

Psychology and christianity: five views | eric l. johnson



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Review of “ Psychology & Christianity- Five Views” by Eric L. Johnson.

Title: Psychology & Christianity – Five Views

Author: Eric L. Johnson

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Introduction:

In this book review, I intend to cover the following outcomes: evaluate psychological theories against biblical teaching, discuss the contribution psychology has to make to Christian counselling, assess the compatibility of psychology (research and psychotherapy) with Christian counselling and critical examination of psychological theories.

About the editor

Eric L. Johnson is a teacher, editor, author and director. He attended Toronto Baptist Seminary and proceeded on to Calvin College before going on to Michigan State University where he bagged his PhD. He is an academic psychologist and initially lectured for nine years at the Northwestern College in Minnesota teaching Christian worldview, psychology and theology. Johnson wrote “ Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal” and contributed several articles for the Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counselling. He argued for the necessity of theology in counselling and

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psychological research. He is with the Journal of Psychology and Theology as an associate editor. Johnson edited a special issue of the Journal of Psychology and Christianity, entitled " Psychology within the Christian Tradition" in 1998. He made contributions in two books: " Christianity and Psychology: Four Views" and " God under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God" in addition to editing this book that I am reviewing. Johnson is currently the director of the Society for Christian Psychology and the Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

About the Book

Psychology and Christianity: Five Views, is divided into seven chapters and has three hundred and nineteen pages. It is a review and expansion of the first edition titled " Psychology and Christianity: Four Views". This book essentially lends to give a precise understanding of human nature and this is an issue that has refused to go. In page 104, we see that Adams argues that the Bible is sufficient to understand human nature and there is nothing psychology can offer but there are opposing arguments. Freud cited in Chapman (2007: 41) argues that religion is an illusion. However, Crabb cited in Lutzer (1998: 72) argues that we can " spoil the Egyptians"; take the best of both Christianity and Psychology for our use and become more effective as long as they are not in conflict with the Bible because the Bible will always be superior. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral advocates that four factors (Scripture, Tradition, Experience and Reason) must be considered when reaching decisions. In view of all this on-going debates, Johnson tries in this book to advance the argument for a relationship between Psychology and <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-christianity-five-views-eric-l-johnson/>

Christianity, and address the issue of helping Christians to understand and grasp the nettle of psychology.

In this edition, there is a fifth view which has been added to the first edition of four views. This fifth view is contributed by John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall and it is titled "A Transformational Psychology view". The other four view contributors were still involved in this edition but with revised contributions. The authors put forward five different views of how Psychology and Christianity can be integrated. They are David G. Myers who deals with the levels of explanation; an integration view by Stanton L. Jones, biblical counselling view by David A. Powlison and Christian psychology by Robert C. Roberts co-authored by P. J. Watson. Johnson wrote the opening chapter discussing the history of Christian psychology and also the closing chapter which talks about gaining understanding through the five views put forward by the various authors.

The authors gave very good account of themselves in their respective views. Every chapter is concise, well laid out and the thought flow pattern is quite consistent and credible.

Content of the book

Johnson sandwiches the five views in between two chapters that he authored. He started in this first chapter by looking at the history of Christians in Psychology. In this chapter, Johnson looks at a generic background of psychology but with special reference to how psychology is viewed today. He argues (page 10) that science is a gift from God and that the scientific revolution was initiated by mostly Christians. Some Christians

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have unreservedly incorporated modern psychology while others like (Bobgan & Bobgan 1987) have out-rightly rejected it and called it “psychoheresy”. Johnson explained in this chapter about the neutrality of this book and that it is rather a picture of the views of the majority of Christians.

The second chapter was by David Myers’ and it deal with levels of explanation. This chapter delves into the subject of human characteristics. This view recognises that Christian theology and Psychology are different and should be treated so but that both should combine well. Myers argues (page 49) that both vary especially in the methodology of research and so each should free to explore as they deem fit. He further argues (page 72-74) that scientific data has enabled him along with some other Christian thinkers to shift from their view of seeing homosexuality as a sin, to understanding the biological explanation of prenatal influences to brain differences especially also considering the fact that the Bible did not have much coverage on the subject matter.

Stanton Jones wrote the third chapter which is on the integration view. He shares the same view as Myers; that both Christian theology and Psychology have something to contribute to each other and consequently should be integrated; an aspect that is contrary to Myers view that they should be separated. Christianity is God’s word and psychology is God’s work. Jones argues (page 101) that God’s sovereignty prevails over every facet of human life and that Christian psychologists should benefit from that. However, Jones also shares a common view as Myers with regards to the fact that the Bible does not address some issues adequately (page 101). Jones shares a personal testimony of the tension points that he struggled with in-between <https://assignbuster.com/psychology-christianity-five-views-eric-l-johnson/>

Christianity and Psychology. (103-104). Jones became more confused as he desired to be faithful to the Bible, yet, he could not argue with the result that he was actually learning a lot about human nature in Psychology and so through exclusion, he found himself blending both Psychology and Christian theology.

The fourth chapter deals with Christian psychology and was co-authored by Roberts and Watson. They argue that understanding God which is revelation (general and special) should be the starting point for the development of psychological theories. These authors (page 155-156) argue that Christian sermons (using Jesus' sermon on the Mount as an example) are aimed at helping people to live well; dealing with character and transformation of persons and that psychology also deals with how to live, and changing a person's character with the aim of living well. They identify terminology as the only difference between both. They argue (page 157) that sermon conceptualises psychology.

John Coe and Todd Hall co-authored this fifth chapter which deals with the transformational view. They set out, not to develop or defend a model but to shed light on their argument, (page 200) that psychology and Christianity are closely related and that psychology is only an expression of faith and love. This view is the view that has just been added in this edition making it five views. They argue (page 200) in favour of the process and methodology of psychology as a process to new ways of transforming people. This approach looks into the psychologist's transformation (emotional and spiritual).

David Powlison authored the sixth chapter which discusses a Biblical counselling view. He started with a very bold statement “ Christian faith is a psychology”. Also that “ Christian ministry is a therapy” These statements summarises his view. Powlison argues (page 245) that the Scriptures talks about thoughts and intentions of the heart. He further argues that God through the scriptures reveals how human beings should achieve their potentials and a clear change process of attaining such too. Powlison assumes a very new approach in his view; the approach is to delve into the meanings of the word “ psychology” in the very context in which it is used. He argues (page 248) that obviously the meaning is relative. In a bid to drive home his argument, he develops sub themes; Psych 1 – 6. Psych 1 looks at how you work,; Psych 2 looks at the detailed knowledge of human functioning; Psych 3 looks at the competing theories of human personality; Psych 4 deals with the practical application to psychotherapy; Psych 5 looks at a system of professional and institutional arrangements and Psych 6 deals with a mass of ethos. Powlison was really keen on ensuring that his readers have a very clear understanding of his view and goes a step further with a case study as he argues (page 262) that looking at cases is the best way to understand psychological views including biblical counselling.

Eric Johnson authored the seventh and closing chapter where he made reference to similar books that has multiple views on the same subject. According to him, this book helps to highlight the point that a group of people, and specifically Christians in this instance, have the same belief but varied perspectives even within the same belief. Johnson (page 293) uses Proverbs 12: 15 to affirm that a wise man will be humbled, by that

awareness of what he does not know. No one has absolute knowledge except God. He argues that because we are finite creatures, we are limited in terms of views but God is the omniscient observer. He further argues that the more views we are open to, the better our understanding will be, and he encourages his readers especially Christians to dialogue, engage, critique and integrate the strengths of these views as it will enhance their understanding and scope in order to develop their own “ postformal synthesis” (page 309).

There is something I found very fascinating about this book. I found out that each chapter have contributing responses from the perspective of the other authors highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the particular view in light of their own view.

My thought.

I think that the writing style is easy to read and understand. The chapters are logically laid out and concise and the literary genre is prose. The subsequent contributions from diverse perspectives to each chapter are not common and made it all seem like a conference, answering most questions that readers could have raised. I am the pastor of my local church; I encourage members through prayers, teaching, preaching and pastoral care, based on the Scriptures. I have found myself at crossroads in some contemporary issues which are similar to the observations of Myers and Jones, where they have found the Bible silent on some issues and inadequately addressing some other issues. This is one of my reasons of studying Counselling, and a book like this has opened me up to differing

views highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of those views. This review has been an eye opener for me.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I consider the book well-structured as Johnson sets the stage with the historical background and after taking the five views, he borders the book at the end, encouraging scholars to critically and constructively engage to progress the work.

Finally, I observe that Johnson claims (page 10) that the book is neutral and that the views represent the collective views of a majority of Christians. This is a very good claim but it would have been very good if he had gone a step further to substantiate his claim with data. However, overall, I consider this book to be of immense value to any Christian psychologists irrespective of their chosen model; it will open them up to differing views even within the Christian community of Psychotherapists. . I identify with Stanton Jones who authored the Integrative view and I will recommend this book to anyone who is seeking a clearer understanding of the integrative model of counselling.

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