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**A METHOD FOR DEVELOPING PSYCHOLOGICAL  
THEORIES FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Prepared for the  
37<sup>th</sup> International Faith and Learning  
Held at  
Avondale College  
February, 2008

## Introduction

Our mission as Adventist educators is to expand the knowledge of and restore students to a relationship with Christ so that they may become men and women of conviction, principle, and faith, and so better serve in this world and the next. This becomes a formidable challenge as one encounters generally accepted scientific theories, often core to the curriculum, that are in conflict, sometimes very subtly, with our faith and the true sources of knowledge God has given us. This is especially true in the field of psychology. Many educators have highlighted the dangers of worldviews such as pantheism, humanism, and naturalism, not only within the so called “soft sciences”, but within other fields of knowledge as well. As such, proficiency in “critical thinking” or “analytical reasoning” form an integral part of our philosophy of education for students at the tertiary level (Rasi et al., 2001). As a result of the conflict between popular psychological theories and an understanding based on the Bible in areas such as human nature, personality and therapy, many Adventist psychologists have tried to reconstruct popular theories from a Christian worldview. Examples of such attempts include Beardsley (2003), Fayard (2006), Ravelo (1991), Reinecke (1994), Smith (1996), and Springett (1998). Nicholas Onyango's work, in this same volume, demonstrates a worthy effort to untangle and re-evaluate some of the common therapeutic modalities using an Adventist worldview.

While these represent a commendable and valuable exercise in the integration of faith and learning, the author suggests that in order to develop a truly integrated understanding of human psychology one cannot start with secular theories as a base of operation. One reason is that psychology is typified by a conundrum of opposing and conflicting theories. In therapy alone there are thousands of approaches to choose from. While many may be seen as complementary perspectives, there are also those that are in direct conflict at multiple levels. The danger of these theories lies not only in that they present a false and limited picture of human functioning and potential, but that these theories subtly influence the way in which students and educators think. Ultimately, secular psychological theories fail to address, if not negate, the role Christ plays in daily shaping and transforming the character of man. This is not to say that there is no truth in modern psychology, or that it is not possible to critically discern that which is useful from that which may be erroneous. Only that this is a tricky and dangerous enterprise as “error rarely appears for what it really is. It is by mingling with or attaching itself to truth that it gains acceptance” (White, 1903, p. 231).

As Adventist educators we have the task of expanding students' knowledge of God, man, and nature, while instilling an awareness of our complete dependence on God in all matters, from understanding to healing. If we are not careful we may lead students to depend on their own

strength, intellect, or ability to achieve in their lives that which can be attributed to God alone.

Within the field of psychology, various modes of integrating faith, learning and practice have been proposed. A good summary of these is presented by Habenicht (2000), which will be discussed later on. Based on personal experience, as well as the widespread practice in most Christian universities of emphasizing “critical thinking”, it appears as though most educators approach the problem using transformatory and correlatory processes. It is commendable that educators teach their students to think and learn worldviewishly (this term is used by Sire (1990) to describe the ability to understand knowledge in terms of how it relates to worldviews). However, it is argued here that in addition to this, and at times with more emphasis, we need to develop new theories based on Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy.

The thesis of this article is that many contemporary psychological theories are in conflict with that which is revealed regarding human behaviour, thought and purpose in the Holy Scriptures; that an approach to teaching solely focused on critical appraisal of these theories from a theistic worldview is limited; and that new theories should be developed based on those principles of psychology contained in the Word of God. It is argued that in Adventist education, more educators need to put themselves to the task of developing sound and comprehensive theories, founded in the Scriptures and thereafter embroidered with information gathered through scientific methods.

The importance of developing new theories to incorporate into our curricula is twofold. Firstly, by covering secular theories that are often at odds with Biblical evidence and then teaching students to tear these apart, we are creating a theoretical vacuum leaving students vulnerable to future indecision, ambiguity and weakness. Secondly, in order to maintain a steady footing in the academic arena, we cannot rely merely on the laurels of our astute critique of others' work and worldview; we need to bring our own theories and knowledge to the table. What is needed is to “let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation”, to allow them to “contemplate the great facts of duty and destiny, and the mind will expand and strengthen” (White, 1903, p. 17). It is only in this way that we can be true to our calling as distinctively Adventist educators.

This paper presents one possible methodology for achieving this end. It is suggested that knowledge from revelation and science are both beneficial to gaining a fuller understanding of psychology, as long as the correct methodology is applied. In the next section the author will outline some of the conflict between psychology and Christianity and the solutions that have been proposed. The author thereafter discusses a way forward for the development of Christian theories of psychology, before concluding with an example of a course taught from this perspective.

## Conflict between psychology and Christianity

Psychology is an impressively broad discipline, including many specialized sub-fields and perspectives. Conflicts between psychology and Christianity are much more likely in fields such as personality theory and approaches to therapy, while little conflict arises in specialized areas, such as psychological descriptions of perception, learning or development. Bobgan and Bobgan (1987) suggest that from a Christian perspective, psychology can be useful for description, but not for direction. They argue that “psychological statements which describe human behaviour or which report results of research can be scientific. However, when we move from describing human behaviour to explaining it and particularly changing it, we move from science to opinion” (p. 29). Holmes (1977) suggests that ultimately, science and Christianity seldom conflict over empirical data, rather it is *a priori* principles and philosophical assumptions that are often at the heart of debate.

For example, contemporary humanistic psychological theories assume that the power to effect change, ensure well-being and realize one's potential are bound within the individual, while the Scriptures extol people to trust in God for healing and salvation. The underlying values of mainstream psychology tend towards acceptance, being value free, the relief of guilt, and reintegration into “normal” life, while Christians emphasize “calling sin by its rightful name.” Jung, a prominent psychiatrist, asserted that “modern man has heard enough about guilt and sin. He is sorely enough beset by his own bad conscience, and wants rather to learn how he is to reconcile himself to his own nature – how he is to love the enemy in his own heart and call the wolf his brother” (Jung, 1934, p. 274). The Scriptures, on the other hand, plead for us to humble ourselves in complete dependence and obedience to God, who is the source of all truth (Deuteronomy 10:12,13; 1 Samuel 2:9; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Ezekiel 33:11). Many psychological theories, developed from a worldview at odds with religion, seem to demonstrate that “human ambition seeks for knowledge that will bring to them glory, and self-exultation, and supremacy” (White, 1952, p. 12). The following quotes from prominent psychologists demonstrate how resolute this tendency has been within the field (Duffie, 1968; Fayard, 2006):

- “man is the measure of all things” (Erich Fromm, using the words of Protagoras)
- “I have constantly to repeat that neither the moral law nor the concept of God nor any religion has ever fallen down from outside, so to speak from heaven, upon mankind, but man has all this within him from the beginning and therefore he creates it out of himself” (Carl Jung)
- “the evidence upon which he can base a value judgement is supplied by his own senses, his own experience...the value system is not necessarily something imposed from without, but is

something experienced” (Carl Rogers)

- “devout and orthodox religiosity is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance” (Albert Ellis)

Whereas early astronomy, physics and other such disciplines were essentially developed from a Christian worldview, the early giants of psychology were by-and-large self-confessed atheists, and in fact many were openly antagonistic to the Christian religion (Sire, 1990). While this position has seemed to have shifted as of late, with the upsurge of spirituality, there remains a measure of bias against religion that remains (APA, 1999, 2003, as cited in Fayard, 2006). As a result, the majority of psychologists have developed their theories based on assumptions, principles and values that are far removed from those of Scripture. This has had a profound influence on psychology as it is possibly “the discipline that is most affected by religious world view considerations” (Van Leeuwen, 1985, p. 259). Similarly, earlier Christian views tended to be far more critical of psychological ideas than modern discussions. One reason is that the psychology of today has far more empirical evidence to support its procedures and methods than two decades ago. More and more, psychologists are moving towards empirically-supported practice, to the point where it is now possible to conduct meta-analyses of meta-analyses on given topics (Lipsey & Wilson, 1993). However, the fact remains that these remain limited through their exclusion of sources of knowledge based in revelation.

At the heart of much of the conflict between psychology and Christianity are differences in epistemology. Psychologists believe that one may discover truth through the use of rigorous, replicable, objective scientific methodology (there are those who abandon the search for truth altogether, focusing instead on the constructed meaning of reality from a phenomenological post-modern approach). Christians agree that God created in us the ability to reason, and that truth is imbued in nature waiting to be discovered. However, they suggest that ultimate truth is given to man through revelation, that the Word of God is truth. Some Christians argue that nature and man have been marred by sin and therefore nature no longer reflects as clearly the truth of God. Psychologists counter with the argument that if man is fallen, then so is his interpretation of Scripture.

As a result of this conflict some Christians have called for the removal of psychology from Christian lives and education, while others opt for an integration of valid psychological and theological thought, although the term integration appears to have many different meanings. Central to this debate is which field takes precedence. While some Christians assert that theological principles should be integrated into psychology, others purport that psychological insights shed

more light on theological interpretation (Kille, 2002). To some clinicians the contradictions between the disciplines have not been as apparent, but in cases where their comprehensive psychological training has failed them, their faith has not (Eng, 1998).

The efforts of theorists to integrate psychology and religion can be categorised under three distinct eras: unsystematic activities until the early 1970s; a period of intense model building starting in the late 1970s that gradually simmered down, and a relatively stagnant period during the late 1990s (Habenicht, 2000). It generally follows that the quality of integration is directly affected by the quality of the research methods used, which applies to both fields (Farnsworth, 1985). In addition, integration is considered to be an activity of conservative Christians, liberal Christians “have no hope of developing a Biblically sound perspective of psychology since they have forsaken the authoritative teachings of the Scriptures” (Narramore, 1981, p. 33).

A useful approach for looking at the different models of integration was proposed by Eck (1996), and is synthesized well in Habenicht (2000). This model proposes three basic types of approaches to integration:

1. Non-integrative, in which either psychology or theology rejects the other as a source of truth. Examples of this approach are Bobgan and Bobgan (1987) and Adams (1976).
2. Manipulative integration, in which reconstruction results in one field being informed by the other or transformation taking place by filtering out the world views of the submissive field. This approach is prominent in Van Leewen (1982, 1985).
3. Non-manipulative integration, in which both are seen as valid sources of truth and are integrated based on correlations between levels or linkages, or by seeking out unified concepts. An example of this approach is the work of Kotesky (1980).

These methods of integration are somewhat mirrored by the relationships between psychology and theology proposed by Craddock (2001), who proposed four types of Christian perspectives regarding psychology, which influence the type of dialogue that takes place between the disciplines. The first stance, '*psychology as contaminant*', is represented by authors such as Jay Adams, David Powlison, and the Bobgans; who argue that integration leads to a corruption and polluting of theology by psychology. In the second perspective, '*psychology as foe*', Christians view psychology as antagonistic or derogatory to their views and beliefs and therefore completely reject psychology as having any value. In the third view, '*psychology as partner in integration*', theologians and psychologists attempt to identify the shared principles intrinsic to both in the hope of developing a shared knowledge through dialogue between theological categories and their parallel psychological topics. In the last view, '*psychology as support*', Christians borrow

psychological concepts and techniques when they are useful for bolstering theological insights, are pragmatic, and are not overtly in conflict with Christian beliefs and values. Craddock (2001) proposes that the most productive method of integration is likely to be what she calls perspectivalism, based largely on the work of Jeeves (1976). Within this approach, each field engages in both intra- and inter-disciplinary work and evaluation, then multiple perspectives that are exhaustive, not synonymous, compatible, and ideally have a common reference are compared and challenged, until they can be incorporated into a unifying theory. The weakness of this theory, and some of the other integrationist theories, is that they fail to address how one perspective is to be chosen over another, and do not adequately explore the underlying worldviews and assumptions of the perspectives to be integrated focusing more on semantics. All of these attempts at integration have generated some valuable insights; however, seeing as psychology is so fraught with sophism, the probability of passing error into new theory is too high to warrant non-manipulative integrational methods.

One of the primary tasks in the integration dialogue has been to specify the overarching worldview of each domain. Every theory developed and research study conducted, whether acknowledged or not, has a basic set of assumptions, or propositions upon which it is based, influencing the kinds of questions that will be asked, the methods likely to be used, and the interpretation of results. Indeed, much good work has been done to delineate the assumptions central to a Christian worldview (e.g. Sire, 1990). Habenicht (2000) has proposed several assumptions that are central to an Adventist worldview, while Roberto Ouro (1997) presented a useful worldview model specifically for psychology based on seven pillars or assumptions. Based on this worldview, he proposes what he calls the Bio-Psycho-Spiritual-Social or Basic-Four model, and a new paradigm for psychology called the neocognitive paradigm in which scholars may study perception, motivation, thinking, beliefs, and attributions. Ouro (1997) suggests that such a study should restore man to a wholeness and oneness with his creator. The strength of Ouro's (1997) proposal is that it awakens us to the need for a comprehensive model of psychology that is unified; unified because it is based on the source of truth, rather than continuing to use "a patchwork adaptation of today's dominant scientific paradigms" (p. 241).

This approach of incorporating elements that are perceived as useful is called eclecticism, and seems to be prominent in most approaches of integration, whether it be Eck's (1996) manipulative or non-manipulative approaches, or Craddock's (2001) complementarism. Ultimately, a choice of one theory or perspective over another must be made, whether within theology or psychology, or between them. Within psychology decisions can be made based on logic, empirical support, coherence, or even consensus. Within theology the choice of alternate theories, ideally,

should be based on a theory's congruence with the Scriptures as a whole. It is when a choice needs to be made between psychological theories and Christian theories that the debate becomes most heated. Neither can claim sole ownership of truth; however, neither can their validity be seen as equal either. If one is to operate from a Christian worldview, one must hold to the epistemological ascendancy of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 3:19; 1 Corinthians 2:5). However, in the ongoing debate, it appears that 'New Age' thinking and postmodern multiculturalism seem to hold more sway over current thinking than Biblical principle (Habenicht, 2000), with Christian psychologists failing to take up the reformation call for the supremacy of the Bible, and instead placing more trust in the methods of science, which in the field of psychology at times take the form of pseudoscience.

### **Developing Psychological theories from a Christian perspective**

The tralatitious approach used by Christian psychologists for forming theories remains eclecticism - the amalgamation of varying ideas from a melting pot of theories that seems to be supported by ease of use, pragmatic value, individual Scriptures or experiences, or even the charisma of its staunchest proponents. Although this approach is very popular among contemporary academics, it leads us to chant that all truth is God's truth, with truth being merely accepted as "a growing body of data of what we observe to be true" (Harris, 1969, p. 230). Christian psychologists, by taking in vogue ideas and opinions and then trying to support these with Scripture, often perpetuate the mixing of truth and error. In developing Biblically-based theories, we must "keep our own developing views of everything - God, human beings, nature, ourselves - in perspective. On any of these we could be wrong" (Sire, 1990, p. 20). It is important that academics reflect on this point, because it seems that knowledge and position sometimes precipitates an air of haughtiness; our calling requires humility and integrity. Ellen White (1952) warns us that the student or academic should not make his opinion "a centre around which truth is to revolve. He should not search for the purpose of finding texts of Scripture that he can construe to prove his theories, for this is wresting Scriptures to his own destruction" (p. 463). Instead we should begin with a thorough search of the Bible, allowing it to be a lamp unto our feet and a light showing us the path (Psalm 119:105).

The work of discovering knowledge begins with an attitude, an attitude of complete faith that God is truth, and that He desires us to know him (Sire, 1990). For without that attitude of faith "it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). In addition, we must understand that the ultimate purpose of all we are able to study in nature is a revelation of God's love, his omnipotence, omniscience and working in our lives. It is these fundamental principles that are given

evidence to and developed in the Scriptures.

So how do we go about developing theories in the field of psychology without abandoning science, or compromising our faith? The author would like to suggest a methodology that may be used as an aid in developing new, Adventist theories that integrate Christian faith with what may be learned through contemporary scientific methods of inquiry. Rather than a single method, it consists of a typology of methods, in hierarchical arrangement, so that as one progresses down the hierarchy it becomes increasingly difficult to develop an understanding of the foundational questions, such as the nature and purpose of humans, but more easy to provide descriptions and characteristics of certain psychological processes. At the primary level is revelation. Within this stratum are the Holy Scriptures, and as a corollary to these, and subject to the Word, the Spirit of Prophecy. At the second level are the rationalistic methods given to man by God in order to explore his environment, and in it find more of God's love revealed. These rationalistic methods in practice are the thoughts and ideas we generate as we experience new data around us. The adjunct to ideas is experimental evidence, in which scientific methodologies are employed to predict, describe, and explore theoretical constructs and hypotheses.

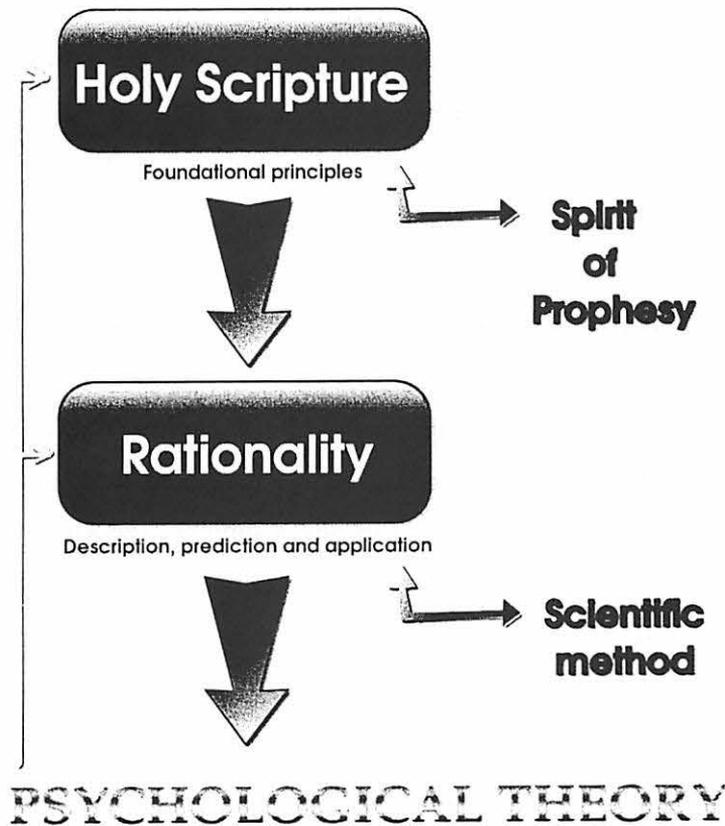


Figure 1: A model for developing Christian theories in psychology

The Bible is our natural starting point as “the true principles of psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures” (White, 1977, p. 10). It is from the Bible that we can find the deepest and most revealing insights regarding human nature, behaviour and healing. The value of revelation is that it is not a result of the effort and intellect of man, which itself is flawed, but rather “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20,21). It is knowledge from this source that is able to provide us with a foundation for any theory in psychology. The Bible should be used as the primary text in all expositions of human thought and behaviour, when “used as a textbook in our schools, the Bible will do for mind and morals what cannot be done by books of science and philosophy” (White, 1952, p. 422). However, the method used when searching the Bible for truth is paramount. One should not approach the Scriptures, for the purpose of interpretation, with preconceived ideas and developed theories that need scriptural reinforcement. In addition, one should not use secular theories to interpret the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not need light from secular theories, they are able to interpret themselves (2 Peter 1:20). “The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture. The student should learn to view the Word as a whole and see the relation of its parts” (White, 1952, p. 462).

Related to the method of revelation, and subject to the Scriptures, are the insights provided in the Spirit of Prophecy. This adjunct does not provide us with foundational principles, but rather commentary regarding what has been given evidence to by the Bible. Any insight gained from these books must be checked against the Scriptures for accuracy and congruence.

The next level in the typology is that of rationalism. Revelation is by no means the only means to uncovering the truth that God has given. We are “directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research [by God] in nature and revelation” (White, 1903, p. 17). God created us with the ability to reason, to question, and to learn. However, our ability to reason has been affected, we do not understand clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12), and our thoughts are clouded by evil (Isaiah 59:7; Jeremiah 16:9). For this reason knowledge generated through our rational abilities, even if it is validated by empirical evidence, can never supplant the knowledge given evidence through Scripture; revelation is the better method of accessing truth. It is from the soil of ideas and contemplation that hypothesis are typically formed and then tested using empirical methods. As such the quantitative, qualitative and critical methods of science become useful for testing and adding to the knowledge developed through reason. From Plato to Pareto there have been debates as to the supremacy of rationalism or empiricism. Modern philosophers such as Fleck, Kuhn, and Plank suggest that empirical evidence is not as influential to theoretical longevity and formation as contested by the positivists, with theorists occupied in “mopping up” work, defending their strongly held ideas against empirical evidence that just doesn't seem to fit. Within the proposed typology, it is

acknowledged that while ideas normally lead to research, the opposite also often happens; however, this debate becomes immaterial as both are subject to revelation.

The proposed methodology may be explored by way of metaphor. The Bible provides a skeleton (or framework) for any theory one wishes to develop, and the Spirit of Prophecy some ligaments and cartilage for understanding the articulation of the skeleton. Thereafter, one may use empirical and rationalistic methods to clothe the theory, and give it movement or application. The important thing is that something cannot be added on, save the skeleton allows for it. In theory, the skeleton without flesh is not fully functioning for the purposes of science, although the skeleton is all that is needed by faith for salvation. The purpose of these additional insights gained through science is to continually provide “fresh evidences of the wisdom and power of God” (White, 1952, p. 426). It is in light of this ultimate purpose that we may better use the methods of science to understand the functioning and structure of human nature, development, healing or any other topic of study we may set out to investigate. At the level of revelation, questions pertaining to origin, purpose and meaning can be answered. At the lower level, questions pertaining to structure and function find their exposition. All aspects of a fully developed and rigorous theory are needed, but the skeleton is most important and needs to provide the structure or form for the remainder of the theory. Some argue that there are topics on which the Bible is silent. Within the field of psychology, this is not justified, as the Bible provides the principles to guide all thought and action. The Scriptures are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). While the Bible may never have spoken of cigarettes, its message is clear about being a slave to the flesh; while the word racism does not appear between its covers, it is clear that all are equal in Christ. The principles of psychology are etched into the text of the Holy Scriptures, their application awaits us in life. “There is no social position, no phase of human experience, for which the study of the Bible is not an essential preparation” (White, 1952, p. 422).

### **An example: The case of ecopsychology**

Ecopsychology is a new field, on the outskirts of mainstream psychology, that has developed out of a concern for the deep ecological crisis facing our planet. The field's main objective is to sensitize people to their estrangement from nature, which is believed to be a better strategy to avert the impending destruction of the ecosystem than scare tactics and guilt (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995). Researchers in the field set out to examine human estrangement and alienation from nature, and the consequences of humanity's violent relationship to nature, on both human and cosmic biospheric stability and well-being (Sevilla, 2006). Ecopsychology is associated with other post-

modern movements that have sprung up at around the same time, including nature writing, deep ecology, transpersonal psychology, Gaia theory, and systems theory. The worldview and presuppositions of ecopsychology have largely been drawn from biosemiotics, Buddhist philosophy, various mystical traditions from a variety of religions, evolutionary theory, the romantic movement in Europe, and the transcendentalist movement in the United States. Some of the theoretical antecedents, from which the field has adapted many of its theories, include deep ecology, Einstein's theories of general and special relativity, chaos theory, Jung's collective unconscious, environmental and ecological psychology, Freud's conflict model, humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology.

Its motivating assertion is that the Earth is a unified, interdependent community of beings in a living universe; therefore, human health, identity, and sanity are intimately linked to the health of the Earth, and must include sustainable and mutually enhancing relationships between humans and their environment. Their motto is "ecology needs psychology, psychology needs ecology" (Roszak et al., 1995, p. 5). The basic creed of ecopsychology can be summed up in eight principles, summarized as follows (Roszak, 1992; Roszak et al., 1995):

- 1) The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious, and it is the repression of the ecological unconscious that is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society. Open access to the ecological unconscious - the path to sanity - can be attained through prolonged wilderness experiences and altered states of consciousness.
- 2) Roszak extended Jung's idea of the collective unconscious to suggest an ecological unconscious, the contents of which represent, at some level of mentality, the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time.
- 3) A primary goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious (self-realization), thereby healing the alienation between the recently created urban psyche and the age-old natural environment.
- 4) For ecopsychology as for many mainstream psychotherapies, the crucial stage of development is childhood. They suggest that the ecological unconscious is regenerated, as if it were a gift, in the infant's enchanted sense of the world, and seek to recover this quality of experience in functionally "sane" adults.
- 5) The ecological ego matures towards a sense of ethical responsibility to the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to humanity. Ecopsychologists hope to weave that responsibility into the fabric of social relations and political decisions.
- 6) Among the therapeutic projects most important to ecopsychology, drawing significantly on the insights of ecofeminism with a view to demystifying the sexual stereotypes, is the re-evaluation

of certain compulsively "masculine" character traits that permeate our structures of political power and which drive us to dominate nature as if it were an alien and rightless realm.

- 7) Ecopsychology suggests that whatever contributes to small-scale social forms and personal empowerment nourishes the ecological ego, whereas whatever strives for large-scale domination and the suppression of personhood undermines the ecological ego. They extensively critique the sanity of our gargantuan urban-industrial culture, whether capitalistic or collectivistic in its organization. However, it remains post-industrial, not anti-industrial in its social orientation.
- 8) Lastly, ecopsychology holds that there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being. The term "synergy" is chosen deliberately for its traditional theological connotation, which teaches that the human and divine are cooperatively linked in the quest for salvation. This is stated as: the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet (Roszak, 1992; Roszak et al., 1995).

From the brief synthesis above one can see that ecopsychology is a not-so-subtle blend of Jungian theory, pantheism (often in the form of animism) and spiritualism. Personally, the author believes that ecopsychologists do highlight some very important insights. Examples of these include providing a staunch critique of mainstream psychology for its failure to sensitively address the question of the relationship between human beings and their environment, psychology's rootedness in the worldviews and values of dominant society, its insular and relativistic views of mental health, which they assert have been developed using normative evaluations in a society typified by communal neurosis, its economic and therefore theoretical dependence on the status quo, its frivolous understanding of the most profound and spiritual aspects of human-nature connections, negative view of humanity, and largely male-dominant view (Roszak et al., 1995; Sevilla, 2006). Their valuable critique of consumerism, city-bound and largely insatiable desires that characterise much of western society, emphasizing nurturing relationships with nature, and their identification of the potential for healing to be attained through time spent outdoors are all propositions that fit well with Adventist teachings regarding the value of nature. However, the author does not believe that one is able to peel off these applicable aspects, without retaining some of the flavour of the underlying assumptions and worldviews. In effect what Roszak and his colleagues (1995) have successfully done is develop a new answer, based on an integration of their own worldviews and values, to the question of "what is the relationship between humans and their natural environment, and what are the consequences of such a relationship?" It remains to be seen whether Christians can develop a coherent, integrated answer to the same question based on a Biblical worldview.

It is to this task that the author has set himself in a class on ecopsychology that is taught at Helderberg College. The author's premise is that a Christian answer to the question described above can be developed based on the methodology suggested in the previous section. Such an investigation is based on revelation, and then relies on science to fill in and further develop it. Revelation is seen as the primary source for asking questions relating to purpose, origins and meaning. On the other hand, science is worthwhile for answering questions pertaining to descriptions and expression. However, at times these may intermingle. Following, will briefly elucidate. In the following paragraphs some of the answers and further questions that can be developed as one moves through each series of methods are elucidated. It is not the authors intention to explicate the course contents and syllabus, or to fully explain an Adventist theory of ecopsychology here, but rather demonstrate the proposed method in action.

### 1) Answers from Revelation

The first place we look is in the Bible. Since there is no ancient Hebrew or Greek word for nature one must look for instances that refer to animals, plants, or the earth and humans together. In the first few pages of the Bible, the creation scene introduces the first topic of investigation for a Christian ecopsychology, the origins of the earth, and a possible relationship between man and nature. In the creation account of Genesis 1:1-26 we see that God speaks all of nature into existence. He creates different parts of creation on different days in a logical sequence, first light and darkness, then an atmosphere, then land and oceans, then vegetation, then the celestial bodies and their orbits, then all the animals to fill the sky and water, and finally on the sixth day he made the land animals as well as man. From this account we see that man and nature share the same origin, substance and creator, and the first distinction between man and the rest of creation is provided. Man is made in the image of God, and with God's own hand, rather than spoken into existence. By contrasting different Scriptures, trying to see the integration of part to the whole, we see that God does things personally, manually, with his own hands, when they are very important to Him, and when they represent Him (e.g. Deuteronomy 5:22; 10:2). It can be deduced that God saw his creation as good, but man as special. This characteristic of the relationship between man and nature is solidified when we read in Genesis 1:28 that:

*“God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth over the earth.”*

Important to our understanding of the relationship demonstrated here are the words

replenish, fruitful, dominion, and subdue. At least the first two suggest a supportive and nurturing interpretation. In fact one translation suggests that man should rule over the earth “using all of its vast resources in the service of God and man”. We see here in the Garden of Eden, before sin, the exemplar of the relationship between man and earth. When we examine the translation for the original word for dominion, *רדה* or *radah*, we see that it means to rule or reign over. In the garden of Eden, between man and nature, we see a characteristic of God, rulership or dominion, given expression in man who is made in His image. Further unpacking of God's rulership, by Scriptural comparisons throughout the Bible, we see that he is loving, protective, intimately involved, long-suffering and nurturing towards His dominion.

On the first pages of the Bible we find an imperative regarding the human-nature relationship - it was intended that we care for and tend nature with the same attitude of loving service demonstrated by God in His dominion over mankind. These texts not only demonstrate the intended characteristics of man's relationship with nature, but allude to God's relationship with his creation. In fact, in Revelation 11:8 we see that God would come to destroy those who destroy the earth. From this short examination we can see that there is a relationship, before the entrance of sin, between man and the rest of creation, which is an image of the relationship that God has with man.

The next question we could ask is, how did it change after Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation? Again, turning only a few pages reveals that not only was man affected by the transgression of God's commandment, but creation as well. Genesis 4:17-19 shows that Adam's curse was shared with the earth, which was cursed to his detriment. There were changes in Adam, as he now would also eat the herb of the field. The curse resulted in changes in nature in appearance and possibly nutrition as well. In Adam the changes reflected a marring from the image or character of God, his thoughts and actions no longer reflected only good, but now evil as well. In nature the Bible describes changes that were largely external, in how things looked and grew, but it is possible that their nutritional and other properties changed as well, seeing as Adam's diet had to change. However, what is clear is that both were ultimately affected by death.

Affirming the connection that existed before sin entered the picture, God then instructed Adam that he is to till the ground. The word for till is *abad*, which means to work, and by implication to serve. Adam seems to have remained responsible for nature. In Genesis 9, after the flood, God's original establishment of the relationship is echoed when He commands Noah and his family to replenish the earth and delivers nature into their hands. However, we know that just before the Flood, nature had already degenerated to the point that some of the animals were declared unclean, while the thoughts of men were described as continually evil. Certainly the actions of man both now and historically can be described as anything but nurturing, stewardly, or replenishing; in

fact humans seem to be destroying nature at an ever more alarming rate. We can also see that biological life on earth no longer typifies the cosy, inviting, and homely context to the degree described of the Garden of Eden. From this short section of Scripture it can be seen that a relationship between man and nature does exist, and that some of its characteristics are made evident. Not too long after the Flood, Scripture reveals that the relationship between man and nature started to deteriorate further, and God had to instruct Israel in many instances to deter them from destroying nature (Deuteronomy 20:19; Genesis 19:23-25; Leviticus 26:3-35).

Thus far we have seen that there is a relationship between man and nature that was sanctioned before the fall, that man was to rule over nature, it could be argued, to learn the wisdom in serving and ruling, that after the fall both man and nature were to bear the consequences of rebellion, and are separated from their previous relationship with God and each other. The Bible then sets out a detailed plan aimed at restoring that relationship, so that man could walk once more among nature with God (Isaiah 66:17-22). Although there is abundantly more in the Bible regarding nature and its relationship to both God and man, it shall not be elaborated on as it goes beyond the purpose of illustration intended here.<sup>1</sup> Useful expositions examining some of these topics in the Bible include Mngqibisa (2006) and Regenstein (1991).

## 2) Further elaboration from the Spirit of Prophecy

The next source for theory building that we should look into are the writings of Ellen White, which according to the Adventist worldview were inspired by the Spirit of Prophecy referred to in Acts 2:17,18. Not only does Ellen White eloquently and emotively elaborate on the events described in the discussion above, but she also shares some further insights regarding the purpose, character, and implication of the relationship between humans and their natural environment. She suggests that nature is in rebellion of our dominion over it, just as humanity is in rebellion of God's dominion over us (White, 1903, p. 26), but that nature still has the ability to talk to us of God's love and glory (White, 1948, p. 333), and to bring us into a closer communion with God by elevating and quickening the mind (White, 1952, p. 12). She entreated men and women to “think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God” (White, 1942, p.

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<sup>1</sup> see the following for additional insights: Genesis 2:8,15; 8:1; 9:12-17; 24:31-33; 49:6-7; Exodus 20:10; 23:4-5,10-12,28; Leviticus 11:2-47; 25:23; Numbers 22:22-35; 35:2-5, 33-34; Deuteronomy 10:14; 11:11-12; 22:6-7, 10; 25:4; 2 Kings 2:19-22; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 5:23; 12:7-11; 35-37; 38: 26-27; Psalms 8:1-9; 24:1-2; 33:5-15; 36:6; 50: 7-14; 84: 3-4; 104:1-30; 145:9, 14-16; 147:4-5, 8-9, 14-18; 148: 7-10; Proverbs 3:19-20; 6:6-8; 12:10; 30:24-28; Ecclesiastes 3:19; Isaiah 1:3; 5:8; 11: 6-9, 22-35; 43:20; 66:2-3; Jeremiah 8:7-8; 9:9-11; Jonah 3:7-8; 4:11; Hosea 2:18-20; Joel 1: 20; Habakkuk 2:17; Matthew 6:26, 28-30; 10:29; 12:11; 23:37; Mark 1:13; Luke 12:6, 24, 27; John 10:11; Romans 8:18-25; Colossians 1:15-16, 23; Revelation 9:4; 11:18; 22:1-2.

315), and suggests that “it becomes man to seek to lighten, instead of increasing, the weight of suffering which his transgression has brought upon God's creatures” (White, 1958, p. 443). She also gives examples of how in Jesus' life He would often retire to regain strength by spending time with His Father in nature, and even calls these “His hours of greatest happiness” (White, 1942, p. 52). Ellen White also expounds on the healing properties of nature, both physically (White, 1948, p. 112), and spiritually through bringing us closer to God, purity and peace (White, 1941, p. 24). Further, she suggests that just as our Saviour continually took time out to be in nature in communion with God, we should also seek an hour a day to spend in nature just with our hearts, the Word and God, and we will receive “a new endowment of both physical and mental strength” (White, 1942, p. 58). The above listed quotes are simply a sample of the kinds of insights available in her writings, there are many more areas in which she writes of the role nature should play in education, and its importance in holistic well-being. Once collected and related back to the Scriptures we should be able to have an informed knowledge of the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. The final step in this analysis takes place using the methods of science.

### 3) Insights from rationalism and empirical evidence

From the exposition above many questions arise, such as in what ways does nature improve our relationship with God, how does nature change in response to the sinfulness of mankind, in what ways can nature be used to promote health and healing, and so on. Based on the principles of healing in nature extracted through the above steps one may begin to develop a nature-based intervention and test its significance; the opportunities abound.

Some of the questions that have been examined by the ecopsychology class at Helderberg College are, for example, in what way are clean animals different from unclean animals, and in what ways have animals changed over time that demonstrates the effects of sin, how is the healing characteristic of the relationship between humans and nature demonstrated and best used? These questions provide for ample use of scientific methods, and yet are able to generate knowledge that is in unity with the truths gained from the Scriptures. By looking at the relationship from a mythological, spiritualistic, pantheistic worldview, many ecopsychologists have understood empirical evidence to suggest that we have an intrinsic relationship with the earth, that life on the earth could not have happened through chance, but that a life force seems to sustain life on earth, and that time spent in nature is likely to lead to renewal and growth. Using a Biblically-grounded approach one is able to come to seemingly the exact same propositions. While the outward appearance is the same, the heart of each theory beats to a different tune.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis of this article is that theories developed from worldviews other than Christian, and by Christian it is meant Biblically-based, often appear attractive and can be useful in practice. However, the worldviews on which they are based are stripped of God's truth, and often lead on a journey that takes man to self-reliance and self-glorification. While the information generated by research within such orientations can be valid, it is argued here that they are not necessarily God's truth. For example, scientists may suggest that evidence suggests an intelligent design of life, if we are to truly integrate our faith with our practice and theory, that intelligence must be explicitly recognised as God. While it is true that there is a relationship between man and nature, it is not written into our deepest unconscious as a lived repository of cosmic knowledge, but was formed by the same God that made man and nature. And, while there is ample proof that time in nature does positively affect wellbeing, it is not because of any animistic properties of nature, nor because of self-realisation and the expression of Roszak's ecological unconscious, but rather because through nature our thoughts and feelings are drawn upwards; and in its most effective form, it lifts the soul in praise of an awesome God.

Knowledge that is generated from, and based on sinful, egocentric human thought, relying solely on tainted human rationality and flawed understanding, will always result in a deceptive, isolated, incoherent and limited theory. One that may be functional, outwardly scientific, appealing, and "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). From such we should turn away, a decision which although not easy, will ultimately lead us to a form of psychology better suited to help the needs of a sick and sinful human race. If not, the author fears that we may find ourselves "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). While the task may seem too great, through the prayerful, earnest, and Spirit-led search of God's revelation in His inspired Word, and what is left to us in the book of nature, and despite our limitations, we may start to gain a true understanding of man as he is now and his potential through Christ.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the following for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper, encouragement, and mentorship: Lisa Beardsley, Duane Covrig, John Hammond, Barry Hill, Nicholas Onyango, Charlene Reinecke, Don Roy, and Timothy Standish. In addition I would like to thank Helderberg College and the Institute for Christian Teaching for their financial support, making this paper possible.

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