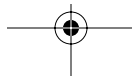
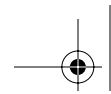


A Place for the Bible in Christian Soul Care

WHAT SINGLE BOOK HAS HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT in the history of Western civilization? It is hard to think of a more viable candidate than the Bible.¹ Some of its influence may be hard to trace, but think of its direct effects on Western theology and philosophy; cultural forms like art, music and literature; the creation of social roles like monk and nun, priest and pastor, and religious settings like monasteries and churches; ethical proscriptions regarding homosexuality and abortion, and prescriptions regarding the care of the poor and the mentally ill; and then consider its indirect effects on the development of social institutions like hospitals and universities; the spread of literacy after the Reformation; the advances of the scientific revolution; the rationale for democracy; and liberation movements like the abolition of slavery and equality for women. In the words of MacCulloch (2003), the Bible has been “an explosive, unpredictable force in every age.”

Over the centuries, however, one of the Bible’s most significant roles in the West has been its influence in the care of souls. As we shall see, the Bible claims to be a soul-care book, and over the nearly twenty centuries since its completion, it has consistently fulfilled that claim in the minds, hearts, lives and relationships of Christians. The subtext of this book consists of an exploration of the Bible’s relevance for soul care. However, the main concern of this book is broader: a description of the major foundations of a specifically Christian model for interpreting and researching human beings, their problems in living and the care of their souls—a model informed by a careful reading of all relevant texts (including those of modern psychology) but guided throughout



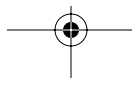


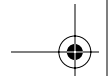
by a Christian hermeneutic. The Bible is given great attention in this book because of its pivotal role in this larger undertaking, since, according to Christianity, it provides the hermeneutical key for the rest of life, especially the care of the soul. On the way to developing a modest, yet ambitious *Christian* model of psychology and soul care (modest because it is necessarily incomplete; ambitious because it aims at being scientific), I will also examine the current state of Christian counseling; a rudimentary Christian philosophy of psychology; and a general hermeneutic for critically interpreting non-Christian psychology texts. Hence, the size of this book. In this first chapter, we will hear from the Bible itself regarding its role in such an endeavor.

The Soul-Care Agenda of the Bible

The central, underlying thrust of the whole Bible is an articulation of the glory of the triune God (see Edwards, 1765/1989; Balthasar, 1989a, 1991). From Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine through Bernard, Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, Luther, Calvin, van Mastricht and Edwards, to Bavinck, Barth and Balthasar, the classical Christian tradition has recognized that this goal, though strictly speaking extrinsic to human nature, is nonetheless wondrously realized through human participation in its actualization. According to Edwards (1765/1989), for example, the *true* happiness of human beings is directly correlated to their sharing in the manifestation of God's glory, finding their ultimate fulfillment in relationship with God.² Julian of Norwich (trans. 1977) put this succinctly: "[my] intention was . . . to live more for God's glory and my profit" (p. 133). When the Bible is read this way, its theocentric agenda is understood to be a project that simultaneously (though secondarily) promotes human well-being.

What unites these dual goals is the conformity of believers into the image of Christ. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is *the* image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature (Heb 1:3). All humans were created in God's image, but this is a developmental goal as well as a feature of human nature (Pannenberg, 1985), and human sin damaged the image, causing fallen humans to resemble God much less than is God's design. As the Real Man (Barth, 1960; Bonhoeffer, 1955), Christ is the human ideal, so he is the Form toward which human beings are supposed to be moving (Balthasar, 1982-1991). The Bible is a postlapsarian book (written after the Fall into sin), given in part to help *re-form* the damaged



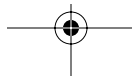
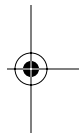


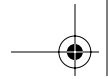
human, not just into a more accurate image of God, but into resemblance with Christ, the perfect Form of humanity. This scriptural re-formation provides a singular display of God's glory.

One must concede that the genres of the Bible are such that its soul-reforming agenda is not always self-evident. One can conceive of a more explicit, comprehensive and systematic soul-care text, perhaps organized around specific disorders, personality constructs or therapy modalities (e.g., see Bonger & Beutler, 1995). But classical Christians take the inspired form of the Bible with great seriousness, doing their best not to force it into some alien mold. It is what it is, so there is nothing for Christians to do but relish the challenge its actual form presents and endeavor to read it appropriately in pursuit of a biblically based, scientifically sophisticated model of Christian soul care for the glory of God. In what follows, we look at three lines of evidence for the Bible's pervasive soul-care agenda.

A Brief Biblical Theology of Soul Care

The entire canon shows a concern with human well-being with reference to God. To begin with, the Bible was composed by writers who were deeply aware that something was radically wrong with humanity. We read first that God ordered the lives of the first humans with both positive directives ("Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over [it]" [Gen 1:28]) and negative ("from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" [Gen 2:17]). Following the word of an alternative way, they disobeyed, and as the consequent judgments of God make clear (and also symbolize), on account of their newfound, relative independence from God's word, humans will live in great distress. The first psychological outcomes of the Fall mentioned in the text are shame and defensiveness (blame-shifting). Cain's story shows that when fallen humans interpret God's actions antagonistically—in self-destructive ways—they experience a perverse anguish, which leads to violence against others. Within a number of generations, God grew greatly disheartened by the tragic and morally deformed psychological state of humanity: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Gen 6:5-6). This very early passage tells us God experienced "pain in his heart" (Hamilton, 1990, p. 274) upon seeing into the human hearts of



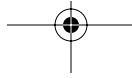


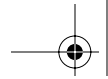
that time. God's reaction flowed from his own nature (the verb *'atsab*, in a Hithpael stem, indicates that God brought it upon himself), and he responded with punishment (on that occasion, the flood), because of his intrinsic abhorrence of human unlikeness to himself and the resultant compromise of his glory—we can surmise from the rest of Scripture.

Nevertheless, after the flood, in spite of the ongoing pain God would have kept feeling (things, after all, did not really get better), he continued to speak words of hope and words of judgment to humans. The rest of the Bible tells of how God, in a variety of ways, rescues and heals humanity from their psychological and spiritual predicament.

Soul-healing through the Old Testament: Preparation by a divine ethics. The text of the Old Testament was written after God had established a special covenant with the people of Israel, with that covenant laid out in the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the rest of the Old Testament based upon it. To understand the Old Testament properly for our purposes, we need to consider its formative function in the history of humanity and how it was appropriated throughout the pre-Christian era. Primitive humanity had to contend with its desires, some that were largely biologically based (e.g., for pleasure and away from pain, and for food, sex and attachment) and others that were more socially constructed (for power, possessions and relationship), but all of which were grounded in a created human nature that was corrupted by its fallenness. As a result, humans sought out gods other than their Creator and were inclined to follow their desires with some abandon. So to prepare humanity for his primary soul-healing intervention (the coming of the Son of God to earth), God established his covenant with Israel through his giving of the *law*—normative language that also reveal in part humanity's purpose and fulfillment in God. The text of the Torah included civil, ceremonial and moral codes to regulate thoughts, desires and human relationships in a theocentric direction, as well as narratives describing the struggles and progress this covenantal revelation and relationship engendered in the lives of the Israelites.

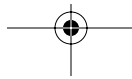
The process of receiving and internalizing the law of God was slow and halting, and it ultimately failed. Specific individuals sought to embrace the law as best as they could (e.g., Moses, Joshua, David and the prophets), but as a people the Israelites struggled morally throughout most of the time period recorded in the Old Testament, a story, painstakingly described in long narratives, that is useful in revealing God's character, the various human responses

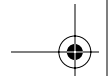




to God's word and the consequences of those responses. In continuity with the Mosaic law, the prophets were raised up to restate and elaborate on God's law to his people in light of their current actions, and to call them back to the covenant. These nouthetic teachers cried out against Israel's idolatry and sins, and called them to self-examination and repentance, further revealing God's holiness, as well as his fidelity to his covenant-people in spite of their waywardness. The Old Testament canon reveals that God is *for* his people, by being vehemently opposed to that which undermines his glory and destroys their well-being. The emotional tone of much of the Old Testament is decidedly negative, but it aptly communicates the desperate psychospiritual situation of sinful humans before God and challenges readers to engage in searching self-examination. At the same time, the prophets also gave hope, by pointing to a better era and covenant to come (Jer 31:33). The fact that much of the last half of the Old Testament looks ahead to a coming messianic redemption provides an underlying degree of optimism in the face of the overwhelming failure of the Old Covenant (Dempster, 2000).

What was the Old Testament's soul-care significance? Manifold. First, its norms and narratives consistently made plain the centrality that God and his glory were to have in the human heart and community, as well as God's relentless opposition to his diminution by humans. In a diversity of ways, the Old Testament declared that there is no more important value for human well-being than God's supremacy. Second, many of the law's cultic regulations underscored and gave divine sanction to the sense of uncleanness and brokenness that is endemic to humanity. Third, the Old Testament documents gave divine hope by making clear that God was covenantally bound to the Israelites and that he would pursue them with all his might for the sake of their well-being (in spite of their resistance to him!). Fourth, the account of this pursuit offered an elaborate narrative in which later Israelites could see themselves, a rich and significant story that doubtless contributed to the formation of their identity, individually and corporately (and into the present). Fifth, the law provided a well-articulated moral framework that could be disseminated throughout the community and would aid in the inhibition of the self- and other-destructive possibilities of unchecked, fallen human desires. Sixth, the law prepared the way for Christ by providing a description of the ideal human form toward which fallen humans were to move (love of God and neighbor), so that the ultimate failure of the Israelites (recorded in the exilic narratives) to fulfill that



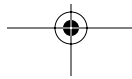


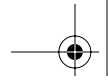
ideal cast a pall upon human nature that was supposed to have fostered greater self-awareness and that pointed to the need for divine forgiveness and transcendent help. We are told in the New Testament that the law was given to show us our lostness (Rom 7:7-25; Gal 3:23-24). But this last point also makes clear the insufficiency of the Old Testament, in and of itself. It is not the complete canon; it required a complementary and fulfilling text. As a preparatory word, it necessarily fell short of the clarity and fullness of the revelation of the gospel found in the New Testament (Vos, 1949). Even so, as the inspired record of the “covenant of law” (Robertson, 1980) and the history of its appropriation by the Israelites, the Old Testament is supposed to be formative for the development of later believers.

Soul-healing through the New Testament: Fulfillment by a divine gospel.

One of those Israelites was Jesus Christ (Work, 2002). As a human he was shaped by the texts he inspired as God, and these words, along with his genetic endowment, life experiences (especially his family life) and choices, contributed to his becoming a perfected human (Heb 5:9), the blessed Form of humanity, the loving, obedient Child of God. In contrast to Adam and Eve, he endured a rigorous, soul-building forty-day period of temptation, after which he embarked on a ministry that manifested the Form: teaching reparative truth, loving sinners and the weak of this world, opposing the betrayal of God by religious hypocrites, and healing the sick. This last “sign” (see Jn 4:54; 6:14; 12:18) would seem to be symbolic of his overall salvific mission of restoring body *and* soul to wholeness. The Gospels describe the Word narratively and portray him as a shepherd of sheep (Mt 9:36; Jn 10:11), a physician of sinners (Mk 2:17), a friend (Mt 11:19; Jn 15:13-15), as well as a prophet who aggressively resisted religious pretense (Mt 23; Jn 2:13-17), one who held forth the highest imaginable standards of care for others (Mt 5; Lk 6:27-38) and exemplified a resolutely theocentric approach to his own suffering. Such is the Form of the God-human, the preeminent manifestation of God’s character and human well-being.

As the Old Covenant texts revealed and the Gospel texts underscored, humans have fallen short of God’s law and design and are incapable in themselves of making the kinds of changes necessary for Godward wholeness. A new way, a new covenant, was promised in the Old Testament. It involved a spiritual transcription of the law on the heart (Jer 31:31-34; 32:38-40; Ezek 36:25-32), but all that this entailed was not clearly revealed until after the evil

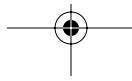
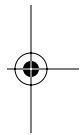


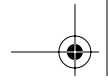


blindness and bondage of humanity was most fully manifested in the death of Israel's (and the world's) Messiah. The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament depict in a variety of ways the nature of the New Covenant in Christ. The good news of the gospel is an articulation of the free gift of divine salvation and soul-healing, accomplished through Christ's life, death and resurrection and offered to all who consent to it from the heart.

It was the task of the apostles to further develop the psychotherapeutic (soul-healing) import of Christ's actions on our behalf in their letters to the earliest churches (see e.g., Roberts, 2001). More than simply manifesting the Form of God, Christ's life, death and resurrection *communicated* the Form to humans through union with Christ and faith in the word describing it. By believing the gospel, humans are united with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11) and so are brought into a radically different place of meaning and significance. They are regenerated and renewed (Tit 3:5); their sins are forgiven (Heb 9); they are given the righteousness of God as a gift (Rom 5:17); they are adopted into God's family (Rom 8:15-17; 1 Jn 3:2); they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit; they are chosen, holy and beloved (Col 3:12); they are a part of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and aliens of the old (1 Pet 2:11); and they are becoming lovers of God and of neighbors. Such descriptions and expositions of the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection, if taken seriously, are explosive in their soul-care significance: they legitimize an exchange of self-definitions, from broken sinner to holy sojourner—traveling in this life from brokenness and sinfulness to greater wholeness in God. They provide the God-breathed basis for a radically new set of relationships, identity, story (past, present and future), attributional framework and motivational orientation. These descriptions are given to in-form and re-form the souls and lives of those who believe.

The Old and New Testament Scriptures together are what Charry (1997) calls *aretegenic*, that is, they have a virtue-shaping function as the textual means of realizing the ethicospiritual excellence known as the Form of Christ. With the Holy Spirit's aid, the Word of God reconfigures the minds of believers, recalibrates their hearts and reshapes their lives, moving them, communally, into an increasingly theocentric way of life that gradually comes to resemble, as individuals, the Form of Christ and, as a body, the communion of the Trinity. Preaching, teaching and counseling are needed for this reformulation because "becoming a Christian [is] a confusing undertaking, for one must





sort out one's old self from one's new, God-given status" (Charry, p. 43), a process of distinguishing that continues throughout this age.

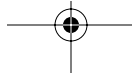
The Bible's Teachings About Its Own Aretegenic Function

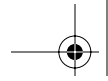
The Bible is not silent about its soul-shaping value. However, before examining those self-attestations, we should think through the *discursive* implications of Genesis 2—3.

As mentioned above, God issued a number of commands to the first humans. The prohibition not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17) seems to have been given as a test of belief (Vos, 1949). Throughout the Scriptures, God's words are assumed to be trustworthy, since he is absolute goodness. The serpent's temptation was hermeneutic in nature and consisted of calling into question the veracity of God's words and the goodness of his intentions. Until the serpent spoke, there was one word and one way (Bonhoeffer, 1955). The serpent's words articulated and constituted an alternative way of interpretation, one that reframed or recontextualized God's words. On account of the serpent's interpretive distortions, the tree looked different. Now, instead of being a tree from which it was unthinkable to eat or touch (Gen 3:3), "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). Words can alter our perceptions and attitudes. As many Christians have noted, the first sin was instigated by disbelief in God's word (a *dissent*) and disobedience to his command, made possible by belief in an anti-theistic word that posited meaning contrary to God's interpretive system. God's speech is of fundamental importance to human well-being. Humanity committed the most egregious action when it rejected God's word and cast itself into misery (Gen 3:16-17; both the man and the woman experience *pain* as a result of their sin, the same root word that describes God's response to sin in Gen 6:6). In contrast, human well-being is found in hearing, accepting and obeying God's word (Anderson, 1982). This foundational teaching-narrative that there is a linguistic basis for psychopathology undergirds all that follows in Scripture and helps to explain Scripture's restorative force.

Psalm 19. After referring to the nonverbal "speech" of God's creation in Psalm 19:1-6, the psalmist wrote of God's covenantal speech to his people:

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;



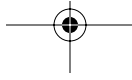


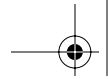
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
 The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
 In keeping them there is great reward.
 Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;
 Let them not rule over me;
 Then I will be blameless,
 And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.
 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 Be acceptable in Your sight,
 O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. (Ps 19:7-14)

The psychospiritual benefits of God's words are here highly extolled. The references to law, commandment and precepts show that the psalmist is referring to the Torah. The fact that God's law (Ps 19:7) is treated synonymously with the fear of the Lord (Ps 19:9) suggests that all of these verses refer to the received and implemented words of God that issue in the fear of the Lord, the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7). We would expect to read that God's commands enlighten and make one wise, soul-states having great therapeutic significance; but perhaps more notable is their ability to restore the soul (Ps 19:7; see also Ps 23:3) and rejoice the heart (Ps 19:8). The psalmist believed God's words heal the soul and bring it to its happy fulfillment. According to this passage, if one thinks rightly, one sees God's words as the greatest of blessings. The psalm concludes by linking these blessings with the self-reflection of the psalmist. God's words enlighten and provoke the receiver to confession. "Cleanse my unconscious," he says to God, in so many words, "so that my meditations may be pure enough for you." It shows an unusual degree of self-awareness—promoted, it would seem, by the glad reception of God's directives.

Psalm 119. Psalm 119 is an even longer digest of striking affirmations of God's words. We will only look at a selection.

How blessed are those whose way is blameless,





Who walk in the law of the LORD.
 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
 Who seek Him with all their heart. (Ps 119:1-2)

This psalm opens with a declaration that human well-being (blessedness) is found in adhering to God's written words—especially his commands—and seeking him from deep within. These sentiments are reiterated in other places:

I have inherited Your testimonies forever,
 For they are the joy of my heart. (Ps 119:111)

and

Trouble and anguish have come upon me;
 Yet Your commandments are my delight. (Ps 119:143)

God's law is a supreme source of human happiness, even in the midst of distress. Psychological consolation is derived from his Word:

This is my comfort in my affliction,
 That Your word has revived me. (Ps 119:50)

I have remembered Your ordinances from of old, O LORD,
 And comfort myself. (Ps 119:52)

O may Your lovingkindness comfort me,
 According to Your word to Your servant. (Ps 119:76)

My eyes fail with longing for Your word,
 While I say, "When will You comfort me?" (Ps 119:82)

If Your law had not been my delight,
 Then I would have perished in my affliction. (Ps 119:92)

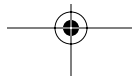
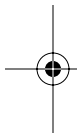
In various ways, God's words and commands provide security and peace, and the psalmist's reflections on them constitute a type of coping strategy.

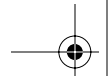
The words of God also lead to a theocentric focus:

Let my lips utter praise,
 For You teach me Your statutes. (Ps 119:171)

They lead away from sin (the biblical concept of psychopathology).³

Establish my footsteps in Your word,
 And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me. (Ps 119:133)





Yet, in spite of the strongly legal tone of this psalm, the psalmist sees a surprising interdependence between God's law and God's love. Both are sources of encouragement in distress:

Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth. (Ps 119:88)

I am exceedingly afflicted;
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word. (Ps 119:107; see also Ps 119:154)

Revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. (Ps 119:159)

The psalm ends on an unexpected note:

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant,
For I do not forget Your commandments. (Ps 119:176)

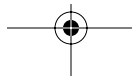
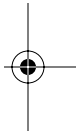
In this great worship song, we learn that the law leads to self-examination, humility and confession.

We find in Psalm 19 and throughout Psalm 119 an affirmation of the role of God's moral statutes in fostering human well-being. This emphasis on commandment is typical of the Old Testament (and of course not absent in the New). This teaching is foundation building, in that it underscores God's centrality and lordship over his people, while providing moral structure that has to be internalized for human maturation to occur, and this emphasis on morality is a necessary preparation for the gospel. But more broadly, these two psalms are a scriptural assessment of the soul-care value of an earlier portion of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:15-17. Centuries later, the apostle Paul gave a strong commendation of the soul-care value of the entire Old Testament:

From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:15-17)

The pastoral epistles, from which this passage comes, deal with foundational teachings for the church, and here we have the most important of the Bible's self-attestations in the New Testament, and instruction that implies the Bible is directly relevant to counseling (Adams, 1979; Jones & Butman, 1991; Mack,





1997). In the context, Paul was warning Timothy that false teachers (“imposters,” 2 Tim 3:13, *goētes*) would be coming to deceive the church. In contrast, Timothy was told to “continue in the things you have learned” (2 Tim 3:14), which were based on the Old Testament, the “sacred writings,” texts that were human but nonetheless “holy” (meaning “set apart”). Their unique status is due to their being *theopneustos*, a word often translated “inspired” but which literally means “God-breathed.” Scripture is the product of God’s creative breath, composed of expressions that proceeded, as it were, right from God’s own mouth (Murray, 1946). While Paul recognized the human authorship of Scripture (e.g., Rom 10:5, 19), the “sacred writings” were absolutely unique among human books: they consist of the very oracles of God. And why were they given? In Scripture is found the wisdom that leads to salvation (*sōtēria*, “deliverance”; Arndt & Gingrich, 1957) in Christ. The Old Testament consists of wise teachings that point to Christ and guide us to eternal life (when read *Christianly*: through faith in Christ; see Hanson, 1982).⁴

Paul next expanded on this general commendation. The Old Testament, he said, is profitable (or useful, *ōphelimos*) for a range of soul-improving activities: teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. Paul taught Timothy that reading the Bible is beneficial; it is good for the soul. It would make him adequate (*artios*), that is, “complete, capable, proficient, or able to meet all demands” (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 110), which, when combined with the phrase “equipped (*exērtismenos*) for every good work” reveals the Scripture’s primary aretegenic Form–function: it is supremely useful for the reformation of character; it is an agent of virtue, contributing to the ability to act in a godly way in every type of condition or situation.

Paul extols the Bible’s vital importance for human maturation (and so for Christian counseling). Four specific uses of the Bible follow: *teaching* (*didaskalia*), that is, instruction regarding God, the human plight and salvation; *reproof* (*elegmos*), the identification of error or sin; *correction* (*epanorthōsis*, restoration, improvement), we might say, revelation regarding the ways of life that exemplify godliness or Christian maturity; and *training in righteousness* (*paideia* [giving guidance] *tēn en dikaiosynē* [uprightness]), guidelines for how to attain godliness in this life. Understanding Scripture promotes our understanding of God, ourselves and the way of salvation, so it is indispensable for our psychospiritual well-being (and for Christian soul care).



2 Peter 1:2-4. In another passage often cited in conjunction with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle Peter⁵ stated:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

In this grammatically complicated passage, Peter wrote that everything necessary for life and godliness is gained through the knowledge of God and Jesus, all of which God has promised. Since the Bible is the primary textual repository of the knowledge of God, as well as of God's promises, the Scriptures should be understood to play a central role in the spiritual growth to which Peter referred. However, Scripture is not explicitly referred to. Calvin (1578/1979) suggested that the source of the knowledge of God and his promises referred to in this passage is the gospel.

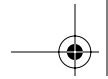
Regardless, the real emphasis of this passage is on God's power. Peter says *that* is the *source* of everything important that we need in order to grow in grace, so that Calvin (1578/1979) believed that the "everything" which we have been granted consists of "the peculiar endowments of the new and spiritual life" (p. 369). So then, the knowledge of God is the *means* of God's power in the Christian life as well as the communication of God's characteristics (*physis*, nature). And since Scripture best reveals such knowledge, we can properly infer from this passage that preaching and prayerful meditation on Scripture should promote Christlikeness in a corrupt world.

Romans 15:1-4. Just prior to this passage, Paul had argued that believers who are strong in their faith must have regard for those who are weak, who could stumble at the more mature behavior of the strong. Then he wrote:

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul here appealed to the Roman Christians to live their lives with the well-



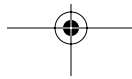
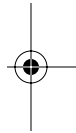


being of their brothers and sisters in mind, and he pointed to the example of Christ, who bore the suffering of the cross for the sake of his people (Dunn, 1988). Christ's life is "a pattern and model for the church" (Schreiner, 1998, p. 748). Paul quoted an Old Testament Scripture that he applied to Christ, and then he drew the more general observation that such Scriptures were given to teach us, for the purpose of promoting our continuing in the faith (and so developing proven character, Rom 5:4) and granting hope through a sense of consolation (or strength and comfort), psychospiritual blessings that derive from the teaching of Scripture (*graphōn* is a genitive of source). Again, we see that Paul understood the Old Testament to be the means of communicating positive affective dynamics that led to Christlikeness manifested in the mutual love of others in the body of Christ.

Colossians 1:25-29. Paul discusses another important mode of the word of God in Colossians 1:25-29.

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Here Paul points out that his apostolic ministry involved preeminently the preaching of the word of God. However, this preaching did not consist of quoting Old Testament texts, but rather refers to a verbal exposition of the message of Christ, the *kerygma* (Mounce, 1986), the word that had not been fully revealed in the past but was manifested now in Christ's life, death and resurrection (see also Acts 13:5, 46; 18:11). We learn here that the word of God is not to be identified exclusively with Scripture; in this usage the "word of God" is the central message of Scripture, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul then highlights what for him was a core theme of this verbal condensation of the word of God: the indwelling of Christ in the believer (and among the body of Christ, the church). Paul calls the abiding of Christ in the believer the "hope of glory," that is, Christ's indwelling is the ground for the believer's eternal participation in the glory of God. So the gospel provides a sense of security



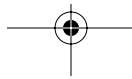


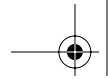
and stability that is an anchor for the soul. Paul also vigorously proclaimed Christ and his work, and the goal of this teaching was to “present every man complete [*teleion*, perfect] in Christ.” Therefore, teaching about Christ brings about soul change, eventually leading to a complete conformity to the image of Christ in heaven, as a result of union with Christ (a bilateral union: the believer in Christ and Christ in the believer). So here we learn that the spoken gospel brings immense and everlasting benefits to the human soul.

Ephesians 4:11-16. This is the last passage we will look at in this section. After bringing up the topic of gifts to the church, Paul wrote:

And [God] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Paul does not mention the Scriptures here, but the gifts to which he refers are all “Ministers of the Word” (Barth, 1974, p. 482), either those who themselves wrote Scripture (apostles and prophets) or those who are called to communicate its message (evangelists, pastors and teachers). So we may infer, at the very least, that when Paul wrote of what God gave the church to help foster its maturation, he had in the back of his mind the content of Scripture, the inspired, infallible record of the message of these gifts to the church. Consider further the fruit of their labors: “the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). The ministers do this through their teaching, and the goal of that teaching is knowledge, that is, the “knowledge of the Son of God” (see also Jn 17:3; 2 Pet 1:3-4). Paul went on to say that the outcome of that ministry is a maturity and wisdom that keeps the saints from being tossed about by “every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”; instead, they will have learned to speak “the truth in love.” Paul is teaching that the truths of the gos-





pel lead to Christian discernment, growth and maturity. So, while the Scriptures are not explicitly mentioned, we are warranted in concluding that when the final New Testament canon would be formed, the writings it contained would perform the same functions as its authors and the other deliverers of its soul- and community-changing message.

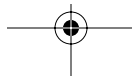
Earlier in the chapter Paul pleaded with the Ephesians to maintain their unity as the body of Christ. Paul continues with that theme in Ephesians 4:11-16 by arguing that the ministers were given to promote unity through the maturation of the saints. This developmental goal is variously described as attaining to “the unity of the faith” and “the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13), growing up “in all aspects into Christ” (Eph 4:15), and becoming a whole body, each part fitted together and properly working, causing “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). The goal of Christian and pastoral soul care then is thoroughly interpersonal. It entails a communal unity in faith, through the personal, sweet knowledge of Jesus, such that we all grow into his likeness, everyone moving, little by little, into his image, helped by each other’s love.

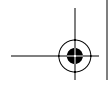
Paul was thinking developmentally and encouraging the Ephesians to grow in unity by becoming increasingly alike through a co-transformation, by the truths of God’s Word, leading to a mutual, reciprocal edifying of one another in love. The dual importance of God’s Word and the church in the fostering of psychospiritual development could hardly be more strongly stated. The canon is now closed, and we look to the Scriptures as the permanent, inerrant record of God’s Word to us, but, in addition to the Scriptures, there is a fundamental role that both Christian teachers and laypersons play in promoting this Christlikeness. The mature Christian pastor, counselor and layperson are all supposed to communicate and promote both truth and love.

Let us turn next to examine some of the biblical teachings relevant for this task.

Some Explicit Soul-Care Teachings in the Bible

The last focus of this chapter concerns the many themes derived from the content of the Bible that lead to the resolution of some of the main problems of our souls as well as the experience of positive affect and the practice of virtuous behavior, as we learn how to embrace such themes more fully and deeply. Helping others go deeper with these teachings is, of course, what makes dis-



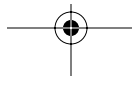


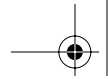
tinctly Christian soul care a *practice* (MacIntyre, 1984; Murphy, Kallenberg & Nation, 1997)—if not an art—that itself requires virtue, rather than just the communication of intellectual information.

The perfectly good God. First and foremost, Scripture teaches us about God. Paul wrote of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). The Greek word for “blessed” (*makarios*) conveys something akin to “happy” (Arndt & Gingrich, 1957) or “perfectly blissful” (Guthrie, 1957), and the Bible portrays God as being completely content, fulfilled and joyful: “enter into the *joy* of your master” (Mt 25:23, italics added). There is no hint of deficit in him, no emptiness, neediness or misery. On the contrary, in the words of theologians, God is self-existent and self-sufficient (Bavinck, 2004), and the source of all else. “In Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28). “From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever” (Rom 11:36). To God belongs “all power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev 5:12). Therefore, God is able “to enjoy what is most enjoyable with unbounded energy and passion forever” (Piper, 1991, p. 24). He is the plenitude of reality, beauty, greatness and goodness, and so is the source of all true happiness and aid.

At the same time, God’s infinite capacities enable him to be perfectly concerned for human well-being. We noted that the Bible portrays God as grieved and angry over human evil, but it also shows him to be the Savior and Protector of the weak, the poor and the suffering (Ps 12:5; 68:5-6; 113:5-9; Prov 19:17; 1 Cor 1:27-28). God is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and *abounding* in lovingkindness and truth” (Ex 34:6). It is his nature to be moved with compassion at the sight of human suffering and victims of evil, traits clearly displayed in Christ (Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34; 8:2; Lk 19:41; Jn 11:35, 38), who demonstrated a steady love for sinners and the broken, concretely manifesting that the triune God is love (Jn 15:9; 1 Jn 4:8).

Both these aspects of God are wondrously relevant for soul care. The infinitely joyful God is alone capable of supplying human blessedness, because he alone is filled with overflowing blessedness. And he himself is inclined to do so, because his blessedness consists in part in perfect compassion towards humans, including his design to rescue them from their suffering and brokenness and their sin and condemnation. His glory is manifested in his love as well as his infinitude. These corollary truths provide the bedrock that undergirds Christian soul care.



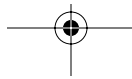


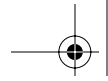
God, the soul healer. Flowing from his good character is God's active care for the psychospiritual well-being of his people. The Bible tells us God comforts the downcast (2 Cor 7:6; see 2 Thess 2:17), sustains those who fall and raises up all who are bowed down (Ps 145:14), preserves the souls of his godly ones (Ps 97:10), hears the cries of his people and saves them (Ps 34:15, 17; 145:19), restores the souls of his "sheep" (Ps 23:2-3), delivers the righteous from their afflictions (Ps 34:19), heals the brokenhearted, binds up their wounds and supports (or relieves) the afflicted (Ps 147:3, 6). God said to the distressed that he would build them up as a fortress of jewels (Is 54:11-14). The psalmist was encouraged that "when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path" (Ps 142:3). God grants his people to be "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16), a strengthening of their hearts in every good work and word (2 Thess 2:17). The psalmist declared to fellow-believers that

[God] delivers you from the snare of the trapper,
And from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with His pinions;
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. (Ps 91:3)

These metaphors comfort by reminding readers that the all-powerful God is on their side and committed to their good. This feeds a transcendent sense of optimism, a trait that many have identified as crucial to human well-being (Carver & Scheier, 2002; Seligman, 1991; Snyder, 2000).

Christ's work is soul healing. According to the Bible, the most important soul-healing event of all time was the death and resurrection of Christ, an event that has many ramifications for the soul. The most important outcome was that Christ's death propitiated the wrath of God against sinners (Rom 3:25) and made possible their reconciliation with God (2 Cor 5), which in turn made it possible for God to be the believer's soul-healer, Father and friend, all roles that bring comfort and create unique forms of religious coping for the Christian. Humans are said to be alienated from their Creator, but the gospel declares that through faith humans are granted divine forgiveness because of what Christ accomplished on the cross (Col 2:13-16). But this objective forgiveness also has subjective benefits. The experience of guilt and shame, signs of alienation from God, are ubiquitous and debilitating (especially shame,

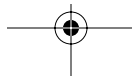
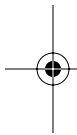


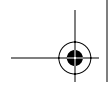


Tangney & Dearing, 2002). The blood of Christ, we are told, is able to “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14), so that we can experience the divine forgiveness and be released from a futile, works-oriented religious regimen. This experience, in turn, can assist Christians in forgiving others (Eph 4:32), an activity that itself likely reduces one’s own distress (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000).

While speaking to the seven churches in Asia Minor, Christ said to the Sardis church: “Buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see” (Rev 3:18). In rich metaphor, Christ informed the church that his death and resurrection procured abundant spiritual wealth, a perfect standing before God that covered their psychospiritual uncleanness and gave them wisdom to see the reality beyond appearance. We are told in Hebrews that Christ’s death specifically addresses a particular kind of anxiety: he died to deliver from their slavery those who struggle with fear of death (Heb 4:10). But Christ’s work relates more broadly to all soul-disorders in a fundamental way: “by his bruises we are healed” (Is 53:5), pointing ahead to the transcendent, all-encompassing soul-healing accomplishments bound up in the suffering of the coming Messiah.

Christian salvation is soul healing. The Bible informs us that when the believer is brought into Christ, a host of psychospiritual benefits become available to him or her. Paul sounded something like an early Christian cognitive therapist when he told Christians that because of their union with Christ, they could let go of certain vices, like sexual immorality, evil desire, anger and malice (Col 3:1-8)—dispositions that all have psychopathological implications—by setting their minds on the realities in Christ that are above: their union with him, their new selves, their new standing and status, and so on. In fact, Paul taught that God is constructing within Christians a “new self” through their faith and requisite internal activity (known as mortification and vivification; Eph 2:10; Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:17; see Calvin, 1559/1960, Vol. 1, pp. 595-602). He pointed explicitly to the word of God’s grace that was “able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32), a “building up” of inner resources for living the Christian life. However, he also understood the psychospiritual impact of Christian experience, pointing to the peace of God as something capable of guarding the



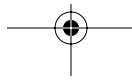


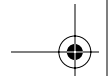
hearts and minds of believers (Phil 4:7). The indwelling Holy Spirit produces this peace, along with other soul-fulfilling states of mind and traits of character like love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, goodness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Though Paul did not give a comprehensive model of how to develop these Spirit-fostered virtues, he constantly directed the attention of his fellow believers to their transcendent, omnipotent, attributional source: God in Christ. On account of such realizations, he understood that Christianity produces an unbounded optimism in one's spiritual competence in Christ: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

Other apostles taught similarly. According to John, knowing and experiencing the love of God enables one to overcome fear (and perhaps its cousins, anxiety and shame?): "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love" (1 Jn 4:18). Peter encouraged his readers to endure their sufferings knowing they have an imperishable inheritance awaiting them in eternity (1 Pet 1:3-7). The Bible teaches that Christian salvation has secured abundant psychospiritual resources for Christians.

Human life has a christocentric maturity goal. Given the Christian's God-established standing and new life, the Bible points to the goal of this life, the Form of Christ. This Form is in view in the Bible's many admonitions and exhortations to be a person characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience, courage in the face of adversity (Acts 4:1-21), forbearance of one another in love (Eph 4:2), concern for the weak and disadvantaged (1 Thess 5:14; Jas 1:27), quickness to listen and slowness to anger (Jas 1:19), joyfulness (Phil 4:4), freedom from the love of money (Heb 13:5) and from anxiety (Phil 4:6), the bearing of other's burdens (Gal 6:2) and a radical love (1 Cor 13). The Bible's description of Christian virtues provides a template for one's character, the transformation of which is the goal of human life and Christian maturity (and so Christian soul care). This goal is summarized well in two distinct but corollary ways: as the love of God and the love of neighbor (Mt 22:37-39; see O'Donovan, 1986, ch. 11) and as conformity to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

Historically, the traditions flowing from the Reformation have labeled the gradual realization of this conformity "sanctification," with the implication that one's life can be increasingly "set apart to God." Unfortunately, many Christians have interpreted sanctification superficially and relegated it to little

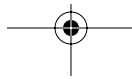


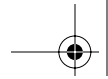


more than a legalistic program of conforming one's beliefs and behaviors to the belief system and moral code of one's church. However, if this process entails an increasing conformity to the image of Christ—the ideal Form of human life—it must also include an inward dimension, affecting the depth structures and activities of the heart (Crabb, 1988; Powlison, 2003; Narramore, 1984; Roberts, 1997; Tripp, 2002), and encompassing affective dispositions, attitudes, motives, loves and hates, and character traits (i.e., virtues), a much more profound change than mere cognition and behavior work alone could provide.

Christian soul-healing has an inter-human dimension. It is impossible to read the New Testament epistles carefully without recognizing the interpersonal nature of the salvific process. The epistles themselves are the work of anointed human beings communicating the gospel, at least in part, to address the soul-care needs and concerns of communities of other believers. Thus, the form of Scripture itself involves human-to-human interaction and psychospiritual support through its written discourse.

In the Scriptures, the local church is envisioned as a site of significant social support, shaped by the example and power of God in Christ. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; . . . contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. . . . Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone” (Rom 12:10, 13, 16-17). “Admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1 Thess 5:14). “[God] loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4:10-11). Implementing such admonitions and encouragements leads to the creation of communities with high and holy standards that simultaneously provide loving, patient and accepting environments. Communities such as these can best help their members mature into the kind of Christian personhood that is increasingly able to engage in self-examination, take responsibility for one's actions and behave in ways that promote the welfare of others. At the same time, there are biblical limits to the acceptance of the community. Unruliness, for example, is to be admonished (as just mentioned); unrepentant sin is not to be given unconditional positive regard (see 1 Cor 5). But it is precisely the existence of such interpersonal limits that constitutes a part of the soul-healing value of the biblical community. If maintained with deep humility and grace, they will





encourage struggling believers to hang in there and seek higher ground.

Christians should take care of their souls. One of the sages of Proverbs wrote this classic self-care maxim: “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23). We discover there that the wise person pays attention to her heart, listens to it and seeks to improve its condition, since the heart is of central importance to human well-being.

Two examples of such care of one’s heart in the Psalms demonstrate a prescient use of self-regulation found in what might be called “theocentric self-talk,” used for manifestly therapeutic purposes:

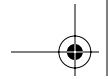
Why are you cast down, O my soul,
And why are you disquieted within?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
My help and my God. (Ps 42:11 New Oxford Bible)

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me; bless His holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;
Who pardons all your iniquities;
Who heals all your diseases;
Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
Who satisfies your years with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle. (Ps 103:1-5)

These passages illustrate a specific soul-care strategy recorded in the Bible: when feeling bad, one should try to take a more spiritual posture and address the distressed “parts” of one’s soul as a “dialogue partner,” in order to summon more of the soul into conformity to God’s word. Many centuries later, contemporary cognitive therapists would make use of similar “self-regulation” strategies; what is different today is that they are typically implemented apart from a theocentric context.

Most of the time, however, the biblical authors give more *general* encouragements or illustrations regarding the care of one’s soul. For example, consider how some of the biblical authors approach anxiety, a common malady of the soul. “When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul” (Ps 94:19). We are not told exactly what the consolations were, but the preceding verses refer to God helping his people and to his love

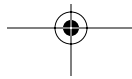


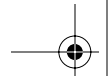


holding them up. Such reflections helped the author in overcoming his worries and filled him with delight. The psalmist wrote, “Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you” (Ps 55:22). This is similar to the New Testament admonition to cast “all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:6-7). Believers are taught here that they can “cast” their psychospiritual struggles on to God, and through this activity they will experience relief. In his Sermon on the Mount, Christ gave his followers a number of reasons to help them overcome anxiety about whether their basic needs would be met: there are more important things with which to concern oneself; God cares for birds and flowers; he will care for you; if you seek God first, you will have no wants; take one day at a time (Mt 6:25-34). Paul later told the Colossians to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col 3:15).

Such passages teach that believers have access to a spiritual contentment that undermines anxiety, and they are encouraged to pursue it. However, let us conclude this chapter on the Bible’s self-attested value as a soul-care book by acknowledging that all these instructions are quite general in nature. Nowhere, for example, is it spelled out exactly *how to* cast burdens or anxiety on the Lord. Such “how-to” procedures are not self-evident, and this kind of task is particularly challenging for some, depending on their proneness to anxiety. The Bible is characterized by this *general* level of strategic sophistication. Perhaps we can infer from this observation that God desires the Christian community to continue to develop its understanding of human beings and come up with more specific, detailed and comprehensive guidelines—strategies and treatment protocols, based on good Christian theory—to help people apply and fulfill the more general soul-care principles that he specially revealed in the Bible, much as he sanctioned later trinitarian reflection.

The specific strategies given in the Bible, combined with the multitude of general, therapeutically oriented encouragements and admonitions, together convey God’s revealed agenda that his children need to care for their souls biblically. However, the texts themselves would also seem to leave open the possibility of developing *further* Christian thinking about human beings and soul care, leading to an even richer and more comprehensive system of soul care (e.g., with detailed strategies for particular disorders), all to be realized within the theocentric guidelines found in the Bible. The sampling of biblical soul-care teaching that we have examined makes a persuasive case that it is God’s intention that the Bible have a secure place as the main text for Christian soul





care in his church. We turn next to consider how the church has used the Bible in its soul-care thinking and practice.

Notes

¹For various types of evidence, see Cook and Herzman (1983), Francis (1997), Jeffries (1996), Kuyper (1898a), Levy (1992), Lindberg & Numbers (1986, 2003), MacCulloch (2003), McGrath (1999b, chap. 14), Prickett (1986), Schweiker (2002), Stark (2003), Torrance (1984) and Van Til (1959).

²This thesis has been developed popularly by Piper (1991, 1998).

³As we will see, the Bible has its own psychopathology framework that centers on alienation from God as the chief human psychological disorder, which all humans share. Later in the book we will attempt to make sense of other forms of psychopathology within this theocentric context.

⁴And “there was room within the term ‘sacred writings’ for the New Testament to be considered by later Christians as included in this assertion” (Oden, 1989, p. 24).

⁵Peter’s authorship is disputed, but not universally.

