platonic idea). The language is somewhat varied, but Christians believe both in eternal life for the redeemed, and eternal judgment or eternal death for the damned or un-redeemed. The eternal state of the individual is thought to depend on her or his relationship with God, and thus is ultimately dependent on God Himself, not on us. The belief in eternal judgment has important implications. First, what we do matters. It matter so much that eternal life or death hang in the balance. A second implication is that this life is not “all there is.” Stringfellow (1969) points out that true hope is based on this conviction.

Dishonesty and Distortion. Humans are self-deceivers who engage in a variety of processes to avoid accurate self-perception of negative attributes. Defensiveness, denial, dissociation, are widely known human faults to which all of us are prey. (cf. Ro 1-2, Jn 8:43; Jer 17:9-10; Ps 139:23-24). At one time I had an acquaintance who proudly proclaimed that she would “tell it like it is” to all concerned. In the same conversation, she cautioned my wife and me that we were not tell her parents that she was still smoking--they had paid her \$500 to quit, and she did not want them to know she had not! I was struck then, and still am, with the discrepancy between the statements. My acquaintance’s claims, while striking, are not so unusual. Sadly, I do the same kind of thing myself (though perhaps a bit more subtly) all too often. I fancy it is not quite so obvious, but even that is not so certain. One of the consequences of human fallenness is that we do not tell ourselves or others the truth: defense, denial, distortion, dissociation, even outright lying, are the way of life for all of us. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:10). Talk about truth! We do not have it. Yet “God

desires truth in the inward parts” (Ps 51:6). Even when we get glimpses of who we are, we are all too quick to forget and go our way with denial restored (Jas 1:22-25).

Christians believe there are two essential sides to human fallenness which we must grasp simultaneously. First, we are not as good as we could be. Each of us has, and will again, choose the low road. Beyond that, none of us in our own capacity is capable of being as good as we need to be to meet God’s perfect standard. Because we fall short, we are condemned already!

Condemned Already. “I’ve been rejected all my life” the woman across from me said. She went on to relate a tale of being abandoned by her father before she was old enough to know him, of a mother who was more interested in smoking pot than in caring for her daughter. She described being sexually abused by a step-father and step-brother for years.

Rejection. It is one of the most painful experiences humans undergo. Those who seek my help in the counseling room often report rejection, though sometimes in other words. Rejection is not limited to my clients. When I sit alone with my secret thoughts, I too have experienced rejection. Thus the news that I have been chosen (Eph 1:4), adopted (Eph 1:5), accepted (2 Cor 5:9; Eph 1:6), made a part of the body (Rom 12:4-5; Cor 12:13-14; Eph 4:1) and bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33) comes as incredible good news. So much so that some people I know struggle with difficulty believing that it could possibly be true that they are included in this number. But that is the good news.

The bad news is bad indeed. Christians also believe that those who have not accepted God’s plan and gracious provision are condemned. In the words of John 3:18, they are “condemned already” (KJV). In this sense, unbelievers, too share a fellowship of sorts--the fellowship of condemnation. But they do so without the benefits of the sense of family belonging that Christians can enjoy through redemption.

Redemption

“There’s no free lunch” she said. We’ve probably all heard it, typically many times. It comes in various forms, but this notion is a foundational belief of our culture--perhaps of all humans. You get what you deserve, and you deserve what you get, we believe. In a more poetic and dramatic

form, Maria, in *The Sound of Music*, having just heard that Captain Von Trapp loves her, sings out her reflection on this good fortune:

Nothing comes from nothing; nothing ever could.

So, somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good.

(Richard Rogers, Sound of Music, 1964)

Conversely, when something unpleasant happens--disease, injury, divorce, or whatever--we must have done something bad This, perhaps, is one of the reasons we have such difficulty accepting those who are disadvantaged or handicapped: deep inside we secretly believe that somehow they must deserve their plight. To believe otherwise is to face our own potential for misfortune, even our own mortality. It is too painful to come to grips with the possibility that a slight slip, a minor misjudgment, exposure to a pathogen, or some other mishap could bring us to a similar--or worse--state.

The Bible talks about this human belief in justice, perhaps most notably in the book of Job. The book of Job revolves around the belief, held by Job and his friends, that God blesses the righteous but judges the wicked (Job 4:7-9; 8:20; 11:13-20). Job's friends believed he had done evil since Job's obvious misfortune convinced them that he was undergoing God's judgment. Job believed that he was righteous, but that God had brought judgment on him anyway. Job went so far as to propose that God had been unjust in bringing misfortune upon him (Job 9:1-10:22). This view of divine justice seems to be a widely shared human belief. You get what you deserve. What goes around comes around. You must have done something good--or bad.

Redemption flies in the face of the conviction that you get what you deserve. The good news of Christian salvation is of the incredible kindness, the incomprehensible grace, of God. Christians believe that God offers forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation as a free gift (Eph 2:8-10). All that is required is that we accept this gift. Those who accept it become new creatures (2 Cor 5:17), born of God and marked with His seed (1 Jn 3:9), sealed with His Spirit (Eph 1:13-14), and thus empowered to a renewed life (Phil 2:12-14) of service to God (Heb 9:13-14) and other persons (Gal 5:13-14).

To become a new creature in Christ, Christians believe, involves receiving a new nature, acquiring new motivations, entering into new relationships, and receiving new capacities and empowerment through the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. This has great practical implications for counseling such as motivating and enabling the individual to enter into the spiritual disciplines in a new way, as we shall see later.

Most, perhaps all, religions and approaches to human spirituality are concerned with the question of how we can enjoy a good life. While religions typically focus on what humans must do to obtain the blessings of the gods, Christianity stands out in its belief that God reaches out to us. Christians believe that God took the initiative to do what we could not.

Christians believe that God stepped in to solve the problem of our helpless, hopeless condition. Jesus Christ, Son of God, took on human form, lived, and died a sacrificial death to pay the price of reconciliation. Accepting this gracious provision of God is described as becoming a “new creation” and as a “second birth,” thus signifying that it resolves the problem of spiritual death. Even many Christians struggle at some level with the belief that whatever happens to us is deserved. This belief makes it difficult for us to accept God’s grace for ourselves--or others. Our own private responses to reports of the death-row conversion of serial-murderer, Ted Bundy, or to the Christian profession of convicted Texas pickaxe murderer, Karla Faye Tucker, may shed some light on where we are with respect to this belief.

The belief that you get what you deserve, and you deserve what you get, is a basic one which comes up repeatedly in counseling. When psychological misfortunes befalls us, or when other misfortunes produce psychological effects, it is common to wrestle with this perplexing question. The victims of misfortune often are also beset by those, often well-meaning, who believe that they are suffering due to their own fault--their own personal sinfulness; thus their suffering is deserved. A personal friend, recovering in her hospital bed shortly after surgery, was confronted with the question “Why are you here?” The initial response, “Because I’ve just had surgery clearly was not acceptable to the questioner. It soon became clear the question was essentially about what secret sin the person had committed to deserve this discipline.

Capacity to Know God

Christians believe that it is possible to enter into a relationship with God through redemption. God initiated the relationship, but it requires a human response of acceptance. For those who enter into relationship with God there are many important practical implications. They are adopted as beloved sons of God. As adopted members of God's family (1 Jn 3:1), Christians become brothers and sisters. Thus they can enter into a relationship of mutual care and support, much as might be expected in a healthy human family. In this life they can have mutual support from each other, plus the power of God's Spirit at work in them. Along with these is the promise of a future hope (Jer 29:11-13), an inheritance (Col 1:12, 3:23-24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pe 1:4), and blessings beyond comprehension (1 Cor 2:9).

Justification. Redemption, or justification, Christians believe, is offered freely to all who will accept it. Redemption is undeserved. It must be accepted in faith in the person and character of God. Redemption brings with it the hope of transformation in this life, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It also brings the promise of recreation. There is an already and not yet quality to this process. Christians continue to live as fallen persons in a fallen world. But positionally, in God's eyes, they are already "seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:12).

Redemption offers to us joy, peace, hope, and love. Joy at the freedom from the penalty of death through what God has done. Peace with God, and the potential for peace within ourselves and with our fellow-humans through God at work in us. Hope that God will bring about what he has promised although we cannot see it at present. Love, because we begin to know God's love, and through knowing His love we can begin to love others as He has called us to do (1 Jn 2-4).

The redemption which God offers surpasses human comprehension. Often Christians talk about salvation, or being “saved.” Salvation is a multi-faceted process. Traditionally it has

justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification, or redemption, involves the gift of forgiveness. One can inherit a million dollars, but the money is of no value until the person believes the inheritance is real and takes the needed steps to receive the money. Similarly, forgiveness cannot be earned. But it must be received in order to be of value.

Redemption is such a powerful life-transforming process that it is referred to variously as adoption, grafting of a shoot on a vine, rebirth, and re-creation. The Christian is said to have God's seed in her or him, and is described as God's child (1 Jn 3:1-3). Through this process the new Christian comes to have new relationships, both with God and with other Christians. The Christian also gains new desires or motivations, and new capacities to carry out actions pleasing to God (Phil 2:13-14). Sadly, not all who call themselves Christian have undergone this transformation. Still, Christians believe it is possible, and many Christians profess to have experienced it.

Sanctification. The second aspect of salvation is sanctification. Sanctification is a process or spiritual growth which unfolds over time as the Christian engages in the regular practice of spiritual disciplines. Through this process the Christian grows in knowledge of and relationship with God, and gradually gains freedom from the power of sin in daily life. More is said about this area in Chapter 8 in the sections on spiritual wellbeing and spiritual maturity. In brief, they involve a deep sense of belonging, a gradual cessation of distress, and a growing sense of peace, hope, joy, belonging, and meaning and purpose in life which grows out of fruitful service to God and others. Christians believe these transformations can take place in life on the earth, here and now. Christians become part of a new family. As members of a "family" of believers, Christians are described as "members" of a body (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4:11-13; 1 Pe 4:10-11). Christians believe they are called to unity of purpose and harmony of relationships (Jn 13:35) while at the same time diverse in their personal qualities and gifts. In the sanctification process, the Christian cooperates with God. The individual can, and sometimes does, stymie the sanctification process. But Christians believe that people can change in ways not humanly possible when God is at work in them. Nonetheless, such change is limited.

Sanctification is also referred to as *spiritual growth/maturity*. Just as human persons are born with limited capacity for self-care or responsible action, Christians believe that the Christian's walk with God begins with birth, requires care and feeding in the early stages, but can be followed by a process of growing strength and capacity and lead eventually to spiritual maturity. Christianity is not just about getting rescued from our fallenness. It is about being transformed into Christ-likeness or spiritual maturity. We will return to this theme in Chapter 8.

Glorification. The third aspect of salvation is glorification. Most Christians view this as an event which will occur at some unknown future time. The word "heaven" or the expression a "new heaven and a new earth" is used to describe both the place and the transformation which Christians believe will take place (Is 65:17). It appears that the glories, pleasures, and joys of heaven are beyond human comprehension (1 Cor 2:9). It is said that we will then "know fully" even as we are fully known by God (1 Cor 13:12). This transformation, most Christians believe, will be God's doing at some future time. It includes receiving a new body, with transformed capacities for knowing, behaving, and relating (1 Cor 15).

Grasping what heaven will be like is beyond us. Its description is mostly in terms of negations--statements that what is unpleasant and undesirable now will not be present there. There will be no more wars, no more sorrows, no more tears, no more pain. Disease, disaster, injustice, and all forms of evil will be absent. The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, and the child will play with the viper (Is 11:6-9). "They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain" (Is 11:9) God says. What exactly will be present is less clear. But it appears that it will include light, feasting, celebration, worship, intimacy of a kind presently unknown, and joy beyond comprehension (Ps 16:11). These are the things which Karl Marx dismissed as "pie in the sky by and by" (**). To be sure, they are not available to us now. But it seems they are worth waiting for. Meanwhile, the transformation described above can make this life better and prepare us for joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pe 1:8).

Meaning and Purpose Revisited. Christians believe that humans, as contingent, dependent, finite creatures best find meaning and purpose for their existence in relationship with

their creator. While the capacity for relatedness emerges in the infant-mother relationship in childhood, the most essential and primary human relationship is with the ultimate object, God.

In turn, this capacity for object-relatedness reflects the presence in humans of the image of God.

Legal, Moral and Ethical Concerns

Each of us seems to have an inherent sense of justice or fairness. We become offended and believe that we have been wronged. But what is good? Bad? All of us seem to share at some level in the aspiration voiced in the Coke commercial:

I'd like to teach the world to sing
In perfect harmony

Teaching the world to sing in perfect harmony--more literally, putting an end to the conflicts among and within us--is a worthy goal. If only we could do that in Kosovo! And in ourselves!

Christians believe that before it is possible to truly be an agent of peace in the world one must first make peace with God and with God's help attain peace within. For Christians, the person and character of God provide the basis for all justice, morality, and ethics.

Some question whether law and morality is anything more than a social convention. They propose that morals can change, or even be discarded if we choose. Christians affirm a God-given standard of right and wrong. They believe that justice and morality are a part of the way things are, and a part of the truth about reality as well. Christians believe that all humans will ultimately face the need to account for their conduct before God, either through bearing the penalty of falling short of God's perfect moral standard, or by having the penalty paid on their behalf by Christ. In one of these two ways, Christians believe, God will ultimately judge all moral failure (). Further, Christians believe that human government is ordained by God to uphold justice and punish evil. While conceding that justice is never fully accomplished by fallen people in a fallen world, Christians believe that the absence of government can be worse than imperfect government.

Some have proposed that morality is the product of evolution and serves to promote survival. However, Moreland pointed out that conceptual problems arise in evolutionary ethics.

“If one accepts atheistic versions of evolutionary ethics, then this provides strong evidence that no moral properties or virtues constitute the natures of acts and things (e.g., persons), and there are not objective, absolute moral principles” (p. 55). Assumptions of the Big Bang, and blind evolutionary process, in which morality merely serves to foster survival “provides strong evidence against our common-sense intuitions about the nature, form, and objectivity of morality” (p. 55).

Relativism, the notion that morality is based in culture and circumstance, ultimately leads to moral indifference according to Colson (1997). When right is defined merely by what I or someone else thinks at the moment, morality ultimately does not matter. The result is a tendency for everyone to do what seems right in her or his own eyes. Still, most people recognize that there may be social consequences anyway for what we do. Thus we become more concerned with guarding our backsides rather than with doing right.

New Resources.

Christians believe that redemption, becoming a child of God, opens up new human capacities through the work of God’s Spirit within. It appears that there are two dimensions of this transformation: new motivations, and a new capacity to carry out positive efforts for self and others.

New Motives and Altruism. The whole notion that humans do things for others apart from selfish motives is in question. Traditionally, altruism had the connotation of doing good for others with no expectation of personal gain. But researchers who investigate altruism question this belief. Christians also question this notion, but on somewhat different grounds; Christians believe that they are motivated and empowered by God to do good for others.

Hope. In the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever, Covenant is portrayed as a leper, condemned to a life of isolation, loneliness, and despair. In a seemingly-prophetic confrontation, Covenant is met one day by a decrepit old man who pronounced “There is also hope in the world” (). The setting and the story are a bit different. But that is the story of Christianity. There is also hope! Here we are, fallen persons, living in a fallen world,

surrounded by evil on the outside, bent toward evil on the inside. But there is also hope. The Christian belief is that this can all be changed through entering into a relationship with God.

One of the few unique things that Christians can bring to counseling is this sense of hope. That no matter how bad things are, no matter how harmed, wronged, damaged the person may be now, there is still hope. Christian counseling may be unique in its belief in the power of God through the Holy Spirit outside ourselves to change and motivation outside ourselves to want to change (Phil 2:12-14)).

False Christians

Most Christians agree that not everyone who professes to be Christian in fact is so. The fact that humans are self-deceivers suggests that this might be so. Beyond that, a number of scriptures point to it as well. In the parable of the wheat and tares (Mt 13:25-40), Jesus suggests that bad seed has been sown with the good, but that separation awaits the judgment. One reason for this delay lies in the very difficulty of telling the difference between the two at present, though deeds are a distinguishing mark. Perhaps another reason for the delay is that God is about the process of turning tares into wheat. Finally, Christians are encouraged that the practice of righteousness, in contrast with the practice of sinfulness, is a source of subjective reassurance that we are indeed God's children (1 Jn 3:1).

Human Cultural Distinctives

Christian beliefs have important implications for cultural distinctives. These reflect paradoxical truths which must be held in tension. The first principle is that human separation, including hostility about human differences, is rooted in the entrance of sin into our world. From a theological perspective these consequences are sometimes described as the judgment of God on human sin. From a human perspective it may be more helpful to describe them as the consequences of human choices.

Following partaking of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve began to place blame and to experience conflict over "control issues" (Gen 3:11-13; 3:15). Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden, and barred from re-entry. The next major event of interest is the

conflict between Cain and Abel, resulting in fratricide. Their conflict was over religious/spiritual issues, presaging a second human division and related conflicts which continue today.

The next major event in the book of Genesis is the growing evil of humankind. The judgment of God is carried out with a great flood which wiped out all of the human race except the family of Noah. Human history began once more with one family, and that family quickly fell into evil once more. Everyone began to build a tower to “reach into Heaven” (Gen 11:4). This action was followed by the creation of language and culture (Gen 11:5-10); some view this as an act of divine judgment, while others view it as merely a part of God carrying out His divine plans.

While Christians are not fully agreed about how to interpret these scriptures, the important point for us here is that a part of the plan of redemption is the breaking down of such barriers. Babel symbolizes the division of humankind into groups distinguished by language and culture, and marked by suspicion and hostility. In contrast, the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, resulted in the redemption of humans. One aspect of this redemptive transformation is the blotting out of the barriers of race and gender (Eph 2:14-18). Perhaps this, too, is an example of the principle of already and not yet. Incipiently, among believers, the barriers of race, gender, and culture are removed. Christians believe that in the coming kingdom there will no longer be such barriers to divide humans. Some Christians believe that such a condition will come on this earth at a future time; others believe that the coming kingdom will be established in a new heaven and a new earth.

According to Colson “the heart of culture is religion. Religion shapes a people’s most fundamental outlook on life--their values and attitudes” (Colson, 1997; p. 40). Colson’s views at this point parallel those proposed here.

Culture and Knowing. One of the thorny issues raised by the multicultural concerns of postmodernism is that of whether all knowing is culturally relative. Related, but more troublesome, is the notion that all views are equally legitimate--even equally true. Most Christians have reservations about this latter notion. For the most part, persons holding non-

Christian views probably also have misgivings about the notion that all views are equally true.

The suggestion in some quarters that some construals of reality are more viable than others () is an unsatisfactory way to resolve the question of truth. It merely substitutes a pragmatic standard--viability (or utility)--for an epistemological standard, truth. In discussing the difficulties in defining mental disorders, Widiger (1997) recently stated

es means that the perspectives of all cultures are equally valid . . . Cultures that aspire to base their beliefs on objective, dispassionate, and critical observations of empirical data do often fail in this effort, but . . . will be relatively more successful overall in getting closer to the truth than cultures that are less reliant on the principles and methods of science. (p. 264)

Widiger's conclusions are helpful, but too narrow. Rather, it can be argued that those who rely on a balanced approach to knowing which even-handedly takes into account experience, intuition, reason, science, and authority will generally arrive at the best approximations of truth. Short of a view such as this, intellectual and theological--even scientific--debates reduce to exercises in persuasion rather than efforts to approximate truth. Without such a view, claims that one view is better--or more true--than another become meaningless. Thus it is contended that most human intellectual discourse is based on the assumption of a notion akin to this one.

Tolerance Revisited. Prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude have long been among the cardinal virtues of our culture. Recently, tolerance has been added in the context of multiculturalism. In machines, tolerance allows for small variations from design specifications because perfection is not possible. When tolerances are too wide, machines self-destruct. In recent years, great gains have been made in mechanical reliability among especially Japanese automobiles through the adoption of a "zero tolerance" strategy in which the degree of variation from specifications has been systematically reduced. While social and cultural perfection are also unachievable, and tolerance for diversity is essential, one wonders whether our choice to increase tolerance, at least in some instances, is not similarly self-destructive.

When upheld as a virtue, tolerance can be destructive of other virtues. Tolerance of imprudence or injustice, beyond narrow limits, annihilates these virtues. Tolerance of injustice precludes

justice; tolerance of dishonesty undermines truth and trust. And so on. Curiously among many who advocate tolerance, the vice they most vigorously oppose is bigotry--they cannot tolerate intolerance.

The challenge, then, is to love the persons in question, but not to tolerate their evil actions. It is precisely this delicate balance to which Christians are called. Perhaps it is here that we can most clearly see the truth that “love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God” (1 Jn 3).

Sadly, too often we blow it on one side or the other of this balance point.

Tolerance is directed toward something which is merely mediocre, or even bad, undesirable, or unacceptable. Tolerance implies that one endures that which is petty, mean-spirited, or inferior.

One does not tolerate beauty, virtue, achievement, or the like; one admires and applauds them.

Grace is a related concept, but grace is deeper and richer. Grace gives. It is undeserved good.

Grace labels as ill or evil that which is forgiven, but actively extends forgiveness. Christians are called to extend grace and love, even to their enemies. Not mere tolerance, to manifest the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Christians, in fact humans in general, seem to assume that some views are more true than others, even though we often disagree about which ones they are. This does not, however, justify disrespect for other views, or for the persons who hold them. Christians generally believe that as bearers of the image of God, all humans deserve respect. Christians believe that what we do to another human is as if it were done to God himself. Christians are called to love even those who persecute them (Mt 5:42-48). Sadly, we fail all too often to live out this belief!

A final consideration about culture is the proposal that much as personal strengths and weaknesses are related, so a culture’s strengths and weakness seem to be related. Typically cultures will have both strengths and weaknesses. Further, those strengths and weaknesses are likely to be complementary. This suggests that as a general principle, cultures are not so much better or worse than each other as better or worse than each other in a particular respect.

Stewardship

Most Christians believe that all that exists belongs to God (Hag 2:8; Ps 24:1, 50:12, 89:11; 1 Cor 10:26). The Christian view of abilities and possessions is one of stewardship. Christians believe that our attitude about skills and possessions should be one of grateful and generous use rather than one of possessiveness.

Work, too, is affected by Christian beliefs. The “protestant work ethic” has come to be mostly viewed in a negative light as a form of workaholism in modern America. Christians do believe that it is a Christian responsibility to work for their needs and wants. However, Christians also believe that rest is a God-honoring responsibility. While many Christians, sadly, disregard it, Christians widely believe they are called to one day of rest each week. A part of the background for this rest is a trust in God that he will provide adequately through six days of labor each week. Interestingly, there is empirical support for greater productivity with a six-day work week.

Sexuality and Spirituality

For humans, engaging in sexual intimacy is a spiritual experience. For some it is likely is an overt act of worship. For others it probably seems as though sexual intimacy is both degrading and animalistic--sex may be spiritual, but it definitely is a downer. Still, because of the presence of *imago dei*, human sexuality has a spiritual connection. MacKnee (1997) proposed that sexuality and spirituality have common roots in human incompleteness and the search for wholeness. Perhaps it is this connection which accounts for the intense responses among many Christians to sexual issues. It is as if somehow, perhaps more subconsciously than consciously, we recognize the sacred in the sexual and recognize its potential threat to Christian spirituality. Perhaps less often, we are also aware of its potential contribution both to our sense of completeness and to our connection with and understanding of our relationship to God (see Eph 5:21-32).

Becoming True

Many Christians believe that truth is personal--truth is a person (Jn 14:6). Christians believe there is also a sense in which the Christian life is a life of becoming true. Becoming true begins with the admission that we fall short of God’s holy standard. Being born of God is described as

creation in truth (Eph 4:24). It involves becoming filled in an ongoing way with the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn 5:7), who represents the God of Truth at work in the life of the individual Christian. Through this process Christians are empowered to walk in truth, and to seek truth in the inward parts, to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Ro 12:1-2; Eph 4:23), to have true hearts (Heb 10:22), and to worship God in truth (Jn 4:23-24). Christians believe that obedience and service to God is the path to knowing truth (Jn 8:31-32; Heb 5:12-14). Jesus is described as true (Mt 22:16; Mk 12:14; Jn 1:14, 17; 14:6), and the true light (Jn 1:9). Similarly, God is described as true (Jn 7:28; 8:6, 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Th 1:9; 1 Jn 5:20; Re 3:7; 6:10; 19:11), and the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). The Christians commonly believe that the basis of truth for humans lies in entering into a relationship with the God of truth.

Finding Joy

A friend and colleague once told me “There are two ways to find satisfaction in life. One is to do what you feel like doing. The other is to do what you believe is right.” The satisfaction which comes from doing the latter is broader, deeper, and more lasting. Joy comes when the two paths lie together--when what we want to do comes into alignment with what we know is right. Then we are pure of heart, and we can find the joy and peace Christians believe that God means each person to have. (See Seligman, APA Monitor, August, 1999).

Conclusions

While Christians differ in many beliefs, most Christians believe that humans are complex. The expression that humans function as biopsychosocial and spiritual unities has been used to summarize this, but it is recognized that even this expression is too simplistic.

Christians believe that humans are created, and bear the image of God, which is likely also multifaceted. Humans have great worth both as bearers of God’s image and as those for whom God paid the ultimate price, the death of his son. Humans are fallen, but can be redeemed. They are finite, contingent beings who depend on God for their continued existence and for having their needs met. Humans not only are dishonest with each other, they are self-deceivers.

Because of their corporate and individual transgressions of divine standards, humans are fallen, and stand under God's condemnation. Christians believe that God reaches out to us, offering redemption if we will receive it. Those who are redeemed enter into a process of transformation in this life called variously sanctification, spiritual formation, and spiritual growth. Following death, Christians believe that a second transformation will occur. Called glorification, this involves receiving a new body and new capacities which are more God-like. Salvation and spiritual growth have profound implications for human functioning, Christians believe.

These include the potential of the new resource of God at work in the individual believer, involvement in the family of God, and a process of growth toward more whole and healthy personal, social, and spiritual functioning.

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Table 1

Worldviews: Basic Questions

Basic Questions

What exists?

How do we know it?

How does it work?

Who am I?

What's wrong (and right)?

Philosophical Domains

Metaphysics

Epistemology

Cosmology

Anthropology

Ethics

Table 2

Major Christian Beliefs about Being Human¹

Humans are complex and diverse

Humans function as a biosychosocial and spiritual whole or unity

Humans seek meaning and purpose

Humans are created beings

Humans are of inestimable worth

Humans bear the image of God

Humans are imperfect or fallen

Humans limitations include finitude, contingent existence, self-deception, and divine condemnation

Humans can know God, be redeemed/justified, sanctified, and glorified

Moral, ethical, legal concerns (aka spiritual concerns)

False Christians

New resources: motivation and hope

Humans exist in cultural contexts: Cultural distinctives in Christian perspective

Stewardship

Sexuality and spirituality

Becoming true

Finding joy

Strand (1998) describes human personhood as “the coordinated interworking of three characteristics, which are acquired by human beings during early development. . . . Personhood is something possessed only by those humans who develop to an adequate measure of bodily, soulful, and spiritual function. One’s personhood is fully realized on this earth only as one is conformed to the image of Christ, who alone is fully human (1 Jn 3:2). (p. 88)

Strand, M. A. (1998). The meaning of personhood. Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith, 50, 88-94.

God does not show partiality (Ac 10:34 f), extending the opportunity of entering into a relationship with Him to anyone who is willing (Jn 3:16;).

The significance of *imago dei* is underscored by Jesus' remark that giving water to the thirsty and food to the hungry is the same as giving it to Him personally (Mt. 25:31-45). He said "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Mt 25:40b).