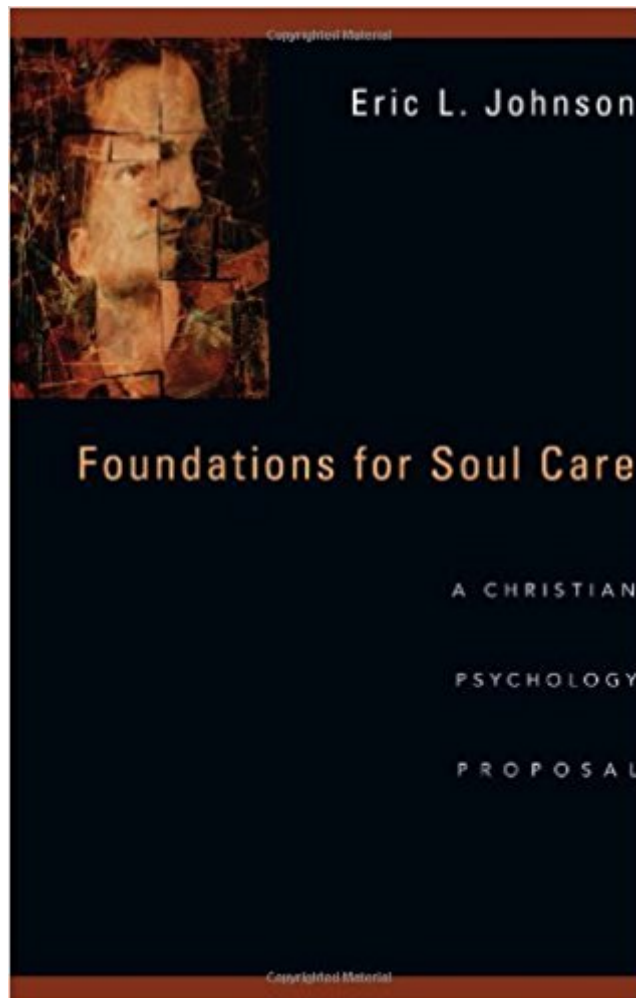


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# Foundations For Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal



## Synopsis

In this groundbreaking work of first-order scholarship, Eric Johnson makes a vitally important contribution to the field of Christian counseling. He first presents a detailed overview and appreciative but critical evaluation of the reigning paradigms in the field of Christian counseling, particularly biblical counseling and integration. Building on their respective strengths, he seeks to move beyond the current impasse in the field and develop a more unified and robustly Christian understanding. Drawing upon the Bible and various Christian intellectual and soul care traditions, and through a Christian reinterpretation of relevant modern psychological theory and research, Johnson proceeds to offer a new framework for the care of souls that is comprehensive in scope, yet flows from a Christian understanding of human beings--what amounts to a distinctly Christian version of psychology. This book is a must-read for any serious Christian teacher, student, or practitioner in the fields of psychology or counseling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

...a major work -- voluminous, comprehensive, and profound. This book is not only a Christian psychology proposal, but could be a useful starting point as a reference for those who might want to more precisely understand where Christian psychology fits in the broad spectrum of counseling models. While this is not the first book written on the topic of Christian psychology, it is a major effort in helping to define this field. (Craig Strohbach, Shrinkwrap Resources, August 15, 2008) There are differing opinions on psychology and Christianity, but this is a major contribution to the discussion.

We need to return to thinking of our pastoral labors as "soul care." (Preaching.com, Bible and Bible Reference Survey 2007)"Eric Johnson is resolutely fair-minded. He treats others as friends, with charity and respect. He seeks accurate understanding and takes no shortcuts. He takes others seriously, even when he disagrees. He earnestly pursues both truth and helpfulness. In other words, both in person and in print, he is after wisdom ('nothing else you could desire compares'). I count his friendship one of life's pleasures. Eric makes criticism easy to hear and makes vigorous argument in the pursuit of wisdom a delight!" (David Powlison, editor of the Journal of Biblical Counseling)"Eric Johnson combines scriptural interpretation with astute observation to develop a deep, thoughtful, intellectual and complex (in the best senses of those words) approach to Christian psychology. Yet Johnson's work is eminently practical in its purpose. He shows how insight into human nature leads to Christlikeness--maturity in reflecting the Creator of human nature. I highly recommend Foundations for Soul Care to biblical counselors as a core text that expands the conversation regarding what makes Christian counseling truly Christian. Readers won't agree with every point, but with eminent scholarship Johnson thoroughly addresses every point worth discussing." (Robert W. Kellemen, chair of Christian Counseling and Discipleship, Capital Bible Seminary, director of the Biblical Counseling and Spiritual Formation Network, and author of Soul Physicians, Spiritual Friends and Beyond the Suffering)"Eric Johnson's Foundations for Soul Care is an important book. Thorough, scholarly and provocative, this work calls us to reclaim the centrality of the Christian faith as we care for souls." (Mark R. McMinn, coauthor of Integrative Psychotherapy)"In this volume Eric Johnson combines a strong interdisciplinary background with his vision for a renewed Christian psychology. The result is an analysis that is intellectually sophisticated, while fully respecting the authority of Scripture--particularly its overall narrative power--and the tradition of Christian theologizing that springs from it." (Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, professor of psychology and philosophy, Eastern University, St. Davids, Pennsylvania)"Ever since the words Christian and psychology were put together in the 1950s, there has been debate and division. But the potential good in exploring the human condition within a consistently Christian worldview remains enormous. Dr. Johnson's book paves new ground that will carry us toward a biblically congruent, spiritually clean and intellectually responsible understanding of people, our destiny and how to get there." (Larry Crabb)"This book constitutes a major breakthrough for those evangelical psychologists, counselors, pastors and therapists who worry about how to hold modern secular psychology together with their faith. Written from a Kuyperian perspective, Johnson shows how a theology grounded in the Word of God for the glory of God can be psychotherapeutically effective. By interweaving a theological account of the person with neurobiological and

developmental approaches to psychopathology, Johnson offers a rich and flowing account of how the soul can be healed by glorifying God. It is a way forward in a discussion that is tempted either simply to cite Scripture on one hand or to elaborate endless methodological models on the other. Johnson returns the healing of the soul to the center of the discussion." (Ellen T. Charry, associate professor of systematic theology, Princeton Theological Seminary)"Eric Johnson's Foundations for Soul Care is a fresh and substantial contribution to the development of a truly Christian Psychology, and to Christian counseling and soul-care. I highly recommend it as required reading!" (Siang-Yang Tan, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Senior Pastor, First Evangelical Church Glendale, in Southern California)"Eric Johnson cuts through the underbrush of contemporary attempts to integrate psychology and theology to get at the root of a truly Christian psychology. He argues that the redemptive provision of the Creator goes back to the very origin of humanity and points forward to the restoration and fulfillment of human life as it was intended to be. From this perspective, the Bible can be viewed as an indispensable source of knowledge as to what constitutes humanity beyond a reductionist, secular approach. As a result, Christian psychology is not just an alternative to secular psychology, but has a biblically informed understanding of what is truly human and therefore can provide a baseline by which that which disrupts, distorts and disturbs personal human existence (sin) can be dealt with therapeutically with a goal of moving persons toward health and wholeness. Because we are spiritual beings bearing signs of being formed originally in the divine image, a Christian psychology is not one that imposes a religious construct upon basic humanity, but rather is able to describe and define humanity in its most complete form, including the spiritual dimension. The concept of 'soul care' is thus not first of all a religious practice but a thoroughly human praxis by which external sources of empowerment (grace) can be provided and appropriated. This is a book that should be at the top of the list as required reading for all who are preparing to be counselors and therapists as well as those already in practice." (Ray S. Anderson, Senior Professor of Theology and Ministry, Fuller Theological Seminary)"Eric Johnson's thought about Christian psychology is an improvement on just about everything in the field. Foundations for Soul Care will set the pace for discussions in the future." (Robert C. Roberts, Distinguished Professor of Ethics, Baylor University)

Eric L. Johnson (PhD, Michigan State University) trained as an academic psychologist and is Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is the author of Foundations for Soul Care and the coeditor of God Under Fire and Christianity and Psychology: Four Views. An associate editor of the Journal of

Psychology and Theology, he is the director of the Society for Christian Psychology and the Institute for Christian Psychology.

Much of what passes for "Christian counseling" seems to be simply secular pop-psychology with Biblical references pasted on as an afterthought. In reaction, so-called "Biblical" or Nouthetic counseling seems so anti-scientific, so quick to focus on blame, and so, well, reactive. Johnson examines these extremes with frank analytical honesty and finds them both lacking. His proposal not to try to integrate these two extremes, but rather that we as psychologists and Christians start from scratch and build a new truly Christian psychology. This is not an easy read, because it assumes familiarity with psychology, modern secular counseling theory, and Christian counseling. If you can hang with the author, you will find his analysis is careful, thorough, and fair. His proposal is breathtaking. When do we start?

Dr Johnson's Magnum Opus is a fascinating, though admittedly difficult, book to read. He makes crystal clear the primacy of scripture while taking a cautious but not rejecting approach to psychology. If this indeed led to the kind of research he encourages we'll learn more in the next hundred years than we have in the last!

This book is not something you grab off the shelf for a casual read. Johnson does however, shed light on a lot of relevant issues for Christian social workers.

Johnson works hard, uses a lot of words, and starts at the wrong end for his argument. Perhaps that is what makes the argument weak or perhaps it is because he realizes the argument is weak. A Christian psychology must begin with a biblical theology and anthropology otherwise one's humanistic psychology determines one's view of God and man. Through *New Eyes* by David Powilson gives a better framework for understanding human beings.

This is the definitive book for any Christian who is wrestling with the question, "What do I do with my Bible in relation to psychology, counseling, and soul care?" Dr. Eric Johnson explores this question through various lenses: historical, philosophical, theological, scientific, semantic, and of course, biblical and psychological. Ultimately, what the reader is left with is a robust, sophisticated, and thoroughly Christian view of the Bible and its the foundational role in soul care.

Dr. Eric Johnson's magnum opus is a beastly achievement. Not only does he present an interesting ideological history of the counseling wars in the church, but his approach to biblical counseling is more biblical than the "Biblical" Counseling approach (labels can be deceiving). Unlike most of the literature coming from the "Biblical" Counseling movement, Eric's deliberations bear the marks of a careful scholar with a deft command of biblical, theological, pastoral, and scientific sources.

Johnson's magnum opus (*Foundations for Soul Care*) is only the first of a three part treatment, and I am now waiting with baited breath for his next two books. If Johnson is right, and Christians are living in the days of the "counseling wars," I think Johnson's treatment in this book will present an approach that will be difficult to ignore by Christians (at least in academic settings).<sup>\*</sup> This approach is far more faithful to a rock-solid biblical worldview than Adams' overly narrow approach that reduces counseling to nouthetics, argumentation to proof-texting and rhetoric, pontificates so many unnecessary false antithesis, and ranks of an unhelpful "psychology is the devil" sort of mentality. <sup>\*</sup>

The chapter "From signs to history" is worth the price of the book for counselors who want a conceptualization of the goals of Christian therapy. This book is essential for those who want to counsel out of a Christian theology & framework.

Eric Johnson's new title, *Foundations for Soul Care*, is a mammoth of psychospiritual elucidations, religious history, philosophical intricacies, and psychological discoveries. A Christian Psychology, in Johnson's appraisal is, "a science in the approximation to the knowledge of God about human beings." Johnson's work is quite commendable for his, fair-mindedness, erudition, clinical sophistication, and biblical accuracy. Johnson's Reformed epistemology is quite evident throughout his book's main proposal: Christians ought to do soulcare from a Theocentric and biblically rooted epistemology about the nature of human beings. The current waves of psychological therapies are, according to Johnson, based on a reductionistic/mechanico-biological worldview of care. These models have neglected the ethicospiritual aspects or spheres of created beings. At the same time, such a neglect of the other spheres of created beings by the psychological/counseling community, e.g., psychosocial, ethical, spiritual, has therefore created a serious damage to the created structures of created beings, and a false dichotomy between a "secular" and "sacred" cosmos. Johnson's theology informs him at this point to declare all of the created order, and consequently, of created beings, as belonging to God the creator of the Universe. In other words, Jesus is the Lord of Psychology, and as such, Christians doing soulcare ought to become bilingual in the dialects of modern psychological science, in order to bring the most

glory to Christ. Created beings and the created order, Johnson informs us, are fallen and tarnished by sin. So, doing Christian soulcare has to be based on the Bible (as the soulcare provider's main template), but it should also have a template that is highly sophisticated in the understanding of psychological/neuroscience research. Scripture is to become our lens to appreciate the goodness of God in the created order (secular psychological discoveries should be read, digested, critiqued, and biblically exegeted in order to know anything that God in his goodness has granted his fallen created beings to know about human nature). Johnson's book is a seminal work that merits serious consideration by those institutions, guilds, and religious communities that seek to glorify God in their soul care. Johnson's proposed model for a Christian Psychology For Soul Care, stands quite apart from models of counseling that seek to root the care of souls on a purely bibliocentric perspective; while becoming neglectful of the significance of psychological science. Truth is also found in the created order, and as such, Christian soulcare providers ought to engage their world with the biblical lens of scripture to read the book of nature (e.g., Calvin's "Institutes"). Johnson's treatment of the issues is, however, quite fair in dealing with the disparities, confusion, or lack of a clear consensus within both the BC Models of soul care; but also by critiquing the lack of consensus within the traditional integrationist approaches that are in vogue in the counseling field today. His distinctions, between Traditional Biblical counseling and the Progressive Biblical counseling approaches are quite helpful for readers who may be unaware of these particulars. His book is intellectual, well-informed, detailed (thus the size), biblically attentive, hermeneutically grounded, and bilingual. Johnson starts his proposed model by emphasizing the basis of Christian soul care---soul care ought to be rooted in the Bible- thus, Johnson presents a high view of the Bible. Such a high view of the Scriptures, guides his endeavors in this book. At the same time, what is quite appealing in his proposal (see chapter 11 of his book) is the suggestion that, Christians doing soulcare ought to develop a biblical template (nurtured by Bible study, scripture memorization, and prayer) that would permit them to read, with the aim of bringing glory to God, the various templates that have been developed by "secular" models of therapy and soulcare. In this regard then, Christian soulcare providers ought to become bilingual (see, Wayne Oates "Pastoral Counseling.") What is remarkable in Johnson's proposal for a Christian psychology, is his high view of Scripture. Furthermore, Johnson suggests that this template or lens (see, John Calvin's "Institutes for the Christian Religion.") should be also nurtured (formed) by the study and appraisal of the Christian classics, which explain and expand the biblical doctrines of scripture. Not to spoil future readers' fun, suffice it to say that, this work has been long awaited for. It is a radical challenge to Christian soulcare providers to not "become afraid of psychological science," nor to lag in "creating a Christian science

of psychology," and to "have a high view for the Bible," as they seek to bring the most glory to God within his created order in the universe, and the souls of human beings. The book is informed by semiotic theory and speech-acts theory throughout; but, it reads easily. As stated above, Johnson is quite detailed in his writing here, so the reader should be prepared to bear with some "excursions," in his writing. A semidiscursive understanding of intertextuality pervades Johnson's proposal as well. This book, which Johnson dedicates to his lovely wife Rebekah, has been the epitome of his love for the Church of Jesus Christ. His contribution to soulcare should be greatly appreciated and validated as the right step towards the realization of a biblically based, psychologically well-informed, and spiritually wise journey into the depths of the human soul. Johnson presents and elaborates on other biblical concepts such as: the dynamics between interiority/outwardness, the role of the Holy Spirit in Soul care, the biblical doctrine of the Triune God, the imago Dei (image of God in created beings), and Christiformity (through counseling to develop in the counselee the character of Christ). These and many more issues are seriously dealt with by Johnson in his masterful, balanced, compassionate, and biblically astute treatise. Now that you have received a foretaste of what is to come. I have only one word for you: Take up (the book) and Read! Best Regards, To God Alone the Utmost Glory, and Peace and Love to His Church. Through Christ, he who is the Lord of the Church.!!

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