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A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOD ATTACHMENT AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE AMONG EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

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APPROVAL SHEET

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOD ATTACHMENT
AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE AMONG
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

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To Brenda: my wife, my champion, and my best friend.

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PREFACE

This dissertation represents the end of my formal education. Although I will no longer pursue my studies at an educational institution, I hope, that by God's grace, to never quit learning. I have more people to thank than this short space will allow. Therefore, I must say thank you to everyone who ever taught me anything. It is because of each of you that I have completed this leg of the journey.

With that said, I must mention a few individuals who should be memorialized in this preface. First, I thank Eric Johnson for his wisdom, friendship, mentoring, and patience with me. Next, I thank my other professors at Southern seminary who helped shape my worldview. Third, I want to express appreciation for some of my now deceased teachers, particularly Francis Schaeffer, for it was Schaeffer who helped me see that Christianity is more than a religion; it is an entire philosophical system, a system that covers all reality. Last, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his gracious intervention into my life. For without him, none of this would be possible.

Todd Hardin

Knoxville, Tennessee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Church nursery workers are familiar with the effects of separation anxiety. Time and again, tranquil toddlers become turbulent tykes when dropped off for Sunday School class. This phenomenon is not limited to children in church. It plays out often[1] when an infant experiences separation from parents. Researchers on human development have determined this behavior flows from the attachment bond children have to their parents, and they call this paradigm attachment theory.

In recent years, attachment theory has gained popularity in the counseling community. Cassidy and Shaver contend that attachment theory has been "one of the broadest, most profound, and most creative lines of research in 20th-century (and now 21st-century) psychology."[2] Attachment theory's popularity has spawned works in several areas. For example, there are attachment books on individual psychotherapy[3] while other texts address family therapy,[4] addictions,[5] trauma,[6] depression,[7] and

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[1]This behavior happens "often" but not always. For example, children with an avoidant attachment tend to disengage with adults when dropped off by parents.

[2]Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), xi.

[3]David J. Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford, 2007).

[4]Daniel A. Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

[5]Phillip J. Flores, *Addiction as an Attachment Disorder* (Oxford: Jason Aronson, 2004).

[6]Laurel Parnell et al., *Attachment-Focused EMDR: Healing Relational Trauma* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013).

[7]Guy S. Diamond and Gary M. Diamond, *Attachment-Based Family Therapy for Depressed Adolescents* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014).

developmental psychology.[8] The research is broad and voluminous. As such, attachment theory has left an indelible imprint on the discipline of counseling. It has influenced the way helping professionals think about how formative relationships shape experiences.

Before proceeding with this discussion, a definition of attachment theory would prove helpful. Mary Ainsworth, an attachment research and theory pioneer, offers the following definition of attachment theory. Attachment theory is an "ethological-evolutionary"[9] way of understanding people. It focuses on the relational ties that people experience with one another. It is "an affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one—a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time."[10] These ties are evident in that they "are behaviors which promote proximity or contact."[11]

Attachment includes four main psychological aspects. First, the individual will maintain proximity to the attachment figure. Second, the person will use the attachment figure as a secure base for exploration.[12] Third, the individual will use the attachment figure as a haven for safety. Last, the person will experience separation anxiety when losing the attachment figure.[13] In general, these dynamics emerge in early childhood, and they continue in some form across the life span.

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[8]Daniel J. Siegel and Mary Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

[9]Mary D. Ainsworth and Silvia M. Bell, "Attachment, Exploration, and Separation: Illustrated by the Behavior of One-Year-Olds in a Strange Situation," *Child Development Child Development* 41, no. 1 (1970): 50.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 92.

Besides the four main attachment characteristics, there are also two attachment dimensions. The attachment dimensions are *avoidance of intimacy* and *anxiety over abandonment*.[14] Brennan, Clark, and Shaver describe the experience of a person in two of the styles:

> **Avoidant**. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.
>
> **Anxious-ambivalent**. I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partners, and this sometimes scares people away.[15]

Agreeing with Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, Beck and McDonald concluded that attachment is best understood as occurring along dimensions. They elaborated on the predominant themes of each dimension.

> *Avoidance of Intimacy* . . . involves themes such as a need for self-reliance, a difficulty with depending [on another], and unwillingness to be emotionally intimate. . . .
>
> *Anxiety over Abandonment* involves themes such as the fear of potential abandonment . . . angry protest (resentment or frustration at [another's] lack of perceived affection), jealousy over [another's] seemingly differential intimacy with others, anxiety over one's lovability in [another's] eyes, and, finally, preoccupation with or worry concerning one's relationship with [another].[16]

These two dimensions can be further allocated into four characteristic attachment styles. Karen explains each of these styles by describing the reactions of children who participated in attachment research:

> *Securely attached* [children] . . . sought their mother when distressed . . . seemed confident of her availability . . . were upset when she left them . . . eagerly greeted

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[14]The anxious dimension is sometimes referred to as anxious-ambivalent. For an in-depth discussion on the utility of dimensions versus styles, see Marc B. Levy and Keith E. Davis, "Lovestyles and Attachment Styles Compared: Their Relations to Each Other and to Various Relationship Characteristics," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 5, no. 4 (1988): 439-71.

[15]Kelly A. Brennan, Catherine L. Clark, and Phillip R. Shaver, "Self-Report Measurement of Adult Attachment," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships,* ed. Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes (New York: Guilford, 1998), 47, emphasis original.

[16]Beck and McDonald, "Attachment to God," 94, emphasis original.

her upon her return, and . . . warmly accepted and were readily comforted by her soothing embrace.

Avoidantly attached [children] . . . seemed to depend less on their mother as a secure base . . . sometimes attacked her with a random act of aggression; who were far more clingy and demanding than the secure children in the home environment; and . . . despite in some cases being just as openly upset by the mother's departure in the Strange Situation,[17] showed no interest in her when she returned.

And *Ambivalently attached* [children] . . . tended to be the most overtly anxious; who, like the avoidant children, were also clingy and demanding at home; [and] like the secure, were upset when abandoned by the mother in the Strange Situation; but who, despite wanting her desperately when she returned, arched away angrily or went limp in her embrace, so that they could not be soothed.[18]

Karen continues by explaining Mary Main's discovery of the fourth style:

[The] *disorganized/disoriented* [children] display behaviors typical of both the avoidant and the ambivalent baby. In the Strange Situation they seek proximity with the mother in a disoriented, herky-jerky, semiparalytic way—they approach her backwards, or they freeze suddenly in the middle of a movement, or they sit for a while and stare into space.[19]

Bartholomew made further distinctions in the avoidant style. According to Bartholomew, there are two types of avoidant attachment in adults: dismissing and fearful. A person with a *dismissing avoidance* orientation maintains

a positive self-image in the face of rejection by attachment figures [by distancing] oneself and [developing] a model of the self as fully adequate and hence invulnerable to negative feelings which might activate the attachment system. . . . Over time, the strategies used to defend against the awareness of attachment needs become so engrained as to operate automatically and outside of awareness. Individuals with this style passively avoid close relationships; they place much value on independence and assert that relationships are relatively unimportant.[20]

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[17]The Strange Situation is an experiment that monitors interactions between small children and their mothers. It introduces separations and reunions between the child and mother and then records how the child responds.

[18]Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 172, emphasis original.

[19]Ibid., 235, emphasis original.

[20]Kim Bartholomew, "Avoidance of Intimacy: An Attachment Perspective," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 7 (1990): 164.

In contrast, those who are *fearfully avoidant* are characterized by a desire for social contact and intimacy, but experience pervasive interpersonal distrust and fear of rejection. The result is subjective distress and disturbed social relations characterized by a hypersensitivity to social approval. To preclude the possibility for rejection, such individuals actively avoid social situations and close relationships in which they perceive themselves as vulnerable to rejection.[21]

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the attachment dimensions and their corresponding types or styles.[22] Each style consists of a combination of the attachment dimensions. So, dismissing avoidance is characterized by high avoidance and low anxiety and so on.

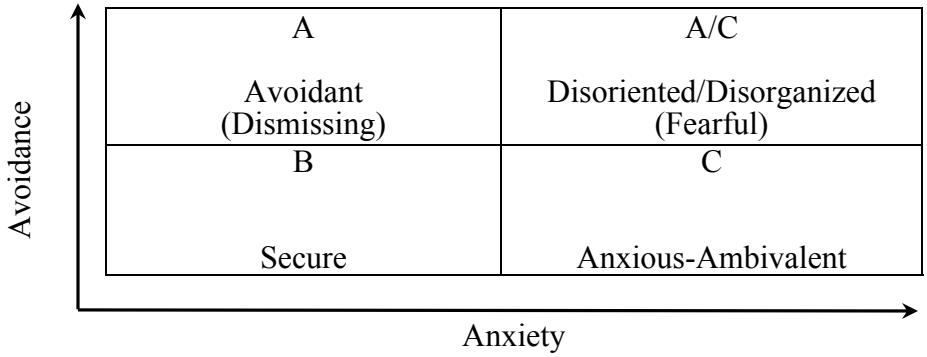

Figure 1. Attachment dimensions and their corresponding styles

To sum up, attachment theory stipulates that infants develop bonds with attachment figures. These bonds last over time. The theory also asserts that they will seek their attachment figures when under duress. They will also experience anxiety when separated from them. Furthermore, attachment problems are best conceived as occurring along two dimensions. These dimensions are avoidance of intimacy and anxiety over abandonment. Some theorists have concluded that these two different dimensions result in four distinct attachment styles: secure, avoidant (dismissing), disoriented/disorganized (fearful), and anxious-ambivalent.

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[21]Bartholomew, "Avoidance of Intimacy," 164.

[22]Adapted from Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, "Self-Report Measurement," 50.

As mentioned, attachment is one of the most thoroughly researched psychological constructs in the latter half of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries.[23] However, the theory is not without its critics. Although a thorough analysis of all views contra to the attachment position is beyond the scope of this project, there are three notable objections to the theory.

First, some theorists challenge the notion that early attachment experiences are determinative in how children turn out. Kagan represents this view when he writes, "The psychiatrist John Bowlby was certain that an infant's experiences with the mother during the first two years created an emotional state, which he called secure or insecure attachment, that might be preserved for a lifetime."[24]

Kagan gives away his position when he offers the following illustration of his understanding of Bowlby's theory:

> This bold idea implied that a bout of depression in a twenty-five-year-old man who lost a gratifying relationship with his mother twenty-four years earlier. In this account the man's current employment, income, health, and friendships are of less relevance than his infant attachment.[25]

Kagan implies that in Bowlby's formulation, later events do not contribute to one's difficulties in life. This idea that early attachments predetermine one's life leads to the second criticism.

The assumption that people are the recipients of their mothers' nurturing has led some theorists to contend that attachment theorists incorrectly see the mind of children as blank slates. Pinker voices the thought when he states, "The attachment hypothesis owes its popularity to a tired notion bequeathed to us by Freud and the behaviorists: the baby's mind as a small blank slate that will retain forever the first few

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[23]Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, xi.

[24]Jerome Kagan, *On Being Human: Why Mind Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), locs. 3167-78, Kindle.

[25]Ibid., loc. 3178.

inscriptions written on it."[26] Pinker seems to assume that attachment theorists believe children take a passive stance in their development.

Besides Hagan and Pinker, other theorists concede that attachment theory sees aspects of development correctly, but errs because it overemphasizes early parent-child attachments at the expense of a child's socialization through peer relationships. Harris voices this sentiment:

> Children are born with certain characteristics. Their genes predispose them to develop a certain kind of personality. But the environment can change them. Not "nurture"—not the environment their parents can provide—but the outside-the-home environment, the environment they share with their peers.[27]

Unlike Kagan and Pinker, Harris tips her hat to the attachment theorists by conceding concepts like children having a secure base or preferring their mothers to strangers, but she too thinks attachment theory misses the mark when it comes to child development.

While these critics of attachment theory articulate their position well, they all share one thing. The problem with each of these arguments is that the critics do not seem to appreciate the depth of attachment theory. For example, the notion that early attachment experiences are determinative in how a child turns out assumes that internal working models (IWMs) are static and unchangeable; however, this is simply untrue.

Next, the notion that attachment theorists hold to the idea a young child's mind is a *tabla rosa* is also invalid. This view assumes that children are passive in their interactions with the environment. As discussed later, attachment theorists understand development as an interactive process. They believe children grow and learn as they interact with their parents, peers, other adults, and other novel situations.

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[26]Judith Harris, *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* (New York: Free Press, 2009, xxv.

[27]Ibid., 137.

Last, the concept that attachment theory under-emphasizes peer interaction is overstated. Attachment theory does value early attachments, but researchers have examined all sorts of attachment. Some of these different studies are highlighted throughout the project.

In essence, attachment theory has been one of the most examined constructs in the history of psychology. Researchers have replicated its findings in different settings and across different cultures. For its critics, the burden of proof remains on them. As such, this project assumes the validity of the observations made by attachment researchers over the last seventy years. These attachment researchers have emphasized the role of relationships and well-being, and since relationships are fundamental to Christianity, Christian psychologists and caregivers approach the theory with great interest. However, before accepting attachment theory's tenets, Christians must first consider whether there the attachment concept is consistent with biblical teaching.

A Biblical and Christian Justification of the Attachment Concept

Christianity concerns itself with relationships. In particular, it focuses on a person's relationship with God, with self, and with others. However, since the world is not an ideal place (Eccl 1:15), these relationships are plagued with dysfunction. One of the ways that the church addresses this problem is through the practice of Christian counseling.

Christian counseling concerns itself with helping individuals improve their relationships with God, self, and others. Thus, for Christian counselors, attachment theory provides a natural area for study. Though, before accepting attachment theory's major tenets, Christians should analyze its worldview assumptions.

Once again, attachment is about relationships, and the Bible is the story of God and his relationship with his children. Thus, the Bible offers a portrayal of God that suggests he could become an attachment object. First, it is possible for God's children to

be near him (cf. Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). Second, God's children can experience him as a secure base. This base provides them a foundation for "exploratory behavior" (Nah 1:7). Third, God's children can take refuge in him. He provides his children a safe haven in times of trouble (Ps 46:1; Matt 11:28), and finally, God's children experience anxiety when they sense his absence (see Ps 51:11-12).

These examples do not reflect a refined *Christian* attachment theory, but show that the attachment concept is compatible with scriptural teaching about relationships with God.[28] As such, there are biblical grounds for pursuing research on this construct. For the Christian, the issue is not whether individuals attach to persons, that is a given (see Gen 2:18). The issue is if people attach to the "proper *objects* in the proper *way*."[29] Therefore, is God a legitimate attachment object for humans, and if so, how?

According to the Bible, Christians should relate to God in loving submission and dependence upon him. Job (1:20-22) and Jesus (cf. Luke 22:42), among others, provide examples of this kind of secure attachment. Yet, history shows that distressed humans fall short of such a relationship with God (Matt 23:37). Those with insecure God attachment often feel unworthy to approach God. Sometimes they are afraid of him. It is important to know that these initial internal reactions are not sin. These reactions are automatic responses of the attachment system to a presenting situation. It seems these responses flow from biopsychosocial damage in the person's attachment system. Granted, some of the resultant behaviors may be sinful, but the initial problem springs from relying on distorted thinking flowing from earlier traumatic or fearful experiences. This distorted thinking provides an erroneous assessment of the situation. It offers a skewed

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[28]Robert C. Roberts, "Attachment: Bowlby and the Bible," in *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology,* ed. Robert C. Roberts and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 207.

[29]Ibid., 213, emphasis original.

vision of God, the self, and others. This skewed interpretation of reality explains why even devout Christians can react to difficulties in an insecure way.

To sum up, those with secure God attachment are better adjusted than those with insecure God attachment.[30] To the extent they are freed from their original sin, those with secure attachment are more likely to seek God. In contrast, those with insecure God attachment are more haphazard or frozen in their God-seeking behaviors. Thus, God attachment may help Christian researchers understand how a person experiences God.[31]

For Christians, understanding how a person experiences God is of great value. God attachment provides a good way of understanding that experience. However, because the Bible does not offer a refined theory of attachment per se, Christian researchers need to study the work of secular attachment researchers for valuable insights into attachment relationships. Christians interested in this topic also have to reflect on how unbelief has affected secular attachment theory.

How then has unbelief affected secular attachment theory? In answering this question, Christians must first assess attachment theory's basic assertions. They do this

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[30]See Kimberly D. Anderson, "The Role of God Attachment Patterns in Relational Spiritual Maturity and Faith Development among Emerging Adults" (Psy.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2014); Matt Bradshaw, Christopher G. Ellison, and Jack P. Marcum, "Attachment to God, Images of God, and Psychological Distress in a Nationwide Sample of Presbyterians," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2010): 130-47; Rosalinda Cassibba et al., "The Role of Attachment to God in Secular and Religious/Spiritual Ways of Coping with a Serious Disease," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 3 (2014): 252-61; Giselle Hernandez, Jessica M. Salerno, and Bette L. Bottoms, "Attachment to God, Spiritual Coping, and Alcohol Use," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2010): 97-108; and Kristin J. Homan, "A Mediation Model Linking Attachment to God, Self-Compassion, and Mental Health," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 10 (2014): 977.

[31]See Victor G. Cicirelli, "God as the Ultimate Attachment Figure for Older Adults," *Attachment and Aging* 6, no. 4 (2004): 371; Tracy A. Freeze, "An Examination of the Role of Attachment, Religiousness, Spirituality and Well-Being in People of Christian Faith: The Baptist Experience" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Brunswick, 2012); Joan Anne Keister, "Attachment Style and Religious Coping Strategies," (Psy.D. diss., University of La Verne, 2010); and Melissa M. Kelley and Keith T. Chan "Assessing the Role of Attachment to God, Meaning, and Religious Coping as Mediators in the Grief Experience," *Death Studies* 36, no. 3 (2012):199-227.

by examining attachment theory through the lens of a Christian worldview.[32]

From a worldview perspective, secular attachment theory is based on Darwinian naturalism. As such, it assumes that the universe is a closed system. Of course, this view is untenable for the Christian, for Christianity teaches the opposite view. For the Christian, the universe is an open system. Its openness allows for spiritual activity that is unseen. It makes room, in Schaeffer's words, for "the God who is there."[33] With such a profound difference between worldviews, an analysis of the two systems proves helpful. It helps Christian theorists articulate a Christian perspective on the attachment concept.

Five foundational differences exist between secular attachment theory and its Christian counterpart. The differences have to do with each theory's worldview, object, focus, ethos,[34] and telos. First, as mentioned, secular attachment theory builds its foundation on a Darwinian worldview, where a Christian attachment theory frames reality within the meta-narrative of Scripture. This Christian ground-motive provides the basis for a Christian understanding of attachment theory. These respective starting points are significant. Everything else flows from them.

Second, for the most part, secular attachment theory focuses on human-to-human attachment. For example, the typical relationship studied is that of mother and child. Christian attachment theory also agrees that human-to-human relationships are important. Christian attachment theorists, however, believe that the most important relationship humans can have is with God, so in addition to other people, individuals can become attached to God (2 Cor 12:8-10; Luke 12:22-31) as well as to things (Luke 18:18).[35]

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[32]Roberts, "Attachment," 206.

[33]Francis A. Schaeffer, *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: The God Who Is There, Escape from Reason, and He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 144.

[34]*Ethos* is used here in the sense of the moral nature of the entity under discussion.

[35]Roberts, "Attachment," 207.

Third, each approach has a different focus. The two approaches differ in terms of how they view human responsibilities in adulthood. While both groups believe that early adults are not responsible for what caused an insecure attachment style, since it happened in infancy, Christians believe that they are responsible for how their damage expresses itself with others and with God, and in this sense, they are also responsible for their weaknesses and sins. Because of this, Christian attachment differs from its secular counterpart because it highlights the *subjects* of the personal agent's attachments instead of the *objects*.[36]

Fourth, each approach emphasizes a different ethos. As mentioned, secular attachment theory holds to a Darwinian worldview. Thus, it bases ethical norms on adaptability instead of transcendent moral standards. It is therefore reductionistic. In the Darwinian understanding of ethics, there is no of recognition of an objective sense of right or wrong. However, Christian attachment theory has a different understanding. Its worldview recognizes God places moral requirements on responsible adults. These moral requirements stipulate how adults are to relate to their attachment figures.[37]

Finally, each approach emphasizes a different telos. Secular attachment theory conceptualizes the purpose of attachment as a "control system." This system increases the survivability of the species.[38] In contrast, the Christian perspective views attachment through the framework of God's desire to foster relationships with his creatures and form images of himself through his redemption and their resultant practice of the virtues. Through redemption and the practice of Christian virtues like love for God and love for others, humans grow in their relationship with God and others and become more like

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[36]Roberts, "Attachment," 213.

[37]Ibid., 208.

[38]Ibid., 221.

him.[39] Table 1 summarizes the major differences in the secular and Christian perspectives on attachment.

Table 1. Differences in attachment concept

Description	Secular	Christian
Worldview	Darwinian naturalism	Christian theism
Object	Humans	Things, humans, God
Focus	Low recognition of adult responsibility	High recognition of adult responsibility
Ethos	Adaptability	Morality
Telos	Survival	Love (for God and others)

As mentioned, secular attachment theory provides a vast amount of research worth exploring. However, because of its Darwinian foundations, Christians must scrutinize its assumptions. Secular attachment theory's naturalistic worldview gives it a truncated view of reality. Nevertheless, that does not mean that secular attachment theory cannot study with great accuracy many aspects of human relationality and how it originates. Believers, therefore, can learn much from secular attachment theory's observations about relationships, but they must do so by viewing these assumptions through the clarity of a Christian lens.

Thoughtful critiques must first acknowledge common ground. They also concede areas in which an opponent has a good point. One area in which Christians can learn from secular attachment theorists deals with child development. Both Christian and secular attachment theorists are concerned with how children attach to their parents. What can Christians value and appreciate, if anything, from the secular attachment view of early childhood attachment experiences?

[39]Roberts, "Attachment," 209, 214, 217.

Secular attachment researchers have helped elucidate previously unarticulated aspects of the created order. One of these aspects is the concept of the Internal Working Model (IWM). Although in existence since the beginning,[40] the conceptualization of the IWM provides a way of understanding the template children use for interpreting themselves and their worlds.[41] IWMs develop in infancy. They come into existence before formal or even concrete operational thinking emerges. As such, IWMs precede spiritual awareness. Thus, it is helpful to understand how IWMs influence later spiritual development.

Having a limitation to engage in self-reflexivity is a deficit that might hinder spiritual development. Young children with insecure attachment typically have poor self-awareness.[42] They also exhibit difficulty in "thinking about feelings, and thinking about thoughts."[43] By and large, secure children are more skilled in these areas. For example, Karen contends that secure children tend to be able to "acknowledge having more than one feeling at a time."[44] They also tend to be more aware of the complexity of human emotional experience. Karen elaborates by noting that secure children often can tell "that people can say one thing while meaning just the opposite."[45] Such capacities for self-reflection and emotion awareness are indispensable for spiritual development. A

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[40]God created human beings as rational, personal agents (see Gen 1:26-28). As such, they have always possessed the ability to plan for possible scenarios and learn from their mistakes. IWMs are simply learned experiences that serve as templates. IWMs help individuals formulate possible courses of action when faced with novel situations. So, in this sense, secular attachment researchers did not discover IWMs. Instead, they observed their existence and then offered a linguistic label and explanation for them.

[41]Ross A. Thompson, "Early Attachment and Later Development: Familiar Questions, New Answers," in *Handbook of Attachment*, ed. Cassidy and Shaver, 349.

[42]Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 207.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

deficiency in such skills is certain to stifle spiritual growth. As such, children with insecure attachment, when compared to their secure counterparts, will lag behind.

While these IWMs entrench themselves in the person, Karen points out that IWMs "are not completely dominant."[46] Karen provides cases of insecure children overcoming negative IWMs. In most instances, these children had a "third person" who provided a safe haven, but was someone "of far less importance, like a grandparent or babysitter."[47] This haven served as an "island of secure functioning."[48]

Christian attachment theorists would agree with Karen that positive change under such conditions, although difficult, is possible. The Christian perspective, however, would want to provide a wider relational circle for the child. It would offer repeated exposure to healthy relationships characteristic of a vibrant faith community, and would help the child maintain proximity to a Person of "far greater importance" (i.e., the Triune God of the Bible) than any human attachment figure. In essence, a Christian understanding of attachment would seek to help the child move closer to God.

Attachment theory and Christianity are both interested in relationships between persons, and since God is a Person, humans should be able to attach to him. Thus, it seems that it would be possible to develop a Christian version of attachment theory. As such, it is inevitable that Christians would want to study human attachment to God.

Attachment to God

Given that secular attachment theory and Christianity are concerned with relationships, it is not surprising that many Christian researchers have taken an interest in secular attachment theory.

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[46]Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 207.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

A number of Christian researchers have examined how people relate to God as an attachment figure. For example, Beck showed that God fulfills the criteria of serving as a secure base.[49] Also, Cicirelli explored the idea of God being an attachment figure among senior citizens.[50] Furthermore, Kirkpatrick showed that God can be an attachment figure,[51] and Manock confirmed Kirkpatrick's initial research.[52]

This research suggests that God qualifies as an attachment figure. Hence, God attachment exists. This means that studying attachment to God can also help people better understand how believers relate to God. Although God can be an attachment figure, people must attach to him in a different way than they attach to other humans because of his non-corporeal nature (see John 4:24). For example, since God is Spirit, people cannot touch or see him as they would other individuals.

There are differences in how humans relate to God and how they relate to each other. This observation has led many researchers to investigate their similarities and differences. Some studies focused on how adult attachment patterns in families compare to God attachment styles. For example, McDonald and colleagues compared parent-child attachment with child-God attachment within families.[53] Furthermore, Miner studied the effects of parent-child attachment on religious orientation and psychological wellbeing.[54]

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[49]Richard Beck, "God as a Secure Base: Attachment to God and Theological Exploration," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 125-32.

[50]Cicirelli, "God as the Ultimate Attachment Figure."

[51]Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Attachment and Religious Representations and Behavior," in *Handbook of Attachment*, ed. Cassidy and Shaver, 906-33.

[52]David Isamu Manock, "The Relationship of Adult Attachment Styles and Image of God in Individuals" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Psychology, 2003).

[53]Angie McDonald et al., "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypotheses," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24, no. 1 (2005): 21-28.

[54]Maureen Miner, "The Impact of Child-Parent Attachment, Attachment to God and Religious Orientation on Psychological Adjustment," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 2 (2009): 114.

Murunga investigated the connection between children and fathers in relation to God attachment.[55]

Extending beyond parent-child attachment, Kimball and colleagues explored the relationship between peer-to-peer attachment and God attachment.[56] Cunion analyzed the effect that intimate partner violence may have on God attachment.[57] In each of these studies, researchers found connections between human attachment and God attachment. The research reconfirms the validity of the attachment construct. In addition, it indicates that there is a relation between human and God attachment.

Christian researchers have also examined the connection between God attachment and well-being. Freeze investigated the relationship between attachment and well-being for Baptist believers.[58] Joules studied the role of God attachment in adult religiosity, spirituality, and psychological adjustment.[59] Other studies focused on the internalization of God attachment. For example, Zahl and Gibson studied how God attachment affected one's "head" and "heart" knowledge.[60] Also, Rowatt and Kirkpatrick examined how God attachment relates to affect, religiosity, and personality.[61] In general,

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[55]Maurice S. Murunga, "Who's Your Daddy? Family Structure Differences in Attachment to God" (M.S. thesis, Southern Nazarene University, 2012).

[56]Cynthia N. Kimball et al., "Attachment to God: A Qualitative Exploration of Emerging Adults' Spiritual Relationship with God," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 41, no. 3 (2013): 175-88.

[57]April L. Cunion, "The Effect of Intimate Partner Violence on God-Image and Attachment," (Psy.D. diss., Regent University, 2006).

[58]Freeze, "An Examination of the Role of Attachment."

[59]Shaalon Joules, "The Mediating Role of God Attachment Between Religiosity and Spirituality and Psychological Adjustment in Young Adults" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 2007).

[60]Bonnie Poon Zahl and Nicholas J. S. Gibson, "God Representations, Attachment to God, and Satisfaction with Life: A Comparison of Doctrinal and Experiential Representations of God in Christian Young Adults," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 22, no. 3 (2012): 216-30.

[61]Wade C. Rowatt and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 4 (2002): 637-51.

these studies show that psychologically healthy people tend to have a secure God attachment. If this is so, then what about those who are in poor psychological health?

Christian researchers are working to answer this question. For example, Fergus and Rowatt examined the connection between God attachment and scrupulosity.[62]Gillies investigated the relationship between God attachment and same-sex attraction,[63]and Hernandez, Salerno, and Bottoms examined God attachment and alcohol use.[64] Several studies have observed the linkage between God attachment and eating disorders.[65] Other researchers have explored God attachment and risk-taking behaviors by gender.[66] Still others have investigated God attachment and work addiction[67] as well as bereavement.[68] Researchers have also analyzed how God attachment relates to parenting strategies for disabled children. These studies show a significant correlation between psychopathology and insecure God attachment.

Besides studying psychopathology, Christian researchers have investigated the relationship between God attachment and coping. For example, Bradshaw and associates

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[62]Thomas A. Fergus and Wade C. Rowatt, "Examining a Purported Association between Attachment to God and Scrupulosity," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 3 (2014): 230-36.

[63]Ann Elizabeth Gillies, "An Exploration of Early Childhood Attachment in a Sample of Christian Men Experiencing Same-Sex Attraction" (Ph.D. diss., Liberty University, 2014).

[64]Hernandez, Salerno, and Bottoms, "Attachment to God."

[65]Ibid. See also Kristin J. Homan and Valerie A. Lemmon, "Attachment to God and Eating Disorder Tendencies: The Mediating Role of Social Comparison," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 1 (2014): 349-57; and Angela Charpia Weaver, "Investigating the Role of God Attachment, Adult Attachment and Emotion Regulation in Binge Eating" (Ph.D. diss., Liberty University, 2012).

[66]Karissa D. Horton et al., "Examining Attachment to God and Health Risk-Taking Behaviors in College Students," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 2 (2012): 552-66.

[67]Anikó Kézdy, Tamás Martos, and Magda Robu, "God Image and Attachment to God in Work Addiction Risk," *Studia Psychologica* 55, no. 3 (2013): 209-14.

[68]Amy Morgenstern, "Saving Grace: The Role of Attachment to God in the Relationship between Adult Attachment Patterns and Bereavement among the Elderly" (Ph.D. diss., Long Island University, 2009). See also Allison M. Rottini, "Attachment Style and Spirituality as Predictors of the Grief Experience in the Recently Bereaved" (Psy.D. diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2006).

examined the relationship between God attachment and psychological distress.[69] Other researchers have explored the connection between God attachment and coping with serious disease.[70] Besides these efforts, researchers have also examined religious coping strategies and God attachment styles.[71] The results were not surprising. The research indicated a positive correlation between healthy coping strategies and secure God attachment.

Christian researchers have also studied clinical applications of God attachment. For example, Joyce investigated how God attachment may apply to Christian soul care.[72] Knabb and Emerson studied the role of attachment in the meta-narrative of Scripture.[73] Rasar and colleagues conducted quantitative research to develop a treatment manual that included God attachment.[74] These efforts show that God attachment has become a part of Christian therapy. Yet, to make it useful in the church, researchers need to make God

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[69]Bradshaw, Ellison, and Marcum, "Attachment to God,"130-47.

[70]Cassibba et al., "The Role of Attachment to God."

[71]Laura B. Cooper et al., "Differentiated Styles of Attachment to God and Varying Religious Coping Efforts," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 2 (2009): 134-41. See also Kevin D. Corsini, "Examining the Relationship between Religious Coping Strategies, Attachment Beliefs and Emotion Regulation in a Mixed Sample of College Students Attending an Evangelical University in Central Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Liberty University, 2009); Keister, "Attachment Style and Religious Coping Strategies"; Kelley and Chan, "Assessing the Role of Attachment"; Betty Shen Lu, "A Study of Relational Spirituality, God Attachment, and Equanimity for Adult Ministry" (Psy.D. diss., Biola University, 2013); Sarah R. Reiner et al., "Adult Attachment, God Attachment and Gender in Relation to Perceived Stress," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 3 (2010): 175-85; and Ju-Ping Chiao Yeo, "The Psychometric Study of the Attachment to God Inventory and the Brief Religious Coping Scale in a Taiwanese Christian Sample" (Ph.D., diss., Liberty University, 2011).

[72]Nathan Wayne Joyce, "Theory and Application of Attachment to God in Christian Soulcare" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006).

[73]Joshua J. Knabb and Matthew Y. Emerson, "'I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People': Attachment Theory and the Grand Narrative of Scripture," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 827-41.

[74]Jacqueline D. Rasar et al., "The Efficacy of a Manualized Group Treatment Protocol for Changing God Image, Attachment to God, Religious Coping, and Love of God, Others, and Self," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 41, no. 4 (2013): 267-80.

attachment practical. They need to tie it into the spiritual formation process. In other words, researchers need to show how God attachment helps "make disciples" (Matt 28:18-20).

In response to this need, several researchers have answered this call. Anderson studied the relationship among God attachment, human attachment, and spiritual maturity in college students.[75] Augustyn took steps toward creating a relationship-based spiritual development model based on God attachment.[76] Miner explored God attachment in light of a Trinitarian understanding of Christianity.[77] Wang investigated the role of God attachment in the spiritual development of counselors.[78] This research provides an initial foray into the relationship between God attachment and spiritual formation. However, to date, these efforts are just an admirable start. Said another way, there is still much work to do.

Statement of the Problem

It seems that there is a relationship between attachment to parents and God attachment. Furthermore, it seems that God attachment likely influences aspects of one's Christian faith and life. As such, a study of God attachment's effect on spiritual formation would be valuable. However, the concepts of spiritual formation and maturity are complex, which makes precise measurement of these constructs elusive. Instead, a more modest study would identify a few core components of the Christian faith and life. Then it would investigate whether these core components shared a significant relationship with God attachment.

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[75]Anderson, "The Role of God Attachment Patterns."

[76]Brian D. Augustyn, "Relational Spirituality: An Attachment-Based Model of Spiritual Development and Psychological Well-Being" (Ph.D. diss., Biola University, 2013).

[77]Maureen H. Miner, "Back to the Basics in Attachment to God: Revisiting Theory in Light of Theology," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 2 (2007): 114-24.

[78]Kun Wang, "An Examination of the Relationship Among Adult Attachment Style, Attachment to God, and Spiritual Development in Counselors and Counselor Trainees" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A & M University, 2013).

What are these core components of the Christian faith and life? As earlier discussed, researchers have already examined several areas. However, none seem tied to the basic elements of the Christian faith. Moreover, much of the research focuses on the cognitive aspect of religious experience. In contrast, this study considered the type of faith under discussion because the Christian faith is a living faith and not just a thinking faith.

Theologians often focus on the cognitive or intellectual facets of the Christian faith. This emphasis is a worthy pursuit for authentic Christianity requires more than mere cognitive assent to the existence of God, for even the demons can do that (Jas 2:19). True Christianity entails an active belief that changes one's way of living by the power of God (Jas 1:22-27). In other words, the Christian faith is not just a set of propositions to which one assents. Christian propositions are worthless if they are not internalized into the deeper structures of the self. This view of the self is not just ontological; it is existential as well. Seen this way, the self is not just a state of being. It is a state of becoming. For this internalization to flourish, God calls the person to be a certain "sort of self."[79]

This "sort of self" is a self-reflective self, but unlike other sorts of selves, it has a specific object upon which it reflects. For, as it reflects, it understands itself only in light of its relationship to the God of the Bible.[80] This reflexivity speaks to the quality of the person's experience of self-before-God. Of course, this experience of self-before-God eludes precise measurement. Nonetheless, a person's God attachment provides one measurement of how a person experiences this relation.

Other variables that might help Christian researchers and theorists understand spiritual formation include awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about

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[79]Stephen Evans helped shape my thinking and introduced me to this phrase. See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: On Faith and the Self* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), loc. 3799, Kindle.

[80]Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 477.

grace, and religious defensiveness. Like God attachment, these measures do not provide all the answers, but they do answer critical questions of importance for every self-before-God. For example, "Does my knowledge of my sin help or hinder my efforts to make positive changes in my life?"[81] (sin); "When my attitude is wrong, do I still feel I can talk to God?"[82] (grace); and "Does God have a special plan for me to find and fulfill?"[83] (religious defensiveness). Along with God attachment, these constructs measure important facets of the Christian faith and life. Together, they provide an adequate picture of the quality of one's experience of self-before-God. That said, a better understanding of the relationship between these constructs could help believers. It can teach them more about how they see themselves and give them insights into the "sort of selves" God wants them to become. Thus, a study on the interrelationships of these constructs on the Christian faith and life is a worthy pursuit.

Justification for This Study

Christian counseling seeks to promote the glory of God in the lives of its counselees. This means that it attempts to facilitate the glory-reflecting capacities of its clients. Part of this glory-reflecting capacity involves a deepening of one's sense of self, and this deepening is, in part, a sign of healthy psychological functioning. Secure God attachment is an aspect of healthy psychological functioning. In addition, one's awareness of the value of sin-beliefs and evangelical beliefs about grace also contribute

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[81]Adapted from P. J. Watson et al., "Beliefs about Sin: Adaptive Implications in Relationships with Religious Orientation, Self-Esteem, and Measures of the Narcissistic, Depressed, and Anxious Self," *Edification* 1, no. 1 (2007): 66.

[82]Adapted from P. J. Watson, Zhuo Chen, and Timothy A. Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2: Psychometric Refinements and Relationships with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs about Sin, and Religious Orientation," *Edification* 4, no. 2 (2011): 72.

[83]Adapted from Richard Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion: Is Religious Defensiveness Predictive of Worldview Defense?" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 152.

to healthy psychological functioning. Finally, one's levels of religious defensiveness helps to highlight ways in which religion can mask unhealthy psychological functioning.

Ideally, these measures should provide a comprehensive picture of the Christian faith and life. Sin and psychological damage have led to differing experiences of self-before-God. Thus, individuals with different God attachment styles will likely respond differently to these other constructs and this pattern of relationships can be discovered.

Thus, this study explored the relationship between God attachment, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness. Applying the study's results will be an initial, small step in enabling Christians to better understand believers' relationships with God in light of these other variables. Up to this point, researchers have not yet explored these interrelationships, so that the question of how they affect the Christian faith and life, until now, remained largely unanswered.

Learning more about these interrelationships may help the church in many ways. First, this knowledge could be of use in parenting, pastoral ministry, and spiritual formation. Second, it may deepen the Christian understanding of psychotherapy and psychological health. Third, it might help Christian counselors understand their counselees' experiences of self-before-God better. Last, it could help counselors understand ways to expand the glory-reflecting capacities of those under their care. The application of this knowledge allows counselors an opportunity to tailor spiritual interventions to the individual needs of their parishioners.

Thesis

The aim of this project was to describe the relationships between God attachment, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness, and their relation to the Christian faith and life. It is hoped that the results of this study will help the Christian community understand how believers relate to God, themselves, and others.

This study was the first to examine the relationship of these variables. It is hoped that the results of this empirical research will benefit parents, pastors, and Christian counselors. Applying its lessons can help them all promote flourishing in the evangelical Christian community.

Background

Forged in the Furnace: Suffering and My Pursuit of Counseling

My personal journey with regard to this topic has been a long and winding path. I began pursuing the discipline of counseling in an attempt to minister to my wife after she plunged into depression resulting from the discovery that our youngest son had autism. I had just transitioned from a high-paying job in business to the pastorate and our financial situation changed dramatically. With money tight, I did not have the financial resources to pay for the counseling my wife desperately needed. Things seemed bleak, but then our church invested in a scholarship program at Liberty University that allowed pastors to attend for free. I took advantage of that program and decided to pursue a degree in counseling.

Liberty University: My Introduction to Attachment Theory

My professors at Liberty University, preeminently Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, introduced me to John Bowlby. Bowlby, the father of attachment theory, provided me with a theory of relationships that really resonated with my experience. Through the lens of attachment theory, my personal story became clearer as I ascertained how my father and mother had unwittingly shaped my view of relationships. I also noticed that I could almost predict certain behaviors or thoughts from my congregants based upon this understanding of how the world worked. Often, in counseling sessions, parishioners seemed to look at me in amazement as I appeared to easily "get to the root of their problems" through my use of an attachment framework. Early on, I discovered that this

way of understanding people seemed both helpful and accurate. However, despite this discovery, my understanding of attachment theory left me with some theological concerns that I had difficulty reconciling.

First, as I interacted with my professors, I noticed that their approach seemed to maximize neuroscience and minimize biblical anthropology. It was as if the soul simply evaporated from their conceptualization of the person. As a conservative evangelical, I had a difficult time accepting such an omission. At this point, my training seemed to focus almost exclusively on working with the constituent parts of the brain, thereby relegating the time-tested spiritual disciplines of the church to serving the ancillary function of being one of several means for calming one's limbic system. Over time, I realized that this model had radically changed my understanding of anthropology. Whereas I had always considered myself a dualist (humans are embodied souls), I found myself functioning as an unwitting monist (humans are comprised of bodies only). Unfortunately, in my thinking, my counselees had become "brains" instead of embodied souls who worshipped *coram Deo.*[84]

Second, it seemed that my professors saw individuals as "blank slates" upon which experiences wrote the narratives of their lives onto their hearts. In this way of thinking, children were innocent and became sinners in response to a lack of love and care from their primary care givers. Now, I concede that children are innocent, at least in the sense that they are dependent upon caregivers and do not have the cognitive ability to commit "big" sins. That said, I also know as both a theologian and the father of a severely autistic son, that there are no sinless hearts (Jer 17:9). There is something fundamentally wrong with humans. The Bible calls it sin, and people do not have to be taught this reality; they simply express it in one way or another. It seemed that in a desire to establish attachment bonds in therapy, my professors minimized (or simply ignored the effects of)

[84]Latin for "Before the face of God."

indwelling sin in their clients. I remember one discussion in which I had to explain the theological concept of the "noetic effect of sin" to one of my professors. Of course, an improper understanding of sin leads to improper diagnoses, improper goals, and improper treatment plans. As I progressed in my studies, I felt a growing uneasiness about the theological direction of my course work. I was caught in a dilemma; I wanted to finish my degree, but I wanted to do so in an institution that held to a more biblical anthropology.

Westminster Experience:
Back to the Bible

That opportunity came in the fall of 2008. At that time, I transferred to Westminster Theological Seminary. At Westminster, I became acquainted with a type of biblical counseling that was unlike anything I had previously experienced. Of course, earlier in my ministry, I had read Jay Adams's *Competent to Counsel* and his *Manual of Christian Counseling*, but Adams's books seemed authoritarian and focused primarily on behavior. However, after sitting under the teaching of Westminster professors David Powlison, Ed Welch, and Mike Emlet, I experienced a renaissance of sorts that resulted in my conversion to what Johnson calls progressive biblical counseling. There, in the midst of Presbyterians, this Southern Baptist learned a Christ-centered, heart-motivated, relationally-focused, narrative-influenced approach to counseling.

These professors taught me several wonderful things that I still carry with me today. First, Welch introduced me to Dooyeweerd's Christian ground-motive as the meta-narrative of Scripture and showed me how effective biblical counseling sought to tie the counselee's narrative to this larger story. Second, Powlison showed me the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture in both counseling theory and clinical practice. Finally, and most importantly, Emlet taught me a biblical anthropology. I am indebted to each of these men for what they imparted to me.

However, as wonderful as my experience was at Westminster, there were some drawbacks as well. First, it seemed that my instructors studied secular psychology from a

polemical perspective and often dismissed things like attachment theory as fads. Second, in their quest to be pastoral, my teachers did not value research. Hence, there was really no way to substantiate the effectiveness of their model. Finally, in an effort not to confuse the ministers they were training, my professors used great care in using only biblical or theological terminology when discussing problems of the soul. While I admired the desire to be biblically and theologically sound, it sometimes seemed as if there were often psychological terms or concepts that more specifically delineated a counselee's experience than my professor's terminology did. For instance, while "fear" is an excellent biblical category, obsessive-compulsive disorder is a psychological label that more precisely delineates a specific experience of fear. In my professors' defense, I think they simply did not want to confuse their students, most of whom were pastors, by introducing unfamiliar psychological terminology. However, as one who had already been exposed to and often used this terminology, there were times when I felt handcuffed in describing my counselees' experiences while studying at Westminster.

The dilemma for me was that while I identified with the biblical counseling approach, I could not "forget" some of the valuable information that I had learned at Liberty—information that had in some practical ways served me and those I ministered to so well. After completing my Doctorate of Ministry at Westminster, I reluctantly returned to Liberty to pursue my Ph.D. in counseling. The decision to resume my studies at Liberty flowed from practicality and not conviction; I returned to my alma mater because, at that time, they were one of the few institutions that offered a research doctorate in a modular format.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Common Grace and the Antithesis

Unfortunately, not long after I returned to Liberty I found that not much had changed. However, by this time, other institutions were offering modular degrees, and soon after I started my Ph.D. at Liberty, one of my professors suggested that I meet Eric

Johnson, a Christian psychologist and professor at Southern Seminary. My professor felt that I would enjoy learning from Johnson because my instructor knew that Johnson and I shared some common theological interests. Like myself, Johnson loved the Puritans, Reformed theology, and helping hurting people. After visiting Southern, I decided to transfer to their modular Ph.D. program in biblical counseling. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since attending Southern, I have been introduced to some other long-dead "teachers" who ardently shaped my thinking. First, Soren Kierkegaard helped me understand the Christian development of the self and gave me a general framework for understanding spiritual development. Second, Abraham Kuyper taught me the importance of "sphere sovereignty" and how there is not one inch of this universe that Christ does not claim for his own. Third, Herman Bavinck showed me how law and gospel work together in moving people to spiritual maturity. Finally, Francis Schaeffer helped me see how Christianity provides a unified answer for all of life.

Perhaps the most important thing I have ascertained since being a student at Southern deals with balancing the common grace of cultural activity like science, and the antithesis[85] between the church and the world. It seems to me that my professors at Liberty leaned too heavily on common grace. At the same time, my mentors at Westminster overstated the antithesis. As such, my experience at Southern taught me the value of balancing both of these concepts in my pastoral work as a Christian counselor. With those thoughts in mind, I now turn to the methodology used to accomplish this project.

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[85]By antithesis, I follow Dooyeweerd's definition who described antithesis as "the fundamental spiritual opposition between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness." Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options,* vol. 15, *Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd*, ed. D. F. M. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Paideia, 2012), 225.

Methodology

Purpose of Study

In this study, the goal was to understand better how God attachment mediates one's experience of self-before-God, as well as how God attachment related to awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness. The study provided initial evidence that suggested significant relationships existed between these constructs and explored how these relationships could affect the evangelical Christian faith and life.[86]

Research Design

This project was a quantitative study that examined the data from two perspectives. First, this study included a correlational component because it sought to determine whether significant relationships between God attachment, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness existed. In addition to these correlations, this study investigated the potential relationships of the independent variables of gender and religiosity on God attachment.

Second, this study incorporated a causal-comparative component because it examined the effect that the unmanipulated independent variables of "awareness of the value of sin-beliefs," "evangelical beliefs about grace," and "religious defensiveness" had on the dependent variables of "avoidance of intimacy with God" and "anxiety over abandonment from God."

Because this study dealt with beliefs and experiences, the self-report method was appropriate for this research design. The self-report method also allowed a large number of individuals to participate over a relatively short time span.

This study used both correlation analysis and multiple linear regression to

[86] All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

determine the relationships and effects of these variables. From this analysis, tentative conclusions could be drawn on how God attachment related to and affected aspects of the Christian faith and life.

Hypotheses

Based on this design, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There would be a negative relationship between avoidant attachment to God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness.
2. There would be a negative relationship between anxious attachment to God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness.
3. There would be a negative relationship between avoidant attachment to God and intrinsic religiosity.
4. Males would have higher scores of avoidant attachment to God than females.
5. There would be a positive relationship between evangelical beliefs about grace and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs.
6. There would be a positive relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety over abandonment by God.

Definition of Terms

The following are important terms that are used in this dissertation.

Secular. Secular refers to a naturalistic view of the world that is fundamentally antagonistic to religious ways of thinking.

Attachment. As defined by Ainsworth et al., *attachment* is "an affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one—a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time." These ties are evident in that they "are behaviors which promote proximity or contact."[87]

Avoidant. Bartholomew and Shaver describe *avoidant* as an attachment style

[87]Mary D. Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 50.

"characterized by a positive self-model and a negative model of others. [Avoidant] individuals also avoid closeness because of negative expectations; however, they maintain a sense of self-worth by defensively denying the value of close relationships."[88]

Dismissing avoidant. A *dismissing avoidant* is a type of avoidant attachment style characterized by a denial of attachment needs. Bartholomew explains that these individuals "maintain a positive self-image by distancing themselves from others while placing a great deal of importance on independence while minimizing the value of relationships."[89]

Fearful avoidant. A *fearful avoidant* is a type of avoidant attachment characterized by a desire for social contact that is mitigated by a fear of rejection. Bartholomew writes, "These individuals actively avoid social situations and close relationships in which they perceive themselves as vulnerable of rejection."[90]

Secure. Bartholomew and Shaver explain that *secure* is an attachment style "characterized by the combination of a positive self model and a positive model of others. Secure individuals have an internalized sense of self-worth and are comfortable with intimacy in close relationships."[91]

Ambivalent. Bartholomew and Shaver write that *ambivalent* is an attachment style

> characterized by a negative self model and a positive model of others. [Ambivalent] individuals anxiously seek to gain acceptance and validation from others, seeming to persist in the belief that they can attain safety, or security, if they could only get others to respond properly toward them.[92]

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[88]Kim Bartholomew and Phillip R. Shaver, "Methods of Assessing Adult Attachment," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships*, ed. Simpson and Rholes, 31.

[89]Bartholomew, "Avoidance of Intimacy," 164.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Bartholomew and Shaver, "Methods of Assessing Adult Attachment," 31.

[92]Ibid.

Disorganized. Disorganized is an attachment style described by Bartholomew and Shaver as

> characterized by negative self *and* other models. [Disorganized] individuals, like the [ambivalent], are highly dependent on others' acceptance and affirmation; however, because of their negative expectations, they avoid intimacy to avert the pain of loss or rejection.[93]

God attachment. God attachment is an emotional bond with God that indicates the degree to which one feels close to and safe and secure with God.[94]

Avoidance of intimacy with God. Beck and McDonald write that *avoidance of intimacy with God* is a dimension of attachment that "involves themes such as a need for self-reliance, a difficulty with depending upon God, and unwillingness to be emotionally intimate with God."[95]

Anxiety over abandonment by God. As Beck and McDonald explain, *anxiety over abandonment by God* is a dimension of attachment that

> involves themes such as fear of potential abandonment by God, angry protest (resentment or frustration at God's lack of perceived affection), jealousy over God's seemingly differential intimacy with others, anxiety over one's lovability in God's eyes, and, finally, preoccupation with or worry concerning one's relationship with God.[96]

Religious defensiveness. Beck describes *religious defensiveness* as is a belief system or state of being characterized largely by "a faith commitment devoted toward producing happy, peaceful thoughts: a faith of positivity and upbeat optimism."[97]

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[93]Bartholomew and Shaver, "Methods of Assessing Adult Attachment," 31.

[94]For a thorough treatment of how God qualifies as an attachment figure, see Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Attachment and Religious Representations and Behaviors," in *Handbook of Attachment*, ed. Cassidy and Shaver, 223-50.

[95]Beck and McDonald, "Attachment to God," 94.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion?," 143.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 has introduced the subject of this project. As the reader has seen, it includes the current research, thesis, methodology, background, definition of terms, outline, and the delimitations for this dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides a theological foundation for the study by articulating a Dutch-Reformed perspective that seeks to view reality through the worldview lens of the Christian ground-motive.

Chapter 3 provides a psychological foundation for this project. It contrasts secular attachment-focused psychology with a Christian psychology of attachment

Chapter 4 introduces the proposed study and elucidate the variables used in the study. It also includes a discussion of the instrumentation, method, participants, procedure, reliability, and validity concerns of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the study regarding each stated hypothesis.

Chapter 6 discusses the conclusion drawn from the study, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Delimitations

As with any project, it is impossible to include everything. Because of this, some items will not be addressed in-depth. For example, I have limited the analysis of spiritual formation to the constructs of the awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness. While several other components could be measured, in my estimation, constructs under consideration are both sufficient and manageable for this initial exploration of the relationship between God attachment and the Christian faith and life. Moreover, while I touch upon different theological views of these constructs, this study mainly focuses on the understanding of these concepts from a Reformed Evangelical perspective.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GOD ATTACHMENT

As mentioned in chapter 1, the God attachment concept emerged from secular attachment theory research. In essence, God attachment and human attachment share a common psychological heritage. As such, a thorough analysis of this lineage proves helpful. However, before doing so, one must establish a theological perspective. This perspective provides a vantage point that will further the development of a Christian philosophy of attachment and offers a Christian framework for interpreting the psychological data.

This chapter begins with a brief articulation of a Christian worldview. Next, it gives an overview of a Christian philosophy for interpreting reality. This philosophy derives from the work of Dooyeweerd and others. This perspective, influenced by Dutch-Reformed theology and philosophy, argues that worldviews are best understood through the paradigm of the Christian ground-motive. Last, the chapter examines the concept of relationships. As a whole, this dissertation is concerned with relationships. In keeping with this motif, this chapter explores how these relationships relate to the Christian ground-motive. First, the "Relationship Realized" section examines God's original intention for relationships. The "Relationship Ruptured" segment explains what went wrong with God's original plan. Next, the "Relationship Restored" portion identifies how God goes about fixing the damage caused by the rupture. Fourth, the "Ratification of Redemption" part explores the implications of possessing this redemption. This section covers some of the hindrances Christians experience in appropriating redemption to their lives.

Attachment is about relationships, and this project is about a particular kind of relationship: how Christians relate to God. Before examining the Christian's relationship to God, one must consider some questions, such as how did God relate to himself before the beginning of time? Why did God choose to create the world? Why did God choose to create human beings? And how does the doctrine of creation help one understand the believer's ideal relationship with God? The answers to these questions help define normalcy in the Christian faith and life. They also help clarify the individual's proper role in relating to God, self, and others. However, before examining these relationships, an overview of ground-motives will prove helpful and will provide a context for the relationship discussion that follows.

A Brief Overview of Ground-Motives

A ground-motive is a "fundamental motivation . . . a driving force."[1] It is a way of seeing the world. Often people are unaware of the existence of ground-motives.[2] Even so, they control everything people do. Dooyeweerd believes that four different motives have dominated the history of Western civilization:

> (1) form and matter, which dominated pagan Greek philosophy; (2) nature and grace, which underlay medieval Christian synthesis thought; (3) nature and freedom, which has shaped the philosophies of modern times; and (4) creation, fall, and redemption, which lies at the root of a radical and integrally scriptural philosophy.[3]

For Dooyeweerd, all humans are religious in nature. As such, their ground-motives are expressions of that religion. Once again, this is because these forces drive everything they do. He explains these driving forces inherent in ground-motives:

> In every religion one can point to a ground-motive having such a force. It is a force that acts as a spiritual central driving force because, from the religious center of life,

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[1]Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options,* vol. 15, *Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd*, ed. D. F. M. Stauss (Grand Rapids: Paideia, 2012), 226.

[2]Ibid., 9.

[3]Ibid., 226.

> it governs the temporal expressions and points towards the real or supposed origin of all existence. In the profoundest possible sense it determines a society's entire life- and worldview.[4]

According to Dooyeweerd, ground-motives determine worldviews. In essence, they are the driving forces that help people interpret their worlds. Said another way, ground-motives are subconscious, universal maxims—they help people make sense of conscious, particular experiences in their lives. Thus, the Christian ground-motive provides the Christian with a rich set of interpretative materials to think Christianly about a topic like attachment theory.

One might ask, however, "Why use the Christian ground-motive (CGM)?" The CGM is useful because it captures the whole of reality from the Christian perspective. It explains who people are (creation), identifies what went wrong (fall), prescribes how God fixes what went wrong (redemption), provides a universal view of the world from a Christian perspective, and, hence, offers the Christian a universal way to look at the particular things in this world. In addition, as just mentioned, one of these particulars is attachment theory. With the Christian ground-motive in place, the discussion can proceed—and the best place to start the *relationship* discussion is with God himself.

Relationship Realized

God's Relationship with Himself

Before creation, the triune God enjoyed fellowship with himself. Love characterized this union, and truth, goodness, and beauty flowed between the Trinity's members.[5] God had no need for anything nor anyone else. Frame describes this relationship within the Trinity:

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[4]Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 8.

[5]Ben Stevens, *Why God Created the World: A Jonathan Edwards Adaptation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 13; Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, ed. John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), locs. 463-69, Kindle.

> There is no conflict in the Trinity. The three persons are perfectly agreed on what they should do and how their plan should be executed. They support one another, assist one another, and promote one another's purposes. This intra-Trinitarian "deference," this "disposability" of each to the others, may be called mutual glorification.[6]

In calling this type of relationship a *mutual glorification*, Frame describes a relationship that emphasizes a mutual indwelling of loving and empathetic unanimity. As the Triune God participates in this mutual glorification, his glory reveals itself in the creation.[7] What exactly is this glory and how does it relate to the reason for God creating the world?

Why God Created the World

The meaning of glory. Before explaining why God created the world, it is necessary to define the term *glory*. *Glory* comes from the Hebrew word *kavod*, which means "gravity, heaviness, greatness, or abundance."[8] The New Testament writers use the term *doxa*. *Doxa* carries with it the idea of "outshining" or "dazzling brightness."[9] Piper summarizes these concepts in his definition of *glory*: "God's glory is the beauty of His manifold perfections. It can refer to the bright and awesome radiance that breaks forth in visible manifestations. Or it can refer to the moral excellence of his character."[10]

God's glory, then, is something of great worth and blinding radiance. It is intrinsic to him and flows from him. Edwards also used the metaphor of light to describe God's glory:

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[6]John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), chap. 22.

[7]Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End," loc. 852.

[8]Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, 45-46.

[9]Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testaments* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1992), 479-80.

[10]John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 42.

> Thus it is fit, since there is an infinite fountain of light and knowledge, that this light should shine forth beams of communicated knowledge and understanding; and, as there is an infinite fountain of holiness, moral excellence, and beauty, that so it should flow out in communicated holiness. And that, as there is an infinite fulness of joy and happiness, so these should have an emanation, and become a fountain flowing out in abundant streams, as beams from the sun.[11]

In considering this metaphor, it is interesting to note that the love shared by the members of the Trinity generates the power that produces this light. This love is epitomized by the Father's love of the Son (see John 17:1-5). Hence, in response to this mutual love, God's glory lights up the dark. In doing so, it also brings ultimate and eternal joy to those receiving it (Ps 16:11). This light-bearing function gives a hint about how God desires to use his glory.

The magnification of glory. God demonstrated his "power, wisdom, and goodness" through his creative act.[12] These attributes indicate that God did not create out of necessity. Since God is "infinite" and "perfect" in every way,[13] there is nothing he needs (Is 48:12). Creation can give him nothing his that he does not already have (Rev 4:11; 1 Tim 6:15; Rom 11:34-36; Dan 4:25, 34-35). It seems then, that God created the world to serve as a "glorious theatre."[14] One might liken God's glory to the train of his robe described in Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:1-3). As God filled the temple with his robe, so too does he fill the universe with his glory. Edwards thought that this expansion of glory was God's reason for creating the world:

> Thus it appears reasonable to suppose, that it was God's last end, that there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of his infinite fulness of good ad extra, or without

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[11]Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End," locs. 463-69.

[12]Samuel E. Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith: A Modern Exposition* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013), 87.

[13]Ibid., 61.

[14]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 57.

himself; and that the disposition to communicate himself, or diffuse his own fulness, was what moved him to create the world.[15]

In his wisdom, God created the world as a focal point for his glory. In doing so, the world serves as a "theatre,"[16] venue, or stage upon which he displays his glory. In this theatre, God reveals his glory in two ways. First, the natural world testifies to his majesty (Ps 19:1-3; Rom 1:18-20). Called general revelation, this testimony reveals God's work in nature. Second, God reveals himself through special revelation, namely, his written Word, the Bible (Heb 1:1-2a). Third, God manifested his glory through the incarnated Christ (John 1:14). Fourth, he now reveals his glory through the work of the Holy Spirit in contemporary believers' hearts and lives (Eph 3:16).

Although all earthly metaphors fall short of capturing the essence of God's revelation of his glory, perhaps the example of a theatrical production will approximate it. Imagine God the Father as the producer of the play. Consider Jesus the central character or protagonist, and think of the Holy Spirit as the play's director. With these roles filled, general revelation can then be thought of as the set, props, and costumes on the set, and special revelation would be the director's instruction to the actors. In this imperfect metaphor, God provides the context for the drama through his creation (i.e., the stage), but true fellowship with the actors flows from his spoken word (i.e., his instruction) as they imitate the example of the protagonist (i.e., Jesus) under the director's careful guidance (i.e., the Spirit).

The mediation of glory. One way God communicates his glory is similar to a conversation between two people. In a conversation, there is a speaker and a listener. There is also a message sent, a message received, and a message responded to. First, God's glory is his greatness and goodness and is intrinsic to his being. Theologians refer

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[15]Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End," locs. 469-75.

[16]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 57.

to this as God's internal glory or God's fullness.[17] It consists of his perfections or characteristics like his love, beauty, goodness, and truth. Second, like a speaker in a conversation, God sends this message, via a speech act, to the listener. This speech act conveys the message and thereby reveals God's external glory.[18] Third, the listener receives, interprets, and understands God's message.[19] Finally, the listener responds to God's message, as Frame says, through "a covenantal response of the whole person to God in all areas of life."[20] God mediates his glory through revelation (i.e., communication), and humans receive this revelation, digest it, and experience transformation from it. This transformation culminates in the return of this glory through lives that reflect God's character.[21] The fact that God chooses humans as dialogue partners shows they have a special place in the created order.

Why God Created Human Beings:

To reflect His glory. As the apex of his creation, God created humans in his own image (Gen 1:26). God gave humans the innate ability to reflect his knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; Gen 1:28). He made man a living soul (Gen 2:7) or said another way, a self. Murray states that, as a self, "man is a person and, therefore, a self-conscious, rational, free, moral, and religious agent."[22]

Humans manifest God's glory through their faculties. Humans reflect God's knowledge with their mind, God's righteousness and holiness with their affections, and

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[17]Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, 47.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

[20]John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), locs. 685-94, Kindle.

[21]Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, 47.

[22]John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:38.

God's dominion with their will.[23] In essence, humans mirror God in their cognitions, "character," and "conduct."[24]

God created humans as rational, moral, purposeful beings. Creating humans pleased God. Humans served God as his vice regent in this good creation. God blessed humans and sustained them.[25] In humans, God created the ideal mirror for reflecting his glory. Looking upon his creation, God concluded it was "very good" indeed (Gen 1:31).

To return His glory. In the Garden man prospered as he walked with God in the cool of the morning (see Gen 3:8). By making man an image bearer, God distinguished him from the rest of creation. God used man as an instrument for reflecting his glory throughout his good creation. In man, God created a relationality unseen in the rest of creation. Man had the innate ability to relate, commune, and have fellowship with God. Unlike the animals, man could take part in God's glory by returning it to him in praise and worship and growing ethicospiritual conformity. Johnson observes the effect that the beauty of God's glory has on the human being: "The soul that sees something of God's infinite beauty cannot help but utter praise, feel drawn toward that beauty, desire to participate in it and resemble it, and seek to live to exalt it."[26] Thus, God created man to both reflect and return his glory. God sustained man, and man worshiped God and took care of his good creation. In relating to God in this way, man fulfilled his reason for existing (Isa 43:7).

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[23]Linleigh J. Roberts, *Let Us Make Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 13.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., 12.

[26]Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 12.

The Believer's Ideal Relationship with God

The doctrine of creation helps define normalcy and also gives direction toward that end. In a perfect world, individuals would enjoy an unhindered relationship with God characterized by love and dependence. They would depend on God and as God pours his love into them, they would reflect that love into the lives of others. In such an environment, everyone would reflect and return God's glory. All people would find meaning and purpose in God and would enjoy an intimate and unhindered relationship with the Creator and his good creation.

In this pristine environment, everyone would enjoy secure attachment. Children would have positive images of themselves. They would also trust others. Mothers and fathers would be available and responsive in times of need, and they would provide solid, secure bases from which their children could explore God's good creation. Things would be the way they are supposed to be.

In the current environment, however, no one enjoys an intimate, unhindered relationship with God, or each other because the world, and by extension human beings, are far from perfect (Rom 8:22; 3:23). Something terrible has infected the creation. Theologians refer to this foreign invader as sin, and humanity's fall into it has corrupted God's creation. Sadly, subsequent generations remain under the fall's curse, and this is evident in the way they relate to God.

Relationship Ruptured

As mentioned, humanity fell and this came about because sin entered the world. Waldron expands on this teaching in Genesis by explaining why sin entered into God's good creation: "After creating Adam and Eve, God wrote his law on their hearts. (Gen 1:27; Eccles. 7:29; Rom 2:12a, 14–15)."[27] However, the first couple broke God's law by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). As a result of their

[27]Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 285.

disobedience, sin entered the world. At this point in the story, readers know how sin came into being. However, they still do not know why. Why did something as atrocious as sin enter the world? Once again, one must return to the beginning of the story.

In Genesis 3, the serpent entered the scene. He deceived Eve by convincing her that a good God would not place restrictions on her. Satan focused on the thing Eve did not have. He did not bring up all the blessings God had given her. At this fateful point, Eve decided to believe Satan's lie rather than God's truth. She rejected God in the hope of being like him (see Gen 3:5). For his part, Adam willingly participated in the attempted coup (see Gen 3:6). The implications of this decision haunt the human race to this day.

Sin came into God's good creation because Adam and Eve rebelled against God's law. In their ambition to be like God, they exchanged their worship of God for worship of themselves. While this narration describes the event, it does not define sin. To appreciate the effect of the fall, one must understand the concept of sin.

Sin: A Multi-Faceted Deformity

Sin is a complex entity that eludes simplistic definitions. Maybe the easiest way to understand sin is to think of it as a deformity or a departure from the norm. Yet even this approach fails to capture the multifaceted nature of sin. Sin is a special kind of deformity. It is an existential, doxological, moral, and teleological departure from the good. A satisfactory definition of sin must incorporate each of these departures. The result will be a picture of sin in all its ugliness.

Sin: An existential deformity. One way to think about sin is that it is more than just activity. It also encapsulates attitudes and heart orientations. Plantinga offers this perspective when he differentiates a sin from sin:

> Let us say that a sin is any act—any thought, desire, emotion, word, or deed—or its particular absence, that displeases God and deserves blame. Let us add that the disposition to commit sins also displeases God and deserves blame, and let us

> therefore use the word sin to refer to such instances of both act and disposition. Sin is a culpable and personal affront to a personal God.[28]

Looked at this way, sin is both a state of being and a set of behaviors. Either way, both offend God.

Sin: A doxological deformity. Another way to think about sin is that of "fall[ing] short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Piper explains sin from this perspective:

> What does it mean to "fall short" of the glory of God? It does not mean that we are supposed to be as glorious as God is and that we have fallen short. . . . The best explanation of Romans 3:23 is Romans 1:23. It says that those who did not glorify or thank God became fools "and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images." This is the way we "fall short" of the glory of God: We exchange it for something of lesser value. All sin comes from not putting supreme value on the glory of God—this is the very essence of sin.[29]

Therefore, sin is the intentional exchange of the priceless for the inferior.

Sin: A moral deformity. Sin also has a moral component. Bavinck asserts that sin is an "ethical-spiritual . . . deformity, a departure from God's perfect law."[30] Those under sin's dominion, reject God's sovereign rule. Instead of submitting to God's kingship, they "do what is right" in their own eyes (Judg 21:25).

Sin: A teleological deformity. Yet another viewpoint understands sin as a corruption of "the way things ought to be."[31] Plantinga contends that peace (*shalom*) was the chief characteristic of God's original creation.[32] He sees sin as "human vandalism" of

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[28]Cornelius Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 13.

[29]Piper, *Desiring God*, 57.

[30]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 126.

[31]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 10.

[32]Ibid., 14.

the original creational blueprint.[33] This vandalism disrupts the Architect's original purpose for the creation. From this perspective, sin is "culpable shalom-breaking."[34]

Toward a Definition of Sin

Thus, sin is both a state of being and a set of behaviors. It robs God of glory, transgresses his holy law, and corrupts his design for creation. Sin reminds everyone that in this world things are not "the way [they] ought to be,"[35] for it demonstrates an alienation in relationships between God and creation, God and humanity, and humans with each other. This global definition paves the way for a closer look at some of the detailed characteristics of sin.

Characteristics of Sin

Several characteristics describe sin. First, sin lacks an independent identity.[36] According to Bavinck, it is a "no-thing [that] can only be [understood as] a privation or corruption of the good"[37] As mentioned, sin is a "defect" or a "deformity" of that which is good.[38] Second, sin is parasitic. It feeds on its host.[39] Owen likened sin's hunger to a "grave that is never satisfied."[40] Sin is active not passive. It debases and consumes

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[33]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 16.

[34]Ibid., 14.

[35]Ibid., 10.

[36]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 138.

[37]Ibid., 126.

[38]Ibid., 136.

[39]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 89.

[40]John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 53.

anything it touches.[41] After consuming its prey, sin converts its victim to do its bidding, which helps it spread into new hosts. This dynamic explains the "fruitfulness of sin."[42] Without intervention, sin will, in Owen's words, "bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins."[43] Third, sin is an impostor who impersonates that which is lovely. Sin knows that prey flees from predators. Thus, it lies in wait, disguised as something attractive, before luring its unsuspecting mark. Platinga commented on this aspect of sin by quipping, "To do its worst, evil needs to look its best. Evil has to spend a lot on makeup. . . . Vices have to masquerade as virtues."[44]

Sin is an ugly reality. It did not end with Adam and Eve. The consequences of its advent ripple through history. Sin has distorted the world. It has also disrupted how people relate to God, others, and themselves. Before seeking a remedy, one must first explore the effects of humanity's fall into sin.

Effect of the Fall

On the world. Sin turned the world upside down. Bavinck comments, "Sin ruined the entire creation, converting its righteousness into guilt, its holiness into impurity, its glory into shame, its blessedness into misery, its harmony into disorder, and its light into darkness."[45] The entire "creation was subjected to futility" (Rom 8:20). As part of the creation, humanity could not escape the Fall's devastating effects.

On humanity. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed an unhindered and intimate relationship with God. Afterward, things would never be the same. Their

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[41]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 126.

[42]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 90-91.

[43]Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 52.

[44]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 98.

[45]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 28-29.

rebellion erected a barrier that separated them from God (Gen 3:24). They had experienced love and acceptance, but now they felt guilt (Gen 3:13), fear (Gen 3:10a), and shame (Gen 3:10b).

That first sin brought about pain in all phases of life. First, there would be pain in bringing life: "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children'" (Gen 3:16a). No longer would Adam and Eve produce offspring without great difficulty. Second, there would be pain in relational life: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16b). No longer would Adam and Eve experience a harmonious interpersonal relationship. Third, there would be pain in sustaining life: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field" (Gen 3:17b–18). No longer would Adam and Eve subsist without backbreaking labor. Finally, there would be pain associated with departing from life: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). No longer would Adam and Eve enjoy everlasting health and vigor.

The Bible teaches that the fall affected not just Adam and Eve. The fall mutated their reproductive systems. They passed down their genetic imperfections to their offspring (Rom 5:1-11). This mutation guaranteed that sin and misery would cascade through later generations. Bavinck commented on the effect of this tragedy:

> The first sin, the sin for which our original human ancestors are responsible, has had calamitous consequences for them as well as all their descendants and unleased a flood of misery on the human race. In consequence, humanity as a whole, and every person in particular, is burdened with guilt, defiled, and subject to ruin and death.[46]

In general, the fall turned the world upside down. It forced humanity to live in a world characterized by sin and misery. Yet, the fall did much more than that. It changed the nature of human beings.

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[46]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 78.

On individuals. Sin is universal in scope. Everyone (see Acts 17:30), without exception (Rom 5:12), struggles with sin across their lifespan (see Gen 6:5; 8:21; Job 13:26, 14:4; Pss 25:7; 51:5; 58:3; 103:14; Is 43:27; 48:8; 57:3; Ezek 16:3; Hos 5:7; John 3:6; Rom 7:7ff.; Eph 2:3).[47] In his commentary on the 1689 Confession, Waldron observes, that becoming a Christian does not loosen sin's grip on the believer because sin "still indwells believers" (see 1 John 1:8-10; 1 Kgs 8:46; Pss 130:3; 143:2; Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20; Rom 7:14-25; Jas 3:2).[48]

Sin defiles the whole person, "body and soul."[49] People now experience physical death and infirmity (Gen 2:17; 2 Cor 4:16). Sin warps personalities and influences them toward self-rule (Rom 3:10-12). People are now tarnished images. Sin sullies both head (Titus 1:15; Gen 6:5; Eph 4:18; Rom 8:7) and heart (Jer 17:9; Ezek 36:26; Mark 7:21). Bavinck describes sin's tragic effect on the human being:

> As extensive as original sin is in humanity as a whole, so it is also in the individual person. It holds sway over the whole person, over mind and will, heart and conscience, soul and body, over all one's capacities and powers. A person's heart is evil from his or her youth and a source of all sorts of evils.[50]

Therefore, sin is no respecter of persons. Its effect on everyone is complete, total, and never good. However, that is not all. Besides its universality and intrapersonal comprehensiveness, sin also breeds delusion. In other words, sin promotes self-deception (Heb 3:13). Sin darkens the understanding, hardens the heart (Eph 4:18), and exposes people by inciting guilt and shame. Sin leaves people in a vulnerable position. In this state, people will not turn to God in repentance and faith because sin alienates people from

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[47]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 80.

[48]Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 110.

[49]Ibid., 109.

[50]Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 119.

themselves. This self-alienation encourages saving-of-face behaviors, as Plantinga describes:

> Self-deception is a shadowy phenomenon by which we pull the wool over some part of our own psyche. We put a move on ourselves. We deny, suppress, or minimize what we know to be true. We assert, adorn, and elevate what we know to be false. We purify ugly realities and sell ourselves the prettified versions.[51]

Thus, people cannot bear to face the reality of themselves. They intuit guilt and shame, which leads to a sense of uncleanness. In an attempt at self-cleansing, they distort reality. This self-deliverance resorts to calling evil good and good evil (see Isa 5:20). Moreover, they remain self-deceived at their own peril.

This self-alienation also affects interpersonal relationships. Sin causes psychopathologies of the soul that damage others. The Bible lists several of these disorders in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, the Seven Deadly Sins (Prov 6:16-19) and the Lusts of the Flesh (Gal 5:19-21a) are representative samples of these disorders. These character traits make the self supreme. They seek to subject everything else, including God, to the self's authority.

Consequences of the Fall

In this newly fallen world, God no longer served as the Creator, the one owed glory, honor, and praise (Rev 4:11). Also, humans became tarnished images infected with the devastating deformity of sin. This sin not only blemished the surface of human beings, but also permeated the inner fabric of their souls. Left to themselves, they worshipped themselves rather than God. They held dispositions contrary to God. These dispositions manifested themselves in rebellious behaviors. People scoffed at the law of God and lived lives of lawlessness. They also vandalized God's purpose of shalom in his good creation.

Moreover, sin also ushered in its companion—misery. Suffering became part of the human experience. As such, human development, which depends so much on

[51]Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 105.

relationships, became a casualty. As sin alienated parents from God, each other, and themselves, it also inflicted creational damage on the attachment systems of their children. In turn, as their children grew, they bequeathed this damage to their children. On and on it went, damaged attachment systems became one of the unfortunate legacies of this vandalized shalom. Thus, the fall was complete and tragic. Humanity needed help—a help that only God could provide.

Relationship Restored

God created man for his glory and man rejected God's intention by trying to glorify himself. Man's self-glorification project left him hopeless and dead in his sin. Some readers may reason that if God did not need humans, why did he decide to do something about their plight?

Necessity of Redemption

The answer is simple. God loves himself and his glory above everything else. He longs to expand this glory and this glory expansion is his glory plan. This glory manifests itself in his truth, goodness, and beauty. As part of his truth, God cannot lie (Heb 6:18). As part of his goodness, God will keep his promises (Deut 7:9). As part of his beauty, God will reveal his loveliness in a perceptible way (Heb 1:3). This being so, before the foundation of the world, God the Father and God the Son entered into a covenant. In this covenant, they planned to redeem humanity for the "glory of his grace" (Eph 1:5). This "covenant of redemption"[52] was the genesis of God's glory plan.

In light of this glory plan, God created man in his image. God, there in the Garden of Eden, promised man eternal life. God made this promise conditional upon man's total obedience (Gen 2:16). Frame observes, "Many theologians have described the

[52]Frame, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 4.

covenant in Eden as the covenant of works."[53] In spite of the promise of eternal life with God, man broke this covenant. In disobeying God, man triggered the next phase of God's glory plan.

God did not allow Adam's transgression to thwart his plan. Instead, God used Adam's disobedience to extend his glory to even greater heights. In the wake of Adam's fall, God made another promise. This promise became the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-12). God promised Adam that he would set things right again (Gen 3:15); He would redeem what Adam lost. God accomplished this promise through his Son, Jesus Christ (Isa 42:6). Thus, in keeping this promise, God initiated the next step in his glory plan.

Definition of Redemption

God continued his plan of redemption. However, what does redemption mean? When one thinks about the concept of redemption, the idea of rescue comes to mind. Stott observes that redemption is more than rescue: "For at its most basic to 'redeem' is to buy back, whether as a purchase or a ransom. . . . We have no liberty to dilute its meaning into a vague and even cheap deliverance. We have been ransomed by Christ not merely 'redeemed' or 'delivered' by him."[54]

Redemption implies ransom, and ransom suggests particularity. For example, one does not pay kidnappers a ransom for strangers, but will pay a ransom for his children. Ransom indicates God's desire to extend his glory through a community of particular individuals. As a group, these individuals comprise the church. It is this church that God redeems (Eph 1:11-14). Thus, God extends his glory through the church by redeeming its

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[53]Frame, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 4.

[54]John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2006), chap. 7, iBook.

individual members. Because God is a God of order (1 Cor 14:33), there is a certain logic or sequence to this redemption.

Order of Redemption

Redemption is a process. Theologians call this process the *ordo salutis* (or order of salvation).[55] Different faith traditions conceive the steps in this order in various ways, but all follow the general flow of calling, justification, and glorification (Rom 8:29-30).

The perspective taken in this project is that of the historic Reformed theological understanding of the *ordo salutis*. According to Demarest, "every aspect of salvation is grounded in the covenant of grace, occurs in union with Christ, and is brought forth by the Holy Spirit."[56] From this perspective, redemption occurs in this order. There is calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, preservation and perseverance, and finally, glorification.[57]

While there is a sequence to redemption, it is much more than the story of eight simple steps. Redemption is the developing drama of the relationship between God and the believer. In other words, redemption is not just procedural—it is relational; it involves attachment. For the Reformed believer, the relational aspects of redemption emerge in two complementary ideas. The first idea is union with Christ. Billings observes, "Union with Christ is right at the center of the Christian doctrine of salvation."[58] Frame contends that this union is vital to salvation: "All of the blessings [of salvation] are 'in

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[55]Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation,* ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 36.

[56]Ibid., 38.

[57]Ibid., 38-39.

[58]J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), introduction, iBook.

Christ.'"[59] Thus, one must be in union with him to receive those blessings and this union only occurs in salvation. The second idea is that of adoption. Adoption as one of God's children flows from one's union with Christ. It is the culmination of that union. Murray puts it succinctly when he states, "Union with Christ reaches its zenith in adoption and adoption has its orbit in union with Christ."[60]

Relational Aspects of Redemption

As just stated, the *ordo salutis* describes the objective reality of redemption. Union with Christ and adoption express the believer's subjective experience of that deliverance. Before moving on, an explanation of these relational aspects proves helpful.

Union with Christ. Frame contends, "Union with Christ is that spiritual union with Christ that includes all the blessings of salvation."[61] This union empowers believers to bear fruit for the glory of God (John 15:5). Ferguson articulates the effect this union has on the believer's life:

> We have seen that through union with Christ all that is his by incarnation becomes ours through faith. His self-offering becomes ours to bring us pardon for our guilt; his life of obedience becomes ours to give us the new status of sons of God. But when we are joined to him there is also a sense in which his life and power become available to us to transform our lives.[62]

To state it simply, union with Christ makes everything possible in the Christian life. This union brings about the Spirit's indwelling power. Through this union, the Spirit increases the believer's glory-reflecting capacity (2 Cor 3:18). As believers grow deeper and deeper into this union, their faith strengthens. As their faith grows, they internalize

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[59]Frame, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 38.

[60]John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 170.

[61]Frame, *Systematic Theology*, chap. 38.

[62]Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 111.

more and more of their new identities. The objective reality becomes the subjective experience. They transform from slaves to sons and daughters (Gal 4:7). This subjective experience leads to the second relational aspect of redemption—adoption.

Adoption. Adoption is an act of God whereby he frees believers from the dominion of their flesh and brings them into his family. As Billings rightly puts it, adoption means "we are no longer slaves; we are children with an intimate relationship with God.[63] This familial condition is not a temporary state of affairs. Instead, adoption is for eternity. Its permanence depends on Christ's activity, not the individual's effort.[64]

In adoption, God does more than welcome people into the permanent family. He also empowers family members to fulfill family responsibilities. Said another way, God transforms believers so that they fit into their new family. He begins restoring the image of God in humans. He cultivates a renewal of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (see Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). This renewal experienced in life in the family of God ties back to man's original state. God restores his original design by refitting man's glory reflecting capacities. Adoption does more than confer family status. It also prepares the believer to live a life worthy of such a standing.

From an attachment perspective, life in the family provides new episodic memories that heal attachment wounds inflicted as the result of creational damage. Redemption reminds believers of their true identity in Christ (see Col 2:10). It also reintroduces them to God's true identity in their moment-by-moment experiences. It helps them recall his steadfast love, justice, and righteousness toward his children (see Jer 9:23).

These relational aspects of redemption show the closeness believers have with God. Believers are indwelled by the Spirit (Rom 8:9), accepted into God's family (John 1:12), may draw near to God (Heb 4:16), and without fear call out to him, "Abba, Father"

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[63]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 736.

[64]James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2013), chap. 36.

(Rom 8:15-16). In the normal course of life, one would expect believers to relish their roles as children of God. However, relishing of roles is often not the case. There are reasons that people are not always cognizant of God's redemption in their experience.

Ratification of Redemption

Redemption is both an objective fact and a subjective experience that expresses itself in one's embodied life. To realize the benefits and blessings of redemption, one must have all three components. To understand the subjective part, one must first know what people have in redemption. Then, it is helpful to know how one takes possession of redemption. Finally, it is useful to think about the obstacles that hinder Christians from taking hold of redemption.

What People Possess in Redemption

As God's adopted children, believers receive several benefits through their union with Christ. Demarest summarizes these benefits:

> These [benefits] include freedom in Christ from the yoke of the law (Gal 2:4), comfort and encouragement in Christ (Phil 2:1), peace or inner tranquility in Christ (John 14:27; Phil 4:7), strengthening in Christ (2 Cor 12:9; Phil 4:13), being wise in Christ (1 Cor 4:10), rejoicing in Christ (Phil 4:4, 10), being spiritually enriched in Christ (1 Cor 1:5), spiritual victory in Christ (2 Cor 2:14), acquiring hope in Christ (1 Cor 15:19; Eph 1:12), and being safe in Christ (Rom 16:20). . . . Indeed, the Christian believer possesses an ideal completeness in Christ.[65]

This ideal completeness is a blessing. Before it can be realized, however, the believer must appropriate it. In other words, the believer must file a claim before receiving these benefits.

How People Take Possession of Redemption

Believers file their claim as children of God in one way—by faith (Eph 2:8-9). Bavinck shows the connection between the benefits of redemption and one's appropriation of it:

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[65]Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 335-36.

> All the benefits of grace therefore lie prepared and ready for the church in the person of Christ. All is finished: God has been reconciled; nothing remains to be added from the side of humans. Atonement, forgiveness, justification, the mystical union, sanctification, glorification, and so on--they do not come into being after and as a result of faith but are objectively, actively present in Christ. They are the fruits solely of his suffering and dying, and they are appropriated on our part by faith.[66]

It seems that believers claim the riches of God's glorious grace through faith. This faith operates through the believer's union with Christ. As believers go deeper into Christ by faith, Christ fills believers with himself. This process leads to a filling up and pouring out of God's glory. As seen, God mediates his glory through revelation (i.e., communication). Humans receive this revelation, digest it, and experience transformation from it. This transformation culminates in the return of this glory through lives that reflect God's character.[67] In this way, believers participate in God's glory plan.

The Current Experience of Many Christians

If this process is true, then why does this experience elude so many Christians? The reason is simple: things are not the way they ought to be. In spite of one's union with Christ, remaining sin cloaks the believer's glory-reflecting capacity. The suffering brought about by a fallen creation (e.g., genetic abnormalities) and the sin of others also damage the believer's created capacities, including reflexivity.

The New Testament takes into account the reality of the believer's compromised capacities in its exhortations. Jesus reminded his disciples that in him they had peace (John 16:33). Peace, according to Jesus, is characteristic of union with Christ. If that is so, then why did Paul need to exhort believers to let peace rule in their hearts (Col 3:15)? Also, why did he need to remind Timothy of the inevitability of persecution (2 Tim 3:12)? Commands like these are reminders that believers still struggle with indwelling sin (Rom

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[66]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 523.

[67]Stevens, *Why God Created the World*, 47.

7:14) as well as weaknesses (2 Cor 12:9). On this side of heaven, individuals are works-in-process. Luther captured this experience of the believer when he wrote,

> This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished but it is going on; this is not the end but it is the road; all that does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.[68]

God is still in the process of conforming people into the image of his Son. Since believers are not yet glorified, they do not always appropriate God's Word into the deeper areas of their souls. Something is not working according to plan. Something is hindering the way believers relate to God. Like a light under a basket (see Matt 5:15), something is diminishing the light of God's glory. Because of sin and its effects, things are still not the way they ought to be—even for those who have been redeemed.

Hindrances to appropriating redemption. How is it that sin creates such a shadow between believers and Christ? Healthy relationships with God spring from dwelling with him (Ps 91:1-2). Dwelling with God is learning to trust him. Thus, believers with unhealthy God relationships are not able to trust him as they should. Instead of trusting God, they place their faith in other things. They tend to worship either themselves or something in the creation (Rom 1:21-23). They trade openness and vulnerability with God for the empty promises of self-sufficiency. This predisposition toward self-sufficiency often flows from an impaired attachment system. The believers' IWMs convince them that flight instead of faith is the best option. As such, believers often find themselves not reacting in ways that glorify God. This project wants to understand better why believers misplace their faith in this way.

The Christian life is a developmental process. It helps to remember that Christian growth is a process that produces something (2 Cor 3:18). One of the things it

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[68]David Powlison, *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), chap. 11, iBook.

produces is a deepening trust in God. This trust is more than a mere cognitive assent, it is an active trust that brings forth wisdom in the heart of the believer (Prov 3:5). In addition, it is this wisdom that helps believers increase their glory-reflecting capacities. Therefore, as believers cultivate a trust in God, they harvest wisdom for day-to-day living—and as they become wiser, they reflect God's glory better.

However, believers have wisdom and folly in varying degrees. Also, foolishness in believers comes in two forms. First, some Christians struggle with trusting anyone. They do not trust God, and they do not trust others. Early on they learned that the world is a dangerous place. Their experiences taught them the value of self-trust and being suspicious of others, and as they became more proficient at trusting themselves, the world lauded them. From the world's perspective, self-sufficiency makes them seem wise, but, from God's vantage point, they are fools.

Second, some Christians are too trusting of other people. These individuals believe they are worthless. They seek human relationships to fill a void that is within them. However, these Christians, like their self-trusting counterparts, have eschewed their trust in God. These "over-trusters" have traveled a different path than their self-trusting friends, and although they have taken a different route, they have arrived at the same place. They both struggle in trusting God and they both need heavenly wisdom.

Of course all believers struggle with indwelling sin, but to attribute the problems of "self-trust" and "over-trust" exclusively to sin is simplistic. Something more is going on in these situations. A portion of these struggles is likely due to creational weaknesses, namely, compromised IWMs.[69] In these cases, these "early detection" devices, a gift of God's common grace, are simply not working properly.

In contrast, maturing believers, those with fairly accurate IWMs, learn from the missteps of "self-trust" or "over-trust." Over time, and through painful experiences,

[69]Granted, other creational weaknesses are predominantly biological in nature. For example, autism and paranoid schizophrenia are two instances where genetics and not IWMs are primarily responsible.

they begin to forsake their allegiance to self and begin opening up to the love of God. This is often a gradual process characterized by fits and starts, but as trust grows, heavenly wisdom invades the believer's soul.

As wisdom progresses in the believer's heart, God's glory becomes more radiant and visible. As such, predictable change occurs. First, heavenly wisdom brings a more intimate knowledge of the self. It helps believers understand themselves better. Second, this increased knowledge of self leads to an increased knowledge of God. Growing believers become more aware of their flaws and finitude. This awareness stands in sharp relief to the beautiful holiness of an infinite God. Third, the realization of the believer's inadequacy tends to produce humility. This humility often expresses itself in an honest longing for God. Growing believers meet this longing through a deepening enjoyment of their unions with Christ. Last, as believers deepen in the experience and appropriation of their union with Christ, their glory-reflecting capacities increase. They find their roles in God's glory plan (see Isa 43:7). As such, they tend to love God more through praise and worship. They also tend to love others more through ministry and service. In essence, as believers grow, they become more efficient at returning God's glory to him.

Conclusion

This project focuses on the believer's relationship with God. God created the world to be a theater of his glory. He created humans to reflect and return that glory. However, before too long, humans rejected God, and this rebellion compromised their glory-reflecting capacities. God responded to this rebellion by displaying his covenantal faithfulness and steadfast love. He did this by redeeming these fallen image bearers through Jesus Christ. God declared believers just. He blessed them by placing them in union with Christ. He gave them the Holy Spirit to polish their stained souls; but despite being recipients of these gracious actions, contemporary Christians still struggle in their relationships with God.

Why do believers struggle in their relationships with God? This project explores this question. One's beliefs, in part, reveal one's theology. One's theology demonstrates how one lives life. This project seeks to study how these beliefs might be related to God attachment. This study assumes a reformed evangelical perspective and utilizes attachment theory from common grace to investigate God attachment in a theological context to study how theology affects one's relationality and how one's relationality affects one's theology.

The next chapter summarizes and analyzes contemporary attachment psychology and shows how attachment theory and research can help develop a Christian psychology of God attachment.

CHAPTER 3

FROM SECULAR ATTACHMENT THEORY TO CHRISTIAN ATTACHMENT THEORY

The first chapter pointed out that attachments emerge before spiritual development. Thus, early traumatic attachment experiences can negatively affect later spiritual growth. Instead of flourishing spiritually, individuals who have had poor attachment will experience some degree of biopsychosocial damage. Granted, this damage can be a source God uses to manifest his glory most brightly; however, in general, they serve as obstacles to spiritual growth. Thus, these "soul wounds" will, to some extent, and in most cases, compromise individuals' agency and relational style; and, these compromised capacities will affect how they live out the Christian faith and life. The second chapter provided a theological perspective for this project based on a Dutch-Reformed understanding of the world. It argued for the use of the Christian ground-motive as an interpretive theological grid.

This chapter continues the discussion about attachment, bridging the gap between attachment theory and a Christian understanding of God attachment, and exploring the relationship between God attachment and the Christian faith and life. The chapter follows a funnel-type organization. It has a broad beginning, and as it proceeds, it narrows to a fine tip. As such, it begins with a broad sketch of contemporary attachment theory. Next, it articulates a Christian psychology of attachment. Last, it sets forth a theory of how God attachment is related to the Christian faith and life.

The Foundations of Secular Attachment Theory

This section presents some of the distinctive characteristics of attachment theory by emphasizing the foundational building blocks of the approach. In doing so, it focuses

on the contributions of its chief architect—John Bowlby. While others extended his work, in the overall analysis, their subsequent contributions were simply innovations and elaborations of his key ideas. As such, Bowlby's seminal thinking still forms the heart of attachment theory. Thus, understanding these foundations will help bring understanding to the contemporary applications of the theory, including the concept known as God attachment.

Perhaps the second most important person in the history of attachment theory is Mary Ainsworth, Bowlby's first research assistant.[1] If Bowlby's thinking was the seed, Ainsworth's work was the sprout that led to the blossoming of all subsequent attachment research.

Ainsworth conducted two landmark research projects on attachment theory. First, she conducted a study in Uganda in 1954. In that study she discovered there were distinct phases in the development of attachment in young children.[2] She also noted that babies seemed to use their mothers as "a secure base" for exploration.[3] Karen summed up the results of Ainsworth's Ugandan project. He writes that the Ugandan study was

> the first to demonstrate the development of attachment, making sense of infant behaviors and developmental sequences that were poorly understood before. It also planted the concept of the secure base, which would gradually become more important in the way we think about the parent-child bond and about human ties in general.[4]

Thus, Ainsworth's work in Uganda provided Bowlby with empirical support for his developmental theory.

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[1]Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130-31.

[2]Ibid., 137.

[3]Ibid., 136.

[4]Ibid., 141.

In 1963, Ainsworth received a small grant to perform a longitudinal study that observed mothers and their infants in Baltimore.[5] In this study she desired "to replicate the Uganda research and make it much more systematic."[6] The procedure Ainsworth designed came to be called the "Strange Situation." In this procedure, researchers observed a child's reactions to planned departures and reunions with its mother. The results replicated Ainsworth's work from Uganda.[7] It was so successful that it became the most widely used procedure "in the history of developmental psychology."[8] The primary fruit of the Strange Situation was two-fold. First, it provided a systematic way of classifying different attachment behaviors. In discussing the effect of Ainsworth's categorizing of attachment behaviors, Karen argued that the Strange Situation produced "a Rosetta Stone of sorts."[9] It provided a way in which one could "decipher the residue of the infant's experience with its parents."[10] Second, the Strange Situation provided a research protocol that others could replicate with various research participants.[11]

Ainsworth's research helped Bowlby's theory in two important ways. First, her research with children gave empirical validation to Bowlby's ideas. Second, she also helped Bowlby categorize differences in attachment styles.[12] As such, Ainsworth's contribution to attachment theory cannot be overestimated. Bowlby himself acknowledged

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[5]Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 144.

[6]Ibid., 145.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., 148.

[9]Ibid., 172.

[10]Ibid.

[11]For an extended example of this research, see Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications* (New York: Guilford, 2008).

[12]Mary D. Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), xxv.

his indebtedness to Ainsworth for refining some of his initial ideas.[13] He praised Ainsworth by stating that her research "ha[d] led attachment theory to be widely regarded as probably the best supported theory of socio-emotional development yet available."[14] Thus, so influential was her work that two distinct schools of attachment research emerged from her research: the nuclear family and peer romantic traditions.

First, the nuclear family tradition stressed attachment between children and their parents.[15] Mary Main's research with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is representative of this tradition.[16] Karen explains the purpose of the AAI:

> It posed a series of ever more probing questions about each parent's early relationships. It asked for a detailed account of his family situation, descriptions of mother and father, and what he did as a child when he was upset or ill, experiences of separation or loss, feelings of rejection, and feelings about the parent's relationship with his own six-year old. The interview, which lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, sought not only to discover what the adult's early attachments were like, but, perhaps more important, how he thought and felt about intimate attachments now—that is, how he represented them in his mind, what his internal model was like, and whether he could give himself the freedom to access painful memories in this realm and open them up for inspection or whether the whole business was too distressing and needed to be warded off. To that end, transcripts of each adult responding to questions about early and current attachments and what they mean to him were carefully analyzed for such issues as coherency, quality of memory, and anger; and these variables—not what happened or didn't happen in the past—were what Main ultimately used to determine adult attachment status. More than an interview, it was a psychological assessment, almost like the Strange Situation for adults.[17]

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[13]John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development* (London: Routledge, 1988), 23.

[14]Ibid., 28.

[15]Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes, "Attachment in Adulthood," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships,* ed. Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes (New York: Guilford, 1998), 4-7.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 363-64.

In contrast, the peer romantic research tradition focused on close relationships between adults.[18] Hazan and Shaver's work on adult romantic relationships is an example of this tradition.[19] It makes use of self-report measures that are easy to administer and score, and it provides a helpful piece to the attachment puzzle, because it helps fill in some of the gaps left by the AAI. For example, whereas the AAI centers on how childhood experiences shaped adult attachment style, the Peer Romantic approach takes into account how "adult romantic experience" also brings about changes in those styles.[20] This tradition is also of great relevance to this project because Beck and McDonald's work on God attachment traces its lineage back to this tradition.[21]

Both of these "traditions" have provided important insights into attachment theory. The nuclear family tradition has helped theorists understand adult attachment styles. Moreover, due to its research methodology, this tradition captures subconscious attachment tendencies. In addition, the peer romantic tradition has assisted researchers in better understanding how a person's attachment style manifests itself in close adult relationships. Furthermore, its self-report research methodology makes it simple and inexpensive to administer.

As mentioned, although these two traditions have extended Bowlby's work, his base assumptions remain intact. Thus, his work is the primary focus in this section.

According to Ainsworth, there are seven distinctive features of attachment theory. Attachment theory assumes a Darwinian worldview, holds to a psychoanalytic orientation, uses ethology, the study of how animals behave, employs a psychobiological

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[18]Simpson and Rholes, "Attachment in Adulthood," 4-7.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 388.

[21]Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 94.

and behavioral systems approach, incorporates control theory, utilizes an information-processing model of cognition, and makes use of Piaget's structural approach to cognitive development.[22]

The seven distinctive features of attachment theory shape its psychology. After elucidating these features, the next section supplies a sketch of this psychology. Following is a Christian translation of the psychology of attachment theory. Here, an attempt is made to articulate a Christian psychology of God attachment. However, before that, one must understand the infrastructure, which begins with attachment theory's view of the world.

Darwinian Worldview

Bowlby was a committed evolutionist. In *Attachment*, Bowlby made this plain: "The kind of theory outlined is . . . a direct descendent of the theory outlined by Darwin in *The Origin of Species*."[23] Throughout *Attachment*, Bowlby reinforces this perspective repeatedly (85, 126, 131, 134, 141).

Bowlby had good reasons for embracing Darwin—Darwin's worldview helped Bowlby in four ways. First, Darwin's worldview excluded the need for teleological theories. For Bowlby, the question of *meaning*, which form the heart of teleological theories, fell "outside the realm of science" (124-25). Thus, Bowlby considered them irrelevant to his theory. Second, this worldview welcomed ethological studies. Since humans were evolved animals, Bowlby believed that he could learn from the ways that other species performed attachment behaviors. Third, Darwinism gave Bowlby a simple and comprehensive motive for all behavior: survival (124). This simplified things for Bowlby. He did not need to concern himself with elaborate existential explanations for being in the world. He just had to understand how all behavior focused itself on helping individuals stay alive. Last, his Darwinian philosophy fit well with his scientific

[22]Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment*, 3-4.

[23]John Bowlby, *Attachment*, 2nd ed (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 172.

methodology. Thus, he could connect psychology to biology. This connection helped Bowlby, for it allowed him to legitimize his theory in the modern scientific community.

Although Darwin shaped Bowlby's theory, Bowlby never severed himself from his original psychoanalytic orientation. Darwin's influence did distinguish Bowlby from Freud in that Bowlby adhered more closely to biological assumptions than did Freud. In essence, by following Darwin in his assumptions about biology, Bowlby took some of Freud's theory and made it even, for lack of a better term, more "Darwinian."

Psychoanalytic Orientation

With Bowlby's desire to stay linked to Freud, it seems that Bowlby did not set out to develop a new model of psychology. He always saw himself, at heart, as a psychoanalytic thinker (xxxi). Therefore, throughout his career, he kept many of the same tenets as Freud. One sees Bowlby's agreement with Freud in a few key areas.

First, like Freud, Bowlby believed that early traumatic experiences caused much adult psychopathology (10). Second, Bowlby agreed with Freud about the role played by the unconscious. Both also believed that clients used repression and transference in dealing with their traumas (16). In essence, Bowlby used psychoanalytic theory as his starting point, but he also departed from the theory in some significant ways.

One of the greatest differences between Freud and Bowlby dealt with reliance on different scientific sub-disciplines in creating their theories. While Freud relied upon physics (15), Bowlby leaned toward ethology. One can see this difference in Bowlby's disagreement with Freud's psychical energy model of how intrapsychic conflict resolved itself (16, 172-73).

First, Bowlby did not think Freud's explanation covered all types of behavior. He pointed out that Freud's model did not explain certain infant behaviors, for example, why a baby stops crying when his mother enters the room. Likewise, it also had no answer for why the baby resumed crying when his mother exited (19). Next, Bowlby thought that Freud's energy model was untestable and thus unscientific (19). In this regard, Freud's

model seemed more philosophical than scientific. Last, for Bowlby, Freud's energy model had become outdated. He saw Freud's model as an attempt to tie psychoanalysis to the science of the day. The science of that day centered on the concept of entropy, which was thought to apply to all existing matter—both living and non-living. By Bowlby's time, however, scientific thought had changed and entropy was believed to apply only to non-living things (20). For Bowlby, contemporary science had called Freud's energy model into question. In essence, scientific innovation, from Bowlby's perspective, had forced Freud's model into obsolescence.[24] As such, Bowlby thought that this concept could be understood in a more contemporary way. To achieve this, Bowlby tied psychoanalysis and "present-day biology" together. He incorporated "control theory" and "evolutionary theory" into his thinking about attachment (20). In doing so, he made psychoanalysis, at least his version of it, more scientific.

Second, whereas Freud looked into the past, Bowlby speculated about the future (10). For example, Freud began with symptoms of adult patients and traced them back to earlier trauma. In contrast, Bowlby started by observing small children over time and would forecast how traumatic events might affect them (4). In this sense, Freud was *retrospective*, and Bowlby was *prospective*.

Third, Freud looked for various traumas that he believed led to problems in living. In contrast, Bowlby focused on a child's relationship with his mother (or mother-substitute) as the primary cause of psychopathology (xxvii-xxviii).

Fourth, the two differed in their primary patient populations. Freud tended to work with troubled adults, whereas Bowlby spent much of his professional time working with children.

Finally, Freud's theory grew from anecdotal evidence and clinical observations. In contrast, Bowlby made great use of the study of animals to learn more about human

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[24]To be fair, Bowlby thought that the psychical energy model was not central the rest of psychoanalysis. Bowlby, *Attachment*, 16.

behavior (7-8). This study of animal data constitutes the second distinctive of attachment theory.

Ethology

Ethology is the scientific study of animal behavior. Since Bowlby thought of humans as complex animals, he believed that ethology provided "a wide range of new concepts to try out in [his] theorizing" (6-7).

Ethology taught Bowlby that the need for attachment was inherent in living animals. Ethology also helped Bowlby expand his theory in some significant ways. First, ethology introduced Bowlby to the concept of imprinting. First observed in goslings and ducklings, imprinting occurs when young mammals "become directed preferentially and stably towards one (or more) discriminated figure(s)" (167). Imprinting showed Bowlby that mammals had an inherent proximity-maintaining system. This system allowed them to stay close to a particular figure. From an evolutionary perspective, it helped young mammals survive, giving very young animals a way of avoiding predation or exposure (224).

Second, ethology helped Bowlby see the relative importance of attachment for an animal's needs. He drew upon several sources in learning this lesson. First, he benefitted from Harlow's studies with rhesus monkeys (213-16), Fisher's work with puppies (212-13), and Cairn's experiments with lambs (213). These studies showed that very young animals need attachment more than food or kindness. The results of this research had a powerful impact on Bowlby's theorizing, teaching him that "the young child's hunger for his mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food" (xxix).

Ethology expanded Bowlby's theory. However, attachment is also a neurological and behavioral phenomenon. What role does the brain play in attachment? How does the environment facilitate attachment behavior? These questions relate to the next distinctive characteristic of attachment theory.

Psychobiology and Behavioral Systems

Bowlby recognized the close relationship between the psychobiological and behavioral systems. Drawing from his understanding of evolution, neuroscience, and ethology, he came to understand that instinctive behaviors were the result of a number of biological systems that increased survivability. He saw an interactive relationship between neurological and hormonal processes, environmental factors, and behaviors. In discussing causal factors for maternal behaviors in animals, Bowlby theorized,

> Thus once again it is found that a change occurring within an animal, in all likelihood a change in hormonal level, leads to changes in her behavior, e.g. care of young, that result in her receiving stimulation from the environment, which itself has an effect on her hormonal level, and that that again influences her behavior, and perhaps her sensitivity, and so the kind of stimulation she receives. The more adequately any sequence of instinctive behavior is analyzed the more certain are interactive cycles of this kind to be found. Since they occur in lower mammals, it must be expected that in due course they will be identified in higher mammals, in primates, and in man himself. (94)

Bowlby was not the first to see these influences on a person's behavior, but he was the first to assemble all these factors into a workable theory that explained behavior. For the theory to work, however, Bowlby needed a system to deliver these behaviors. He found the explanation in control theory.

Control Theory

Control theory is another important component in attachment theory. It explains how a machine (or living thing) uses feedback to hone in on a targeted goal (41). Bowlby explains this system in the following illustration:

> The simplest form of control system is a regulator, the purpose of which is to maintain some condition constant. A well-known example is a room thermostat, the purpose of which is to maintain the room at a set temperature. To achieve this the system is so designed that its behavior is dictated by the results of comparing the actual temperature with what is set. To make this comparison the system requires, first, an initial setting and, secondly, continuous information about what the room temperature actually is. This information is derived from a thermometer, readings of which are relayed back (fed back) in an appropriate form to be compared with the initial setting. (42)

In this example, the set temperature serves as a targeted goal. As the temperature changes, the thermometer tracks the actual temperature. It compares the actual and targeted

temperatures. When the actual temperature rises above the targeted one, it provides feedback. The thermostat receives this feedback and activates the air conditioning system, and the air conditioner operates until the room returns to the targeted temperature.

Bowlby used control theory to explain how children and mothers maintained proximity. For Bowlby, the targeted goal was survival (124). He believed that evolution had equipped humans with "systems" designed to maintain this proximity. When with his mother, a young child will engage in exploratory behaviors. He will venture away from his mother to explore the environment, but once his distance from her becomes too great, these systems activate. This activation creates an emotional alarm in the child (108). As the alarm activates, the child moves back to his mother. When he returns to a comfortable distance from her, the alarm terminates. Then, after experiencing her reassurance, he can return to his exploratory behaviors (238).

It is interesting to note that this control system works in both the child and the mother. If the mother senses her child has strayed too far away, her attachment system also activates. Then, she reacts and retrieves her baby (241). In essence, part of the control system relies on this cooperation between mother and child (204). For Bowlby, this is a partnership that works to promote survival by protecting infants from predators (226).

This *intersystem* behavior between mother and child explains how both worked together in promoting survival. However, what processes powered this system in each individual? In other words, how do *intrasystem* experiences in one of the attachment partners work? This question brings up the next important characteristic of attachment theory.

Information-Processing Model of Cognition

Attachment theory adheres to an information-processing model of cognition. In this type of model, individuals make appraisals of stimuli in the environment. They also

appraise their own internal states (104), and these appraisals dictate responses to that stimuli or internal state.

To illustrate, think of the information-processing model of cognition, like a complex computer program. Information is entered into the computer, the computer's processor then activates software, the software analyzes and interprets the input data, then, the computer displays the processed output, and the computer user then acts on that output.

For Bowlby, this process centered on his idea of internal working model (IWM). In essence, IWMs served as the brain's software. They are mind maps that work like templates and help people sort, interpret, and make predictions from received information (80).

Bowlby relied on the work of Swiss psychologist and child development pioneer Jean Piaget for much of his own theorizing. For one, Bowlby's conceptualization of IWMs work much like Piaget's concept of assimilation and accommodation. In Piaget's model, the individual uses assimilation and accommodation to interpret novel experiences. Upon encountering something new, the child compares it to previous experience. If this new "thing" matches the previous experience, the person assimilates it. In other words, he relates the novel experience to older experiences. Then, he can interpret this new experience as being similar to other, more familiar experiences. However, if this assimilation process does not yield a match, the child accommodates for it. By accommodating it, he learns more about how the experience fits into his current knowledge base. Thus, accommodation results in an adjusted knowledge base. At that point, he is prepared to deal with this experience should he have it again. He can also predict what *might* happen if the situation occurs and then can formulate a planned response to this hypothetical situation. The same thing occurs in IWMs. In general, IWMs are flexible mind maps that the person can alter by assimilating and accommodating in light of new information.

Bowlby conceived two kinds of IWMs. The environmental IWM dictates how one views the environment or others. In contrast, the organismic IWM influences how one views the self (82). Both IWMs are necessary, and both often work in concert with one another.

Bowlby believed that trauma caused these IWMs to become "in greater or lesser degree inadequate or inaccurate" (82). In other words, for Bowlby, trauma damages IWMs, and these damaged IWMs then contribute to one's psychopathology (82). The following illustration explains how this trauma results in psychopathology.

In returning to the computer analogy, bad attachment figures are like computer hackers. These hackers input viruses into the computer's operating system. This activity hijacks the operating system (i.e., the IWM). When this happens, the system makes inadequate or inaccurate appraisals, and the resultant output is often defective or psychopathological.

Although IWMs are vulnerable to traumatic experiences, their flexibility also allows for their healing. Attachment therapists work like computer technicians. They identify the virus, isolate it, and introduce new data into the system. This new data repairs the traumatized IWM by "rewriting" the operating system's command structure. This reprogramming helps change the individual's view of self and others. In effect, it reformats the operating system so that the computer can function as it is designed to operate.

Another important aspect of IWMs is that, like computer programs, they develop over time. They start simple, dealing with single tasks. Then, as they grow, they handle operations that are more complex. This increasing complexity introduces another characteristic of attachment theory, a reliance on Piaget's structural approach to cognitive development.

Piaget's Structural Approach to Cognitive Development

As already seen, Bowlby freely borrowed from Piaget. As a result, in this section, readers will see that Bowlby also similarly assumed a stage view of development related to attachment (141, 199-204, 222-23). As such, the stage of formal operations was of utmost importance to Bowlby, for it gave him a solid theoretical explanation for the increasing complexity of behaviors, and helped him articulate how children developed from simple to goal-corrected attachment behaviors (152).

Ever the synthesizer, Bowlby applied Piaget's understanding of the progression from sensorimotor intelligence to formal operations thinking (153). In particular, Bowlby showed how formal operational thinking allows individuals to achieve set-goals. In discussing psychological development, Bowlby explains,

> In human beings, psychological development is characterized not only by simple systems' being superseded by goal-corrected systems, but also by the individual's becoming increasingly aware of the set-goals he has adopted, by his developing increasingly sophisticated plans for achieving them, and by his increasing ability to relate one plan to another, to detect compatibility between plans and to order them in terms of priority. In psychoanalytic terminology these changes are described as being due to the supersession of the id by ego. (153-54)

Here, one sees Bowlby describing how formal operations thinking applies to attachment behaviors. For Bowlby, as children develop, they replace simple systems with goal-corrected ones. Piaget's formal operations thinking helps explain how this is possible.

Summary

Thus far, readers have examined the foundational tenets of attachment theory: a Darwinian worldview, a psychoanalytical orientation, an engagement with ethological studies, a psychobiological and behavioral systems approach, a reliance on control theory, and information-processing model of cognition, and a dependence on Piaget's structural approach to cognitive development. Granted, these tenets existed before John Bowlby, but it was he who brought these heretofore disparate tenets into a coherent theory. Although subsequent researchers validated and expanded Bowlby's initial

concept, it is his theory that remains the foundation. Thus, it is this theory that serves as the bedrock for a psychology of attachment.

A Secular Attachment-Focused Psychology

This chapter began with a presentation of some of the distinctive characteristics of attachment theory. This section narrows further by examining how the distinctive characteristics of attachment theory form an attachment-focused psychology. First considered is the philosophical assumptions of attachment theory.

Philosophical Assumptions

As seen, the underlying worldview for Bowlby's attachment-focused psychology is Darwinism (172). This worldview is expressed in this psychology's understanding of the nature of reality, knowledge, and ethics. Bowlby shared the same understanding of reality as Darwin. Like Darwin, Bowlby saw humans as complex animals (55). As mentioned, this presupposition allowed Bowlby to glean insights into human behavior through ethological studies (7).

Moreover, Bowlby's naturalistic presuppositions also simplified his theorizing. He did not need to concern himself with "supernatural intervention" or "teleological causation" (124-25). His Darwinian worldview declared all metaphysical realities out of bounds. There was no need for spiritual themes or an existential search for meaning and purpose. As such, he could then concentrate his efforts on observable things. Thus, Bowlby's conceptualization of humans as animals gave him a reductionistic model of the nature of reality.

Bowlby's ontology influenced his theory of knowledge. His infatuation with Darwin matched his affinity for the scientific method. As such, science became the primary path of discovery, which meant that the scientific method governed his theory of knowledge. Science decided what counted as knowledge and what did not (54). One sees this expressed in Bowlby's critique of Freud's psychic energy model.

Bowlby thought Freud's psychic energy model was more speculative than scientific. Freud hypothesized that all people experienced intrapsychic conflict. As they managed this conflict, energy was dispersed between the id, ego, and super ego (16). Bowlby disagreed with this part of Freud's theory, for on this point, he thought Freud was more a philosopher than a scientist. Instead, Bowlby saw intrapsychic processes as being guided by behavioral and control systems. These systems make use of information and feedback to keep people in homeostatic states (18). What is more, these behavioral and control systems are also observable, and if they are observable, one can then test them. If they can be tested through observation, then they are, in the technical sense, *scientific*. In contrast, the discharge of psychic energy is a metaphorical concept. Because psychic energy can be neither observed nor tested, it falls outside the realm of science. Therefore, in the strictest sense, Freud's theory did not produce verifiable knowledge. Here, Bowlby thought Freud's theorizing extended past the scientific evidence. By rethinking this process, Bowlby had, at least on this issue, made Freud more *scientific*.

Science's influence on Bowlby, however, did not stop there, for it also shaped his understanding of ethics. This is apparent in his view of morality. For Bowlby, morality was a social construction. As an evolutionist, categories of *right* and *wrong* were unhelpful. Instead, he thought in terms of *adaptive* and *maladaptive*. For Bowlby, adaptive changes promote species survival. Maladaptive changes encourage extinction. According to this mindset, morality is irrelevant. One sees this play out in Bowlby's theory of why people act in altruistic ways.

From Bowlby's perspective, altruism has nothing to do with virtue. Instead, it helps individuals pass their genes to future generations (131). People do nice things so that they can be in a better position to procreate. Of course, this implies that the altruistic person is being manipulative, but in this framework, genuine morality does not exist. All that matters is species survival. From this vantage point, Bowlby was freed from making

value judgments. Instead, he thought of human behaviors in pure, scientific terms. This way of *scientific* thinking influenced his understanding of personality.

Model of Personality

There are three components of all models of personality. First, the *core* represents the internal characteristics of the person. It is the unlearned configuration of how people "think, feel, and act."[25] Next, the *periphery* refers to "concrete, learned lifestyles that differentiate humans from each other."[26] The periphery contains the observable fruit of the core's activities. Last, the *development statement* bridges the gap between the core tendencies and the peripheral traits and behaviors—it is the path that core motivations take on their way to the periphery. Bowlby's object relations background led him to a psychosocial approach to personality.

For Bowlby, the core of personality was the individual's need for attachment. He suggested that humans have a pre-wired drive for relationships. He noted, "From empirical observation we suggested that 'the young child's hunger for his mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food,' and that in consequence her absence inevitably generates 'a powerful sense of loss and anger'" (xxix). In essence, in the core of personality is an insatiable need for relationship, very much like the need for food or oxygen, and the quest for relationship manifests itself in observable behaviors, and Bowlby focused on proximity-seeking behaviors. Later theorists, like Ainsworth, would refine Bowlby's original conceptualization by categorizing these proximity-seeking behaviors into distinct attachment styles.[27]

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[25]Salvatore R. Maddi, *Personality Theories: A Comparative Analysis* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1996), 13-15.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment*, 58-62.

Finally, the child's personality develops as a function of the develop of an IWM. The IWM helps the child predict what will happen in certain, similar situations. Thus, the IWM provides instructions as to how to maintain proximity to an attachment figure.

Therefore, for Bowlby, the core of personality is the individual's need for relationship. This need is met as children develop proximity-seeking strategies with significant others. These early interactions create IWMs that will be activated in later relationships. This discussion leads to the next point in the psychology of attachment theory: how attachment theory understands human development.

Model of Development

All models of development must answer four questions: (1) What is the nature of human beings? (2) Are developmental changes qualitative or quantitative? (3) How do nature and nurture contribute to the development process? (4) What is it that develops? Taken together, these questions help readers evaluate the comprehensiveness of an attachment-focused psychology.

The nature of human beings. As a committed evolutionist, Bowlby adhered to an organismic view of the world. In other words, he believed that human beings possessed an organic capacity for growth. He also held to a stage theory of development (142). Second, he believed in the epigenetic principle, which means that experiences in the environment can trigger genetic activity. Though a Darwinian, he was also an object relations therapist. His object relations training taught him that people were more than machines in motion (17). They not only reacted to their environment, but they related to themselves and others in that environment too. As such, this view influenced his understanding of how development occurred.

Qualitative versus quantitative. Bowlby saw development as both qualitative and quantitative. He first observed how attachment behaviors began with the activation of

simple systems. Then, he noted how these behaviors became more complex as the child developed. He called the simplest behaviors "fixed action patterns" (65). For Bowlby, "Rooting, grasping, crying, and smiling [are] examples of fixed action patterns" (66). These simple patterns seemed innate. Bowlby noted that one could see them from a child's birth (265). As the child grows, however, so do the complexity of his behaviors. After fixed action patterns, one can expect what Bowlby called "goal-corrected behaviors" (267). These behaviors help children hone in on their pursuit of a set goal. Toddlers provide a clear illustration of this pursuit. For example, imagine a small child is in a department store with his mother (72-73). When his mother moves, the child adjusts to those movements. He corrects his location to maintain a comfortable distance from her.

For Bowlby, what had started as simple has become more complex. With greater complexity came an even greater intricacy. Bowlby had to figure out how to explain the way children learn from these experiences with their attachment figures. He needed to explain how such past experiences help children predict future ones. He found this explanation in his concept of the IWM.

The IWM represents this sophisticated level of development. Whereas fixed action plans were reflexive, IWMs tended to be intentional. Although goal-corrected behaviors are simple, IWMs are complex and elaborate. They demand a high level of cognitive processing. They need to store and retrieve available information and they possess the ability to use the stored information in ways that make predictions about potential events. Bowlby explains the function of a healthy IWM:

> A number of measures are required if an organism is to exploit usefully a working model. First, the model must be built in accordance with such data as are or can be made available. Secondly, if the model is to be of use in novel situations, it must be extended imaginatively to cover potential realities as well as experienced ones. Thirdly, any model, whether applicable to an experienced world or to a potential one, must be tested for internal consistency. . . . The more adequate the model the more accurate the predictions; and the more comprehensive the model the greater the number of situations in which its predictions apply. (81)

The IWM amounts to a qualitative change to an infant's fixed action patterns, and allows the person to make more elaborate predictions about possible scenarios. At the same

time, the IWM reveals that quantitative changes have occurred, for example, the IWM is the result of the accumulation and storage of data.

Bowlby's view of development leads to the next point. Since children undergo both qualitative and quantitative developmental changes, Bowlby needed to explain how nature and nurture contributes to those changes.

Nature versus nurture. Following object relations theory, Bowlby was an interactionist (17) in that he saw that nature and nurture interacted to produce growth. For Bowlby, people are born neurologically wired for attachment (265), but this wiring is moldable. The child's experiences in his environment help craft this wiring (45). Although the wiring is important, to reach one's full potential as a self, one's relationship with an attachment figure is even more important (xii). One might think of it this way. A potter needs clay, but it is only in the hands of the potter that the clay becomes *something*. In the same way, most people have the genes they need to become a person, but they need relationship to become a person in the fullest sense.

What develops. As stated, higher primates have evolved attachment systems, which begin as simple tasks, and over the course of development they become more complex. It is through interactions with the environment and self that these systems activate and terminate. During this activating and terminating process, the person learns from his experience and develops a template in his mind, called an IWM, which helps him predict and plan for future events.

This IWM gives the person a way to imagine the *possible*. It also allows individuals to create a *symbolic* attachment figure to support them in the event that a real attachment figure is unavailable (261). In addition, a well-functioning IWM gives a person a realistic view of self and others. Said in another way, an accurate IWM coheres with reality. Finally, a well-developed IWM produces logical expressions of one's story—

people with healthy IWMs can express coherent autobiographical narratives.[28] This discussion of healthy IWMs leads to the model of health assumed in Bowlby's model.

Model of Health

Psychological wellbeing, from an attachment perspective, consists in a well-functioning attachment system that perceives the world, especially the social world, with relative accuracy. Although inevitably limited in everyone, the IWMs of healthy people tend to cohere with reality. They also tend to provide a realistic view of the environment and of the self. On the psychosocial level, these IWMs often manifest themselves in secure attachment behaviors, which give evidence of an ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. The IWMs of securely attached persons also reveal themselves through coherent autobiographical narratives. However, insecurely attached individuals demonstrate behaviors consistent with their attachment style.

Model of Abnormality

Troubled individuals often struggle with ineffective attachment systems and inaccurate or outdated IWMs. Compromised individuals often have attachment systems that fail them. These people are like Lorenz's goslings (166), for they become attached to the wrong things and in the wrong way.

On the psychosocial level, unhealthy people exhibit anxious or avoidant attachment behaviors. They tend to struggle in developing and maintaining close relationships. They often offer incoherent, vague, or confusing autobiographical narratives. These symptoms led Bowlby to think about possible causes of psychopathology. Bowlby attributed psychological dysfunction to two primary causes. First, he thought that much adult psychopathology emerges from losing one's childhood attachment figure. He stated,

> We reached the conclusion that loss of mother-figure, either by itself or in combination with other variables yet to be clearly identified, is capable of generating

[28]David J. Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford, 2007), 157.

> responses and processes that are of the greatest interest to psychopathology. Not only so, but these responses and processes, we concluded, are the very same as are known to be active in older individuals who are still disturbed by separations that they suffered in early life. (xxix)

Second, Bowlby believed that early traumatic experiences (i.e., sexual abuse or neglect) lead to problems later in life (4). For Bowlby, these experiences circumvent the proper development of the attachment system and contribute to inaccurate IWMs because they lead to the formation of a developing IWM that comes to expect harm. The IWM, then, encodes these expectations into the neural networks of the brain. This wiring then results in a view of others and of the self that is warped in a negative direction.

As such, for unhealthy individuals to become healthier, there needs to be a rewiring of the brain. This rewiring requires an updating of the person's IWM. Thus, this updating of the IWM becomes one of the main goals of an attachment-focused psychotherapy.

Model of Psychotherapy

Rewiring an IWM is only one goal of an attachment-focused psychotherapy. An attachment-focused psychotherapy has all the elements of other models including the setting of goals, performing assessments, valuing the therapeutic relationship, sharing distinct content, and using therapeutic techniques.

Therapeutic goals. It is true that, at least from a tactical perspective, attachment-focused psychotherapy seeks to rewire IWMs. From a strategic vantage point, however, attachment-focused psychotherapy has a single, overarching goal to promulgate a secure base for clients. From this base, clients can then process disavowed or dissociated aspects of their selves.[29] This secure base is the starting point. To achieve the overall strategic goal, the therapist must first perform an accurate assessment.

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[29]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 257.

Assessment. From an attachment perspective, assessment concerns itself more with the *how* than the *what—how* the client expresses himself is more important than *what* he says.[30] This approach does not mean that content is unimportant, but it does show the value placed on non-verbal aspects of a client's experience, for it contends that these unspoken experiences reveal much about the client's story. This assessment activity assists the therapist in at least four ways: (1) it helps the therapist better understand the client's attachment history; (2) it gives clues to current relational problems; (3) it promotes the therapist's understanding of the client's view of self; and (4) it aids the therapist in providing the client with the appropriate type of secure base.[31]

As with other approaches, a clinical interview is a helpful assessment tool. This being the case, attachment-focused therapists often use portions of Main's Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) for this purpose.[32] The AAI helps achieve two important objectives in the assessment process: it provides a client relationship history and tends to activate attachment behaviors in clients.[33] This activation occurs as the patient describes important relationships. These activated attachment behaviors help therapists categorize a particular client's attachment style. For example, secure people tend to relay coherent and collaborative autobiographical narratives. In contrast, dismissing individuals often lie, are uncollaborative, and inconsistent in their narratives.[34] Preoccupied clients have trouble with succinctness and often express intense emotions and communicate vague and tangential stories.[35]

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[30]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 207.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., 208.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., 209.

Assessment gives the attachment-focused therapist a good starting point and helps the therapist better understand the client and his story. It also helps the therapist strategize the best way to develop the therapeutic relationship.

Therapeutic relationship. In attachment-focused psychotherapy, the therapeutic relationship is of primary importance. Thus, the therapist must relate well to the client. Bowlby sums up the role of the therapist when he writes, "The therapist's role is analogous to that of a mother who provides her child with a secure base from which to explore the world."[36] This secure base gives the client a refuge and a sanctuary to make sense of the meaning behind his attachment behaviors. It also gives the therapist the opportunity to help clients manage their affect. In essence, it mimics the relationship of a mother soothing an anxious child. The secure base thus provides the context in which the therapeutic process can work.

Therapeutic process. One might remember an attachment-focused therapeutic process by the acronym: S-E-A-R-S. The first "S" provides the starting point. The last "S" gives the destination. The, the "E-A-R" describes the therapeutic bridge linking these two points.

S: Secure base. As mentioned, the therapist's chief role is to supply the client with a secure base. From this secure base, the client can explore previously un-storied experiences.[37] The secure base provides a laboratory for the client and a safe place to experiment with new behaviors and actions. Here one can attempt to break old attachment patterns and try on or establish new ones. This helps clients in "accessing, articulating, and reflecting upon dissociated and unverbalized feelings, thoughts, and impulses."[38]

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[36]Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 140.

[37]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 2.

[38]Ibid., 3.

Because of this, the relationship itself is seen as therapeutic.[39] It is an initial ingredient in helping clients strengthen their "narrative competence."[40] Often, exploring the lack of a coherent autobiographical narrative is the next step in the process.

E: Embeddedness. From an attachment perspective, troubled clients often find themselves embedded in their experience. Embeddedness is a mental state. It is a frame of mind in which a person struggles in discerning what they feel from what is real.[41] In this state, clients hold to a single perspective on their situation or experience. They equate beliefs with facts.[42] The attachment-focused therapist works to gain an understanding of the client's embeddedness. The therapist explores the contours of the client's story, then seeks to find discrepancies in the client's narrative. After finding these discrepancies, the therapist seeks to help the client move to the next step in the process.

A: Awareness. As the client's story unfolds, the attachment-focused therapist brings discrepancies to the client's awareness and looks for "unthought knowns."[43] These *unthought knowns* are non-verbal, encoded experiences that clients will either "enact, evoke, or embody" in the counseling process.[44] *Unthought knowns* serve as clues to the missing pieces in the client's story and yield valuable information. Thus, counselors work to uncover them during the therapeutic process. As missing pieces surface, the therapist encourages the client to verbalize them and place them into their narrative. As this happens, the client's narrative widens, which broadens the client's frame of reference. Gradually, the client begins seeing troubling events in the wider context of his personal story. This

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[39]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 7.

[40]Ibid., 3.

[41]Ibid., 135.

[42]Ibid., 136.

[43]Ibid., 115.

[44]Ibid., 122.

new insight brings the client multiple ways of viewing his experience. With the therapist's help, he can connect thoughts, feelings, emotions, and meanings. He can now make sense of his experience through this adjusted narrative.[45] In essence, the client begins to see his story in a more comprehensive way. This clearer perspective leads to the next step in the process.

R: Reflectiveness. Mindfulness is the key component of the reflectiveness stage of the therapeutic process.[46] Here, the therapist helps the client accept both the good and bad aspects of an experience. The therapist also helps the client in differentiating his newly discovered "self" with external reality. With this accomplished, the practitioner can then assist the client in integrating experiences into a coherent and whole sense of self and one's narrative. This coherent sense of self and narrative will help the client better regulate his affect, giving the client "a well-differentiated self-representation [that] allows [him] to function autonomously without feeling that [he is] defined by the feelings of others."[47]

S: Secure sense of self. As the client becomes more secure, he can free himself from the shackles of his story within which he is embedded. This liberation increases awareness and promotes reflectivity in the client, which results in a securer sense of self. The individual can then differentiate and integrate disparate aspects of the self and can now "bring together emotionally contradictory experiences,"[48] as well as regulate these emotional experiences in a healthier way. In addition, these changes bring about a coherent narrative "that reflects [the] experience of a coherent self."[49]

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[45]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 136.

[46]Ibid., 137.

[47]Ibid., 65.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., 155.

Therapeutic techniques. The S-E-A-R-S acronym provides a procedural road map for therapy. Techniques are necessary if one is to move through the therapeutic process. Thus, this section discusses the therapeutic techniques consistent with attachment-focused therapy.

An attachment-focused psychology does not have a single, defined set of techniques. Instead, attachment-focused therapists draw from person-centered, psychodynamic, interpersonal, and cognitive-behavioral approaches for their techniques. In this approach, one may use a variety of interventions. With that said, the therapeutic relationship still remains the most important technique available because it provides clients with a secure base for exploration. Since attachment-focused psychotherapists strive to help establish a secure base for their clients, the techniques used tend to focus on interventions that promote the counseling relationship. Therefore, therapists often use empathy, exploration, and cognitive restructuring to help clients navigate the therapeutic process.

In addition, since relationships are the central focus of therapy, it is not surprising that attachment-focused psychotherapists also make use of transference and counter-transference in the therapeutic process. They do this by identifying and repairing ruptures that occur between the therapist and client during therapy. This activity often helps clients identify and make sense of previously un-storied experiences that they are acting out with the counselor.[50] By using such interpersonal techniques in therapy, attachment-focused therapists provide a secure base from which clients can explore their inner and outer worlds.

Summary

Secular attachment-focused psychology emphasizes human relationships exclusively. It is the conglomeration of many ways of viewing human behavior, combining

[50]Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, 273-74.

thinking from natural selection, object relations, ethology, and control theory. It purposefully excludes metaphysical concepts like spirituality. Thus, although it is relatively comprehensive, given its worldview, it is not *Christian*.

Nevertheless, attachment theory by definition focuses on relationships between persons. A Christian psychology of attachment assumes the existence of the God of the Bible. Since God qualifies as a person, it would seem that people ought to be able to attach to him, and that this relationship of ultimate importance ought to be included in attachment theory. The next section explores the contours of such a psychology.

Toward a Christian Psychology of Attachment

The value of attachment-focused psychology for Christian counselors is obvious. Christianity is a relational religion, and this body of research can help Christians better understand the formative role of early relationships, including the lasting effects of childhood trauma on adults, as well as how the understanding and experience of others, self, and God are profoundly interrelated. However, Christians wanting to appropriate attachment-focused psychology must consider how to interpret its observations in light of a Christian worldview, since attachment-focused psychology in its current form is not *Christian*. For it to be useful to Christians, one must translate it into Christian discourse.[51] This means turning the current secular model into a Christian psychology of attachment that makes attachment to God central to the formulation. This section attempt such a task. First is an explanation of the task of translation. Second is a delineation of the steps translators take in their work. Last is the development of a preliminary Christian translation of secular attachment theory.

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[51]Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), locs. 2976-78, Kindle.

The Task of Translation

It is important to make a distinction between *translation* and not the more commonly used term *integration*. Both terms are legitimate labels for the intellectual activity of relating concepts/words from two different conceptual or linguistic systems. However, *translation* is the preferred label in this dissertation because (1) it better connotes the challenges of such activity and (2) integration, in practice, is often done today in a way that is too simplistic and one-sided, for those doing it do not seem to appreciate the complexity of the task. For example, in many cases, integration is done much like a child deciphering a puzzle on the back of a cereal box. In these games, there is a simple correspondence between the code and the message. Perhaps the number "1" equates to the letter "A" and so on. The child then substitutes the numbers with the appropriate letters. As this occurs, the hidden message becomes evident and the child solves the puzzle. This game assumes a one-for-one correspondence between signs (i.e., numbers to letters).

In integration—at least weak integration—things work in a similar way.[52] For in weak integration, theological and psychological concepts used by different worldview communities are often erroneously equated with one another. A good example is the common equation of sanctification and self-actualization. Granted, they have similarities, but they are hardly identical. As such, one should not equate them. Instead, one should identify and describe the similarities and differences between the two concepts, taking into account the different assumptions of the respective worldview communities and then render the concept in a way that is faithful to the receiving community's worldview assumptions. This process is called *translation*.

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[52]For an in-depth discussion on the concept of "weak integration," see Eric L. Johnson, "The Three Faces of Integration," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 30, no. 4 (2011): 339.

Steps of Translation

Those who have learned a foreign language can best appreciate the complexity involved in the intellectual task being described. Translating from one language to another is not a simple task. For example, there are inevitable differences in idioms. Sometimes phrases in one language correspond to a single word in the other language. There can also be different connotations for the same word in each language. Last, some concepts exist in one language that are absent in the other. If one is going to translate well, he or she must take into account these challenges, which means that care must be taken to lessen the chance of missing something in translation. Building upon MacIntyre, Johnson offers a step-by-step approach that systematizes the translation process. In this process, the translator takes a concept, or "text,"[53] from one worldview community (i.e., secular psychology) and renders it in an understandable way to another worldview community (i.e., Christianity). The steps in this process are "comprehension, evaluation, translation [i.e., translation proper], transposition, and composition."[54]

Comprehension is the first step of the process. Here, the translator labors to understand the meaning of the psychological construct or concept from the alien worldview community on its own terms.[55]

Evaluation is the second step of the process. In this step, the translator deconstructs the psychological construct derived from the other worldview community.

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[53]*Text* is used here as written or spoken communication. When translating a concept from one worldview community to another, one must capture the intended meaning of the communication so that it may be fashioned in an understandable way to the receiving worldview community.

[54]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 3040. See also Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); and Alisdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

[55]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 3042.

He or she identifies and distinguishes the elements that cohere with Christianity from those that do not.[56]

Translation proper follows comprehension and evaluation. Understanding the meaning of the concept in the original worldview community, the translator seeks to put it in words that are congruent with the assumptions of the receiving worldview community.[57] The translator has several options for making this move. The first option for translation is *transliteration*, which occurs when the receiving community does not have a similar, corresponding term that has basically the same meaning. Therefore, the translator just brings over the term from the other language system into the new texts being composed. An example of this might be the term *attachment* itself. One finds the notions of faithfulness and love in the Scriptures (in particular, see Jer 31:33), but nothing that corresponds identically to the construct of attachment. The Christian translator can use *attachment*, since it is fundamentally compatible with the Christian faith.[58] Transliteration is the most basic way to translate a text.[59] "*Same-saying*" is another simple translation move. In this step, the translator treats two concepts as interchangeable.[60] The concept of fear is a good example of this type of translation. Both Christians and non-Christians understand what it means to be afraid. Thus, there is no need to translate here. In this case, one can understand the psychological concept as being the same thing in the Christian discourse.

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[56]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, locs. 3046-48.

[57]Ibid., locs. 3059-61.

[58]Ibid., locs. 3061-63.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid., loc. 3068.

Interpretive glosses and explanations is the third way to translate.[61] This move interprets the psychological "in light of the meaning-system" of Christian discourse.[62] The concept of stress is a good example of this type of translation move. Stress implies a naturalistic or mechanistic pressure upon someone. This experience may have some truth to it, but from a Christian perspective, *all* pressure has meaning and purpose (see Jas 1:2-4). As such, for Christians, *stress* is the working of God's providence in the person's life (see Rom 5:1-5). *Stress* is not the most appropriate term to communicate Christian meaning. Instead, the translator would substitute the term *trial,* or explain that God allows stress for good purposes. In these ways, the translator articulates the notion of stress according to a Christian worldview.

So far, the discussed translation moves relate to transferable concepts. There are times, however, when psychological constructs are incommensurate with the Christian worldview. When this occurs, the translator "will usually be obligated to identify the similar but questionable terms/concepts and critique them within the native idiomatic [i.e., Christian] discourse, while offering a substitution from the native [i.e., psychological] idiom."[63] An example of this situation would be the motivations behind altruistic behaviors. As mentioned, Bowlby saw altruism as a manipulation used to create reproductive opportunities. From a Christian perspective, this motivation is untenable. For Christians, genuine altruism is not about erotic love, but instead, it is about one's sacrificial love for God and others (see Matt 22:37-40). In instances like this, translators first acknowledge the concept's incommensurability, and then offer viable substitutes. In the case of altruism, translators will substitute reproductive drives with Christian love.

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[61]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 3078.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid., locs. 3093-95.

Translators have four options available to them in their work. After completing this exercise, the translator has two more steps in the translation process.

The next task is *transposition*. In this step, the translator considers the ethical and spiritual implications of the psychological construct.[64] This step is necessary because secular psychology offers a truncated view of reality that focuses on the biological and psychosocial levels of meaning, while excluding the ethical and spiritual levels in its formulation. Thus, to make the secular terms or concepts Christian, translators must "take up" these concepts "into a higher level context of meaning—[i.e., the] ethical or spiritual."[65]

After transposing the targeted concepts, the translator performs the last step: *composition*. In this step, the translator produces a "new Christian text."[66] This composition will be "written in the Christian dialect. . . . . It will demonstrate some degree of enrichment of [the Christian] discourse."[67]

Translation is a difficult but rewarding task. It is difficult because it requires translators to be conversant in both dialects. In the end, however, it is rewarding because it enriches Christian discourse by increasing the common grace information available for the Christian care of souls. With such skills in hand, readers can now develop a *Christian* model of attachment-focused psychology. These skills are essential for this project, because they make possible a framework for a Christian psychology of God attachment.

A Christian Psychology of God Attachment

In this section, a translation of the salient areas of an attachment-focused psychology into Christian discourse is attempted by (1) examining attachment-focused

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[64]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, locs. 3131-33.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., locs. 3135-38.

[67]Ibid.

psychology's philosophical assumptions; (2) viewing the approach's model of personality; (3) analyzing the attachment-focused understanding of development; (4) reviewing the perspective's model of health and abnormality; and (5) examining an attachment-focused model of psychotherapy. By this means, readers will end up with a Christian psychology of God attachment based on a translation of contemporary attachment-based psychology.

Philosophical assumptions. As mentioned, a Darwinian worldview provides the foundational philosophical assumptions for secular attachment-focused psychology. As such, it understands human beings as complex animals. Its view of knowledge excludes the supernatural and overemphasizes the scientific method. Since a Darwinian worldview does not have a category for morality, it tends to minimize ethics. In this view, ethics is a means to promote species survival.

From a Christian perspective, attachment-focused psychology is untenable in its secular form. Christians begin with the presupposition that there is a "God who is there."[68] For the Christian, this God "is not silent."[69] Thus, in the Christian worldview, God exists (see Exod 3:14). He created human beings in his image (Gen 1:26). He has revealed himself through his spoken word.[70]

A Christian understanding of the nature of reality sees people as more than animals (Ps 8:6). They are persons, and this personhood separates them from the rest of

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[68]I thank Francis Schaeffer for this phrase. For more information, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982).

[69]My thanks to Schaeffer once again. Ibid.

[70]One sees the result of God's speech-acts in the opening chapters of Genesis. In that narrative, God speaks and things happen, which demonstrates that God's word forms reality. Thus, if Christians want to live a life that coheres with "how things really are," then they must respond to God's speech acts.

creation.[71] In essence, Christianity places man at the top of creation (Gen 1:28). Humans have dominion over the creation.

A Christian view of knowledge does not oppose the scientific method per se. It holds, however, that God has revealed himself through his works and his Word (Ps 19), and Christians depend on this divine revelation to guide their pursuit of knowledge, especially that which is recorded in the Bible. In contrast, the secular attachment-focused view, with its naturalistic presuppositions, sees knowledge as the product of human reason and scientific inquiry. Thus, the two views differ in the content of what they deem to qualify as *knowledge* as well as their methodologies for ascertaining it.

Christian and secular attachment-focused psychology differ with respect to ethics as well. For the Christian, ethics does not exist just to promote the survival of the species. Instead, Christians believe in a moral God who requires his image bearers to live in a certain way before him (Gen 2:16-17).

Therefore, it is evident that these two worldview systems are incompatible in their purest forms. This is not to say that secular attachment-focused psychology has nothing to offer to a Christian version of attachment-focused psychology. What it offers, however, is incomplete. Secular attachment-focused psychology's insights on the biological and psychosocial levels can enrich Christian discourse. But first, one must translate the products of the secular perspective into a Christian dialect. Then, one can transpose its insights into the ethical and spiritual orders of meaning.

Translating secular attachment-focused psychology requires attending to its understanding of the nature of reality, view of knowledge, and understanding of ethics. Thus, translators must interpret these sub-disciplines through the lens of a Christian worldview.

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[71]Schaeffer, *A Christian View*, 102.

First, as seen, since God exists (see Exod 3:14), created humans are relational image bearers, and the purpose of these image bearers is to worship and glorify him. When scared children draw near to their parents, it is not just for survival. Christians interpret these proximity-seeking behaviors as a child's God-given desire for relational connection (see Gen 2:18).

Second, a Christian view of knowledge presupposes that God has revealed himself to his creation (see Ps 19). Thus, when two lovers quarrel, it is not just because they are not meeting each other's needs. God says that this conflict comes from the desires of both participants for a fuller relationship (see Jas 4:1-2; Gen 3:16b).

Third, a Christian model of ethics centers on the morality revealed in the Bible. Thus, for Christians, altruistic acts mean more than creating opportunities for procreation. Instead, these acts are the expression of the activity of the Spirit within the Christian heart seeking conformity to their Redeemer. They are manifestations of Christian virtue.

Secular attachment-focused psychology offers some accurate observations; however, it does not consider everything that is relevant. It fails to examine ethical and spiritual realities. This failure requires Christian translators to transpose secular attachment-focused psychology's observations. They perform this activity by interpreting these observations in light of a Christian worldview. With that said, translators may examine attachment-focused psychology's model of personality.

Models of personality. Secular attachment-focused psychology has significant implications for an understanding of human personality. In secular attachment-focused psychology, the core of the personality is the drive for attachment. As such, it drives everything, and its sole motivation centers around survival. The core reveals itself on the periphery in proximity-seeking behaviors. One can classify these behaviors into different attachment styles. The development statement consists of the IWM. The IWM is the product of interactions with the environment. Over time, these interactions are recorded in memory, and form the IWM. The person then uses the IWM to predict future events.

In essence, the IWM is the bridge that connects the core to the periphery. This framework shows the detailed nature of an attachment-focused understanding of the personality. It leaves a formidable task to the Christian translator.

As one might expect, the Bible does not offer such a complex articulation of personality. But despite its relative simplicity, the Bible *does* offer a comprehensive view of what it means to be human. In doing so, the biblical framework presents concepts that help Christians translate the core, periphery, and development statement of secular attachment-focused psychology into a Christian version of attachment.

Translating the secular attachment-focused view of human personality. A Christian view of human personality must include the theological concept of redemption. While Christian theorists can transliterate secular attachment psychology's description of core, periphery, and development statement into the Christian discourse, they must engage in interpretive glosses with explanations to describe how these constructs manifests themselves in the human experience.

As mentioned, from a secular attachment-focused perspective, the core presents itself as a *drive for attachment*, the periphery manifests through *proximity-seeking behaviors*, and the development statement emerges through the *IWM*. Unfortunately, Bowlby's naturalistic perspective blinded him to the ethicospiritual realities of how these constructs worked themselves out in human personality.

In contrast, Christianity, through its doctrine of redemption, offers a more comprehensive take on how personality expresses itself within the attachment paradigm, for it alters the paradigm in some fundamental and significant ways. For the Christian, redemption introduces forgiveness, cleansing, and acceptance into God's family into the model of personality. Johnson offers a cogent understanding of the changes brought about by redemption:

> Those who believe in and receive the Son are given new lives and selves, are forgiven and have their uncleanness taken away, are made perfectly righteous in Christ and adopted into God's family, and are reconciled to the triune God. . . . No

> psychotherapeutic intervention is more momentous and significant than Christ's work of redemption, and nothing is more important for Christian soul care than the forgiveness, freedom, righteousness and goodness that come to the believer through it. To know one's shame and guilt are taken away and replaced with God's goodness in Christ is the divinely ordained way into a new life of recovery. All humans are to be understood as created and sinful; believers in Christ are also to be viewed from the standpoint of redemption.[72]

Thus, redemption makes a stable, secure relationship with God possible. This new possibility affects the object of one's drive for attachment, direction of proximity-seeking behaviors, and the functioning of their IWM.

Redemption and the drive for attachment. In the Christian view, God created human beings with a need for relationship (Gen 2:18), and although tarnished by the fall, this relational need remains. As mentioned, redemption ushers in an additional and ideal relationship—the believer's relationship with the Triune God.[73] Redemption gives believers membership into the ultimate family, the family of God. Johnson elaborates on this idea:

> [T]he Father's plan included his adoption of new children—once alienated prodigals but now increasingly loving sons and daughters, who are honored to be fellow heirs with their elder brother Jesus, so that now, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is also Father of believers.[74]

Through redemption, God the Father, as the ultimate attachment figure, adopts believers and grafts them into a family that can satisfy their need for attachment.

Redemption and proximity-seeking behaviors. In satisfying the attachment needs of believers, redemption also provides a direction for proximity-seeking behaviors. Through their union with Christ, God provides his children with the ability and impetus to come to him in their time of need. Johnson articulates this sentiment when he writes,

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[72]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 2816.

[73]Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 44.

[74]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 5254.

> Therefore, "union with Christ is the foundation of all our spiritual experience and spiritual blessings" (Ferguson, 1981, p. 105). Those who are united to Christ come to participate in him: they become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet 1:4). . . . Once their [believers'] eternal union with Christ (Eph 1:5) is actualized in the temporal sphere—historically—*the elect experience movement toward God*, a spiritual motivation able to overcome their resistance to God due to indwelling sin, the power of the Spirit of Christ drawing them inexorably toward a theocentric life and creating their willing participation (Phil 2:12-13).[75]

Johnson points out how union with Christ, one benefit of redemption, moves believers toward God, thus providing a fitting destination for their proximity-seeking behaviors.

Redemption and the IWM. The Holy Spirit works in redemption by renewing believers' minds. In this renewal, the Spirit pulls believers into a higher order of meaning. As this transformation occurs, believers' minds, attitudes, interpretations, feelings, and memories, all the elements that contribute to the IWM, become increasingly theocentric. In his discussion on the life of the Spirit in the human soul, Johnson describes this process:

> The Spirit alone makes the highest type of transposition possible. He frees believers to read texts of lower orders of discourse in a new way—in Christ—in relation to Christ. The spiritual understanding is not limited to the interpretation of Scripture, but applies to all of reality, such that other persons, indeed all things, are interpreted in terms of the new creation (2 Cor 5:16-17; Gal 6:14), transforming believers by the renewing of their minds, enabling them to discern what the will of God is (Rom 12:2). This discernment entails nothing other than "an overcoming of the form of the fallen man, Adam, and conformation of the new man, Christ (Bonhoeffer, 1955, p. 38). Consequently, all signs and discourse and all meaning they convey—concepts, symbols, texts, stories and history—are altered theocentrically by incorporation into the spiritual order of meaning.[76]

Thus, as believers yield to the Spirit's work in their hearts, the Spirit renews their minds, and as he renews their minds, their IWMs become more theocentric over time. This change may be evidenced by the manifestation of Christian virtues in the behaviors of the individual (see Gal 5:22-23).

In spite of the incredible nature of the Holy Spirit's work in redemption, it is important to note that his activity in redemption is a gradual process, a process he will

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[75]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 5342, emphasis added.

[76]Ibid., loc. 5455.

most likely not complete in this life. To expect total healing in this life is to underestimate the extent of the damage that sin has caused in the creation. Johnson explains the limits of redemption experienced by those living in this fallen world:

> We cannot allow the wondrous benefits of redemption to obscure the reality of the corruption of the created order, creating illusions about the kind of change we can expect in this age. Damaged psychosocial structures that are the result of poor parenting are not magically or automatically cured simply through our formal adoption by God. Poor parenting and its depressive consequences convince people (often unconsciously) that God is uninterested in them or even that he is their antagonist. It usually takes time and some thorough internal processing, grounded in redemptive faith, to undermine and overcome a sufficient portion of the severe damage for fellowship with the Father to be experienced with some consistency. . . . We understand better today how poor family experiences contribute to such alienation from the Father, combining with the indwelling resistance of sin with which all humans must deal. But the child of God participates in God's glory by gradually learning how to distrust her damaged and sinful attitudes toward the Father and to hope in her Father's greatness, seeking his help, relying on him, thanking him for his gifts and being healed by his endless, enthusiastic goodness toward us in Christ and by means of the Spirit.[77]

God the Spirit renews the mind, but the magnitude of that change, in this life, is often limited by the severity of creational damage sustained by the believer. Thus, IWMs may not be totally healed in this life, but in the words of Schaeffer, there can be "substantial psychological healing."[78] This healing comes about through the Spirit's renewing work in the minds of believers, and consequently, it works toward healing their IWMs as well.

To review, a Christian view of personality can, as Johnson would articulate, *transliterate* the psychological constructs of core, periphery, and development statement. One can indirectly ascertain the effects of these constructs through observing a person's drive for attachment (core), proximity-seeking behaviors (periphery), and the functioning of the IWM (development statement). However, to think about these effects Christianly, one must view them through the lens of redemption. Redemption changes everything. Redemption can alter the core, because, through adoption, believers have a new and ultimate attachment figure—God the Father. Likewise, redemption can modify the

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[77]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 5307.

[78]Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 109.

periphery through the person's union with God the Son, because it in this union that believers have a new direction to take their proximity-seeking behaviors. Last, redemption can transform the development statement through the renewal of their minds brought about as God the Spirit assists believers in healing their IWMs. Although total healing will not occur in this life, substantial growth is possible. This discussion of growth brings up the next important subject, models of development.

Models of development. As previously articulated, all development models must answer four questions: "What is the nature of human beings?" "Are developmental changes quantitative or qualitative?" "How do nature and nurture contribute to development?" and "What is it that develops?"

For secular attachment-focused psychology, human beings are evolved animals. They experience both qualitative and quantitative changes during development. Both nature and nurture contribute to this development. A person's IWM is what develops as the person matures.[79]

Secular attachment-focused psychology's worldview offers a truncated view of reality. As such, secular attachment-focused psychology is unable to identify ethical and spiritual orders of meaning. This flaw leads to differences in the most basic understanding of how secular attachment-focused psychologists understand human beings. For them, people are highly evolved organisms. That is all.

Although there are large discrepancies between the secular and Christian perspectives on attachment theory, there are some commonalities.

First, Christians can agree that people are organisms, but Christianity also teaches that people are also God's image-bearing creatures. They are relational, moral, embodied-souls who constantly interact with others and were made to interact with their

[79]Bowlby, *Attachment*, 142.

Creator. God designed their IWMs to not only relate to themselves and each other, but to relate to him as well.

Second, Christian and secular attachment-focused psychologists agree that people experience both qualitative and quantitative changes. As such, both hold to an organismic view of development.[80]

Third, the concept of an IWM also fits with both approaches. However, in its formulation of the IWM, secular attachment-focused psychology is limited. Once again, it fails to incorporate the effect of sin on the soul. Therefore, its view of personal agency is deficient compared with Christianity. It tends to attribute poor functioning of IWMs simply to poor socialization,[81] fails to recognize that the machine (i.e., IWM) is spiritually defective, and assumes that if given the proper input in childhood, the IWM will process things accurately in the future. From a Christian vantage point, one cannot assume that the machine works the way it ought to. Sin has disrupted the machine's operating ability. Consequently, the machine needs the restoration of all four levels of meaning, if it is to return to its proper working order.

Fourth, Christian and secular models also agree that nature and nurture both play important roles in development. Each recognizes that genetic predispositions and environmental influences help shape who people become.

However, once more, the secular attachment-focused model is incomplete. Its neglect of the ethical and spiritual levels of meaning leave it wanting, leading to an inadequate conceptualization of personal responsibility. Thus, individuals are simply the result of extrapersonal forces for their development.[82] As such, secular attachment-focused psychology tends to place responsibility too much on the nurturing side of the

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[80]Bowlby, *Attachment*, 142.

[81]Ibid., 81.

[82]Ibid., 45.

spectrum. The absence of reference to the spiritual level robs people of the most important attachment, that is, one's relationship with God. Consequently, its lack of a comprehensive worldview leads to an imbalanced developmental model.

In contrast, Christian psychology recognizes the influence of childhood experiences on individuals. It does, however, take exception to the idea that people are the sole result of the interaction of their genome and their environments. As personal agents, God calls people to live in a certain way. He also offers individuals the ultimate healing of an attachment relationship with God. Thus, the Christian view considers the ethical and spiritual aspects of development. This consideration gives Christians a more comprehensive view of the respective contributions of nature and nurture.

Fifth, Christian and secular attachment-focused psychology both understand that an individual's IWM develops. However, the Christian attachment-focused psychology situates the IWM within the larger construct of the "self" that develops before a holy God.

For Christians, this self is to be a certain sort of self. God places ethical and spiritual requirements on this self. It is to be a self that reflects upon itself (2 Cor 13:5), takes responsibility (Gen 1:28), and walks with God (1 John 1:7). Thus, a Christian attachment-focused psychology includes the IWMs as an important part of the self. However, for Christians, the person is more than a proper functioning IWM. The person is a self who relates to both itself and others, but most importantly, to God. A secure God attachment is one of the chief aims of a Christian understanding of attachment. Understanding this secure God attachment helps define how Christians understand psychological health.

Models of health. For secular attachment-focused psychologists, healthy people have two qualities. First, they have well-functioning attachment systems. On the biological level, their neural wiring operates accurately. Second, healthy people have fairly accurate IWMs that tend to cohere with reality. On the psychosocial level,

individuals who exhibit secure attachment behaviors are presumed to have healthy IWMs. They can develop and maintain healthy relationships and they also present their individual stories in the form of coherent autobiographical narratives.

Once more, in part, Christian attachment psychologists can agree with their secular colleagues. IWMs are central aspects to healthy functioning on the biological and psychosocial levels, but, as mentioned, no consideration is given to the ethical and spiritual orders in secular attachment-focused psychology.

For Christians, secure attachment comes to be connected to and formed by one's union with Christ. Healthy individuals have well-functioning attachment systems. These systems, though, tend to attach to the right things in the right way,[83] that is, Christians tend to view themselves in light of their relationship with God. In essence, they interpret their personal narratives in light of God's redemptive story. These individuals know they are a work in progress. They embrace the truth that God has redeemed them from both the penalty and power of sin. At the same time, they will concede that they still struggle with the presence of sin. In general, then, both Christian and secular attachment-focused psychology accept that secure attachment at the biological and psychosocial levels give evidence of psychological health.

Christian attachment psychologists believe that a secular model of attachment offers a truncated view of psychological health because of its neglect of the ethical and spiritual orders of meaning. Christians counter that ultimate psychological health can only come through secure God attachment. This is part of attaching to the right things in the right way, for in the Christian ideal, the individual's IWM relates properly to God, self, and others. This relation frees the person to walk transparently with God, others, and oneself.

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[83]For an excellent analysis of the moral quality of a biblical understanding of attachment, see Robert Roberts, "Attachment: Bowlby and the Bible," in *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology*, ed. Robert C. Roberts and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 206-28.

This description summarizes a Christian understanding of a healthy person. Unfortunately, not all people are healthy. Thus, there must be an explanation about what unhealthiness looks like. Said in a different way, a model of health assumes that there is a corresponding model of abnormality.

Models of abnormality. In secular attachment-focused psychology, psychopathology emerges from damaged IWMs. In general, traumatic attachment experiences have compromised individual functioning. This dysfunction manifests itself primarily in insecure attachment behaviors. Individuals so afflicted also struggle with developing and maintaining close personal relationships, and they often offer incoherent, vague, or confusing autobiographical narratives. Thus, loss and trauma are contributing factors to pathological functioning. These experiences damage the person's IWM, and this damage then distorts the person's view of self and others.

A Christian take on abnormality can incorporate such an understanding of abnormality, but it also offers much more. For the Christian, abnormality flows from the world, the Devil, and the flesh (see Eph 2:1-3) and results in sin, suffering, and biopsychosocial damage. Abnormality is the distortion of God's created good. It is the result of things not being the way they should be.[84] From a Christian vantage point, sin and its effects are not just spiritual and ethical, they also seep down into the psychosocial and biological levels. Sin and its effects, therefore, distort how IWMs operate. They affect how neurological wiring functions. Christianity offers a more comprehensive view of what is wrong with people. This discussion of psychological sickness opens up the discussion for how each approach tries to restore health to the unhealthy.

Models of psychotherapy. Secular attachment-focused psychology holds to a therapeutic model that seeks to do several things. (1) It desires to provide a secure base

[84]Cornelius Platinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), loc. 345, Kindle.

for clients. Its proponents hope that clients will thereby develop greater security in their other attachments. (2) It places a high value on the therapeutic relationship. (3) This approach seeks to identify insecure attachments, in part, by noticing discrepancies in and the coherence of clients' narratives. (4) It tries to help clients move from an embedded story to a reflective one. (5) It uses whatever techniques are available to help achieve its therapeutic goals.

In general, Christian psychotherapy has the same aims. (1) Providing a secure base coheres with the pastoral nature of Christian soul care. (2) The emphasis on the therapeutic relationship can be an extension of Christian fellowship. (3) Listening to a client's story, from a Christian perspective, is an act of love. (4) Promoting counselee reflectivity is congruent with the Christian discipline of self-examination (2 Cor 13:5). (5) Christian psychotherapists agree with the broad use of techniques in therapy. Of course, these techniques must be moral and promote goals that glorify God.

In spite these strong similarities, the above outline reveals a significant difference in these two approaches, but it is one of content, not so much of process. Christian clinicians can use attachment-focused processes, but to execute the process Christianly, they must do a few things. (1) A Christian worldview must guide the entire process. Counselors must submit all goals, methods, and treatment strategies to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). (2) The therapeutic endeavor must focus on promoting God's doxological agenda for the world (Isa 43:7; 2 Cor 5:9). (3) Promoting the secure attachment of a client through the clinical relationship is a noble task. For Christians, however, ultimate security occurs only through one's attachment to God. It is to this quest that this project now turns.

God Attachment and the Christian Faith and Life

Having sketched an initial Christian psychology of attachment, the funnel now reaches its tip. This section shows how God attachment intersects with the Christian faith and life. In examining this intersection, it is important to note three things. First,

attachment affects one's conceptualization of God. Next, it is helpful to understand how these different conceptualizations express themselves. In particular, how does one's attachment to God influence one's conversion, prayer, and worship? Finally, it is desirable to think about related areas of research that have yet to be explored. But before venturing into the unknown, it is best to start with what is already known.

Attachment's Effect on One's God Concept and God-Image

A key argument of this project is that human attachment precedes spiritual development. The support from this argument flows from the reality that attachment commences at birth and spirituality, in its truest sense, only begins after the acquisition of language (Rom 10:17).[85]

Two theories attempt to explain how individuals attach to God. The compensation theory suggests that people "who fail to develop secure attachments with their parents, for whatever reason, may seek attachment elsewhere."[86] In these cases, individuals may use God as a substitute attachment figure.[87] Using Bowlby's conceptualization of the IWM as the "theoretical mechanism to enable attachment,"[88] the correspondence theory postulates that "a person's attachment relationships with parents should predict one's religious inclinations directly rather than adversely."[89] Thus, the correspondence theory contends that people relate to God in the same way they relate to

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[85]This is not to say that spiritual activity does not occur between, for example, the interactions between a nurturing parent and an infant. However, for individuals to develop spiritually, they must have the receptive language to understand the gospel message.

[86]Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "An Attachment-Theory Approach to the Psychology of Religion," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 1 (1992): 16.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Lee A. Kirkpatrick, *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion* (New York: Guilford, 2005), 126.

[89]Kirkpatrick, "An Attachment-Theory Approach," 18.

others. Therefore, those who are insecurely attached to others will most likely be insecurely attached to God as well.

Kirkpatrick compared these two theories and concluded that both theories explain some phenomena, "but for different people at different times."[90] Kirkpatrick explains the role of the compensation theory when he observes,

> Some individuals with insecure attachment histories display the opposite pattern, finding in God the kind of attachment relationship that has been missing from their interpersonal relationships. When this occurs, "falling in love" with God tends to occur rapidly and dramatically, leading at least to a sudden religious conversion.[91]

Kirkpatrick then examines the case for the correspondence theory:

> The most common pattern statistically is that of correspondence. Concurrent IWMs of God and human attachment figures tend to be consistent with one another, and adult religious belief tends to correspond to attachment experienced in childhood. People with secure childhoods tend to adopt the religious beliefs of their parents, which themselves reflect the security of parents' attachment; the transmission of beliefs about a nurturing, loving God from parent to child parallels the process of the intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns. This process explains the strong predictive relationship between people's religious beliefs and those of their parents, as documented in countless studies. . . . The process tends to be slow and gradual.[92]

It seems that both theories have a place in understanding God attachment. Over time, people develop an attachment to God through either compensation, correspondence, or a combination of the two. In light of this, it would seem that parenting has an effect on the development of one's God attachment.

Since parents are the initial primary shapers of children,[93] their early influence on development is foundational. Parents, as image bearers, portray God, more or less (or for good or ill), to their developing children by the degree to which they resemble him. This resemblance helps shape the IWMs of the children and thereby shapes their children's

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[90]Kirkpatrick, *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*, 158.

[91]Ibid., 158-59.

[92]Ibid., 158.

[93]Ibid., 117.

particular conception of God. Good parenting reflects God well. When parents parent well, it increases the likelihood of children developing a secure God attachment. As such, they will tend to experience God as loving, available, and dependable.[94] Poor parental God imaging, however, tends to promote insecure God attachment in children. For these children, God is perceived as an angry, harsh, or distant figure.[95] So, one's parenting influences a child's subsequent God attachment style. This influence can also extend outside the home because Christian parents who reflect God well will usually participate in the life of a local church. As this happens, their children will receive the benefit of additional Christian socialization, which gives developing children other positive Christian role models and teaching to support and nurture them. As such, this fellowship also increases the odds that children will develop secure God attachments.

In contrast, parents who reflect God poorly often do not take part in the life of the church. This lack can add to the children's spiritual isolation. This isolation will likely adversely affect their children's attachment to God. Given all this, it is not surprising that one's parental attachment affects one's concept of God. But there is more—one's attachment also affects one's faith and practice of the Christian life.

Attachment's Effect on Christian Faith and Practice

Attachment affects the Christian faith and life in three significant ways: (1) attachment style affects how one experiences conversion; (2) attachment style affects one's prayer life; and (3) attachment style affects one's experience of worship.

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[94]Elisabeth H. M. Eurelings-Bontekoe, Janneke Hekman Van Steeg, and Margot J. Verschuur, "The Association between Personality, Attachment, Psychological Distress, Church Denomination and the God Concept among a Non-Clinical Sample," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 8, no. 2 (2005): 141.

[95]Jane R. Dickie et al., "Mother, Father, and Self: Sources of Young Adults' God Concepts," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 1 (2006): 57.

On conversion. Those with insecure attachment tend to experience "sudden religious" conversions.[96] This finding coheres with other research that shows that "unhappy childhoods and troubled relationships with parents" also promote sudden conversions.[97] This research seems to show that insecure people come to God to overcome difficulties. For them, God is a sanctuary offering protection from unpleasant life circumstances.

In contrast, those with secure attachment tend to experience gradual and steady conversions.[98] This might be because secure individuals have enjoyed more stability in their relationships. Over time, this stability provides the context for growth. The stability offers an environment conducive to the proper socialization of religious beliefs.[99]

Therefore, attachment research shows that one's attachment style affects how one experiences conversion. However, that is just the beginning. Research also demonstrates that attachment affects one's prayer life as well.

On prayer. Research has found that attachment affects how, or to what extent, a Christian prays. For example, those with an avoidant attachment tend to pray less than

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[96]Duane F. Reinert, Carla E. Edwards, and Rebecca R. Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity: A Summary of Empirical Research with Implications for Counseling Christian Clients," *Counseling and Values* 53 (2009): 116. See also Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Phillip R. Shaver, "Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood Attachments, Religious Beliefs, and Conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990): 315.

[97]Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity," 116. See also Chana Ullman, "Cognitive and Emotional Antecedents of Religious Conversion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 43, no. 1 (1982): 183.

[98]Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14, no. 4 (2004): 223.

[99]Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity,"116.

others.[100] This is especially true of contemplative or meditative types of prayer.[101] This makes sense because, in general, avoidant people seek to evade intimacy.[102] Moreover, those with anxious attachments also tend to engage in as Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix report, "more help-seeking prayer than those who are not anxious."[103] Given an anxiously attached person's fear of abandonment, this is also not surprising. It seems as though one's attachment system, at least in part, influences how or how often one approaches and communicates with God.

On experience of worship. It is also well-documented that attachment affects one's experience of worship. Secure people tend to experience God as positive, loving, and available.[104] These experiences tend to be "independent of stress level."[105] In contrast, those with insecure attachment styles often struggle with negative feelings toward God.[106] These negative feelings are usually related to psychological stressors.[107]

Besides one's experience of God, attachment style also reveals itself in *how* people worship. Anxiously attached people are more apt to engage in emotionally-based

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[100]Kevin R. Byrd and Ann Drea Boe, "The Correspondence between Attachment Dimensions and Prayer in College Students," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 1 (2001): 9.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity," 118.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Eurelings-Bontekoe, Van Steeg, and Verschuur, "The Association between Personality, Attachment, Psychological Distress, Church Denomination and the God Concept," 141.

[105]Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity," 117.

[106]Eurelings-Bontekoe, Van Steeg, and Verschuur, "The Association Between Personality, Attachment, Psychological Distress, Church Denomination and the God Concept," 141.

[107]Reinert, Edwards, and Hendrix, "Attachment Theory and Religiosity," 117.

religiosity than people with secure attachment.[108] Moreover, those with anxious attachment are more likely to express their worship by speaking in tongues.[109] Thus, emotion seems to play a larger role in the worship of those with anxious attachment. This too indicates that a person's attachment system influences how he or she experiences God in the practice of worship.

Research Needed on God Attachment

Secular attachment theory provides a valuable way of thinking about relationships. On the biological level, the theory's IWM paradigm helps explain how the brain uses a control system to maintain proximity to attachment figures. This framework offers a logical way of understanding how prior experiences shape individuals' neurological wiring to help them interpret and predict future experiences. Next, on the psychosocial level, secular attachment theory explains the role of relationships in human experience by giving a plausible reason for separation anxiety and proximity-seeking behaviors. In doing so, secular attachment explains why children become upset or distant upon the departure of a parent, or why adults often pursue former romantic partners either in person or via social media. Thus, on the first two levels of discourse, secular attachment theory can be a useful construct for understanding human behavior. Christians can appreciate how early attachments can affect neurological wiring in individuals on the biological order of meaning. Christians can also accept the extent to which attachment experiences, such as trauma, abuse, or less than ideal parenting, affect a person's ability to relate to self and others on the psychosocial level. Thus, Christian theorists, psychologists, counselors, and pastors can learn much from secular attachment theory.

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[108]Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment," 223.

[109]Ibid.

In spite of secular attachment theory's usefulness on the first two levels of discourse, its naturalistic worldview leaves it wanting from a Christian perspective. What the theory "sees," it sees well; but from a Christian vantage point, secular attachment theory does not see everything. Because of its worldview, the theory has two main blind spots. First, secular attachment misinterprets (or does not adequately account for) the ethical and spiritual levels of discourse, and second, it excludes, a priori, the Christian's predominant Attachment Figure, God.

Steeped in Darwinian evolution, secular attachment theory sees the motivation for ethics in terms of survival. Bowlby saw altruistic behavior as a strategy promoting reproductive opportunities within the species.[110] To be consistent with its naturalistic presuppositions, secular attachment theory assumes that behavior is not "right" or "wrong." Instead, it conceives of behaviors as either adaptive or maladaptive for survival.[111]

A Christian understanding of attachment includes the assumption that there is a "God who is there."[112] This God is a moral God who has communicated an ethical code called the Law. The Law reveals right from wrong (Rom 2:14-15), declares the requirements of living with this holy God (Rom 3:19), and along with the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), it convicts believers when they fall short of these requirements (Rom 3:20). This "falling short" of the Law is the Christian concept of sin (Rom 3:23). For the Christian, the doctrine of sin helps explain alienation from God—an alienation that flows from both guilt (wrongdoing) and shame (wrong-being).[113] A Christian understanding of attachment must include a conceptualization of how sin affects relationships. This project, therefore, investigates how one's awareness of the value of sin beliefs affect relationships.

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[110]Bowlby, *Attachment*, 131-33.

[111]Ibid., 85.

[112]Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998).

[113]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, loc. 492.

Besides its truncated view of ethics, secular attachment theory also holds to an incomplete view of the spiritual order of discourse. As already stated, secular attachment's naturalistic assumptions hold that religion, and any system that explores ultimate meaning and purpose, is outside the realm of science.[114] Moreover, secular attachment does not offer a remedy for the uncleanness experienced by all human beings. In contrast, Christianity offers a view that holds that there is a spiritual component to reality (Gen 1:27). In this spiritual reality, the Triune God exercises providential care over his creation (Ps 145:9). He also brings about a remedy to the experience of alienation from God through, as Johnson puts it, "divine forgiveness because of what Christ accomplished on the cross (Col 2:13-16)."[115] Christians call this construct that God uses to care for his creation and bring about forgiveness, grace. A Christian conceptualization of attachment must, therefore, include an understanding of how grace operates in attachment relationships. This project measures how beliefs about grace affect relationships.

Besides misunderstanding the ethical and spiritual levels of discourse, secular attachment also fails to include the relationship Christians have with God. Because of the theory's naturalism, God does not exist, and therefore, it does not seek to explore this relationship. Thus, secular attachment theory does not consider how believers' relationships with God trigger attachment behaviors. A Christian understanding of attachment must examine ways in which the God relationship triggers attachment behaviors.

Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), one cannot observe attachment with God through direct observation. However, the indirect effect of the relationship can be gauged. One way to measure attachment behaviors is to ascertain how believers use their relationships with God to mediate existential anxiety. Secular attachment theory postulates

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[114]Bowlby, *Attachment*, 124.

[115]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, locs. 486-92.

that upon experiencing separation, individuals experience anxiety. Once triggered, the attachment system seeks to remediate a person's anxiety through proximity-seeking behaviors with a particular attachment figure.[116] From a Christian perspective, one can indirectly observe the relationship with God by observing how believers use their religion when experiencing attachment triggers.

One way of measuring these behaviors is through the construct of religious defensiveness. Religious defensiveness measures how individuals manage existential anxiety. This construct offers a spectrum between defensive and existential religion.[117] According to Beck, those with defensive religion manage anxiety through "a faith commitment devoted to producing happy, peaceful thoughts: a faith of positivity and upbeat optimism."[118] In contrast, Beck argues that those with existential religion cope with anxiety by "a reluctance to quickly adopt religion 'solutions' to existential predicaments. Existential religion is a mode of faith, but it is a faith that is willing to sit with or even embrace the confusions, doubts, and anxieties of belief."[119] A Christian translation of attachment includes how proximity-seeking behaviors show the God relationship. Secure attachments should reveal a defensive orientation while insecure attachments should show an existential orientation. As a result, this project includes a measure for religious defensiveness.

Research shows that one's attachment style affects how one interacts with God. It also shows how attachment influences one's conversion experience, prayer life, and worship. However, from a Christian perspective, secular attachment theory needs further clarification. First, to be meaningful for Christians, secular attachment theory must address

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[116]Bowlby, *Attachment*, 243.

[117]Richard Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion: Is Religious Defensiveness Predictive of Worldview Defense?" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 142-43.

[118]Ibid., 143.

[119]Ibid.

the ethical and spiritual levels of meaning. Second, to be acceptable within a Christian framework, secular attachment theory must show how attachment behaviors interact with God as an attachment figure. This investigation was conducted to help clarify these shortcomings of attachment theory.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

The previous chapter sketched out a Christian psychology of attachment. It noted that human-to-human attachments precede spiritual development, and showed that attachment also influences how an individual experiences conversion, prayer, and worship. It then noted that, as of yet, researchers do not know how one's God-attachment relates to awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness, nor do researchers yet know how these variables relate to one another. This chapter presents the methodology used in this project to answer these questions.

Participants

A purposive sample of participants was taken from members of churches in the East Tennessee area of the United States. The subjects consisted of 60 males and 129 females who volunteered to participate in this pilot study.

Sample Size

There were 225 volunteers who responded to the research request. However, 12 responses were incomplete. Some respondents failed to complete the instrument and others omitted a question or two of the 125 questions. Follow-up emails were sent to all initial respondents requesting that they answer the omitted questions. Several individuals responded to this inquiry; but 12 failed to respond and were removed from the study, leaving 213 volunteers who completed the survey.

Moreover, not all participants were included in the analysis. The Orthodox Belief Scale (OBS) served as a screening instrument for all who participated in the survey. Since this analysis focused on orthodox evangelical Christians, a minimum cutoff score

on the OBS was determined to be at 28. This score is the result of the difference in the median score on the OBS less one standard deviation (rounded). Those scoring less than one standard deviation from the median score on the OBS were not considered "orthodox" for the purposes of this project. This exclusion resulted in data from 24 participants of the original 213 not being included in the following analysis. This exclusion brought the final number of study participants to 189. The ages of the subjects are grouped into the age bands shown in table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of sample by age band

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18-19	2	1.1%
20-29	13	6.9%
30-39	34	18.0%
40-49	54	28.6%
50-59	52	27.5%
60 or older	38	18.0%
Total	189	100%

The predominant affiliation was Protestant, and predominantly Baptist Protestant (94.2 percent). Other affiliations, including Methodists, community church, Christian church, and no affiliation made up 5.8 percent of participants. Thus, findings are largely only generalizable to Baptists.

Instrumentation

Six instruments were used in this project. First, after obtaining the demographic information, the participants' Christian orthodoxy was gauged with the Orthodox Belief Scale (OBS).[1]

[1]Eric L. Johnson, "Growing in Wisdom in Christian Community: Toward Measures of Christian Postformal Development," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26, no. 4 (1998): 365-81.

The OBS is a seven-item instrument that uses a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure orthodox Christian belief. For the purposes of this project, the OBS was used as a screening instrument to identify participants who most ideally represented orthodox Christians.

Additionally, the OBS was supplemented with the fourteen-item Religious Orientation Scale-Revised (ROS-R) scale.[2] Updating Allport's work from the 1950s, the ROS-R "measures both intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation."[3] The ROS-R is a fourteen-item scale measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Eight of the items measure intrinsic orientation (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, and 14); six items measure personal and social categories of extrinsic orientation (2, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 13). The ROS-R demonstrated a respectable internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha of .83,[4] and the authors claim that the instrument demonstrates sufficient validity when compared to other religious orientation scales.[5]

Next, God attachment was measured by administering the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI). The AGI measures God attachment in two dimensions: Avoidance of Intimacy (fourteen items) and Anxiety about Abandonment (twelve items).[6] The original Anxiety about Abandonment sub-scale contained fourteen items; however, the authors discovered that two of the items (14 and 16) "originally drafted for the Avoidance

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[2]R. L. Gorsuch and S. E. McPherson, *Measures of Religiosity*, ed. Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, Jr. (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 154-56.

[3]Ibid., 154.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., 348-54.

[6]Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 94.

dimension, had higher loadings on the Anxiety dimension."[7] Therefore, this project followed the recommendation of the authors and excluded these items from this study. In calculating these measurements, the AGI uses a seven-point Likert scale (1=disagree strongly, 7=agree strongly).[8] The AGI exhibited good internal consistency across three studies. In each study, both sub-scales had Cronbach alpha coefficients of .80 or higher.[9]

Fourth, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs were measured with the Beliefs about Sin scale (BAS). Created by Watson et al., the BAS defines sin as "the trust in self rather than in God."[10] The BAS is a twenty-eight-item instrument scored on a four-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree).[11] The BAS consists of four sub-scales of seven items each. The four scales are

> Self-Improvement; e.g., "my beliefs about sin help me see my faults so I can correct them and become a better person"; Perfectionism Avoidance; e.g., "my beliefs about sin free me from an unhealthy and hopeless attempt to be perfect"; Healthy Humility; e.g., "my awareness of sin helps me maintain an appropriate humility"; and Self-Reflective Functioning; e.g., "my understanding of sin helps me achieve true self-insight."[12]

In its development, the BAS demonstrated acceptable internal reliability ranging from ".67 for Perfectionism Avoidance to .76 for Self-reflective Functioning."[13] While it would be better if the researchers had conducted additional studies across more diverse populations, the BAS was adequate for this study's purposes. Aside from the BAS's

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[7]Beck and McDonald, "Attachment to God," 96.

[8]Ibid., 94.

[9]Ibid., 95-97.

[10]P. J. Watson et al., "Beliefs about Sin: Adaptive Implications in Relationships with Religious Orientation, Self-Esteem, and Measures of the Narcissistic, Depressed, and Anxious Self," *Edification* 1, no. 1 (2007): 59.

[11]Ibid., 60.

[12]Ibid., 60-61.

[13]Ibid., 61.

internal reliability, it also demonstrated good validity since each BAS sub-scale correlated positively with "the Allport and Ross (1967) scales and with mental health as measured by Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), Narcissism (Margolis & Thomas, 1980), and Depression and Anxiety (Costello & Comrey, 1967) Scales."[14]

Fifth, the Defensive Theology Scale (DTS) was employed to assess how individuals use religion to cope with the existential anxieties presented by daily life in a fallen world. Developed by Beck, the DTS is a twenty-two-item self-report instrument that uses a seven-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 7 = agree strongly) in measuring what Beck describes as "defensive religion."[15] This defensive religious orientation manifests itself in five characteristics or themes. Beck explains these five themes:

> In short, an individual with a high score on the DTS would feel "special" in the sense of: being protected from harm or illness; being in direct communication with God; believing that God is especially solicitous of the individual's requests or that God has a destiny planned for him or her; and that the small events of life are filled with clear purpose and meaning.[16]

Conversely, Beck labels those scoring low on the DTS as having an "existential" religious orientation and asserts that they "claim no special protection, insight, or destiny. This is not to say that [they] believe that God cannot or will not help, protect, or direct. Rather, these believers simply recognize that the 'rain falls equally on the just and the unjust."[17]

The DTS served as one measure of how individuals use their faith to manage existential anxiety. Thus, it does not measure "defensiveness" in the classical psychological sense. Instead, the DTS measures how individuals implement their religious faith in coping with difficulties. For the purposes of this dissertation, a defensive orientation (i.e., a high

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[14]Watson et al., "Beliefs about Sin," 59.

[15]Richard Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion: Is Religious Defensiveness Predictive of Worldview Defense?" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 144.

[16]Ibid., 145.

[17]Ibid.

score on the DTS) showed a greater reliance on one's faith where an existential orientation (i.e., a low score on the DTS) revealed less reliance on one's religion in coping with existential anxiety. The use of religion as a defense in the scoring of the DTS does not measure the accuracy of an individual's faith, it just marks the reliance upon that faith.

Psychometrically, the DTS demonstrated adequate internal consistency and validity. In two studies, the DTS posted "internal consistency estimates of .86"[18] and ".85"[19] respectively. The DTS also demonstrated adequate validity evidence. Beck correlated the DTS with Batson's Interactional Scale, an instrument that measures an individual's "readiness to face existential questions, perception of doubt as positive, and openness to change."[20] Although from a conservative evangelical perspective doubt is not good, one's openness to change (i.e., expression of faith in moments of uncertainty), however, is desirable (John 20:24-29). Thus, a person's experience of doubt and faith are two sides of the same coin (Mark 9:24). As such, while focusing on the positivity of doubt, Beck's instrument can still be helpful in understanding one's willingness to change.

Finally, evangelical beliefs about grace were measured by giving participants the Richmont Grace Scale (RGS). The RGS seeks to measure God's "saving and sustaining"[21] grace. It includes four empirically derived sub-scales and uses a five-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). First, the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation (nine items) assesses the "connection between God's forgiveness of the self and the self's love and forgiveness of others."[22] Next, the Grace and Responsibility scale (ten items)

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[18]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion," 145.

[19]Ibid., 147.

[20]Ibid., 145.

[21]Timothy A. Sisemore et al., "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 1: Preliminary Measurement, Relationships, and Implications for Practice," *Edification* 4, no. 2 (2011): 59.

[22]P. J. Watson, Zhuo Chen, and Timothy A. Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2: Psychometric Refinements and Relationships with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs about Sin, and

measures "a rejection of both cheap grace . . . and legalism."[23] Third, Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism (four items) evaluates one's internal beliefs about the relationship between God's grace and one's ability to earn it. Finally, Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism gauges one's beliefs about how participants understand the role of administering grace to others.[24]

The RGS has shown strong internal consistency. In its initial formulation, it demonstrated identical Cronbach alpha scores of .87 across two diverse populations. After refinement, the RGS maintained good internal consistency across all four sub-scales with Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from .61 to .86.[25] In addition to its internal consistency, the RGS has shown good validity. When compared with the Allport and Ross Intrinsic and Extrinsic Scales, the RGS demonstrated a strong positive correlation with Intrinsic Religious Orientation (.61) and an equally strong negative correlation with Extrinsic Religious Orientation (-.62). Furthermore, when compared to the Beliefs about Sin scale, the RGS "correlated positively with all four aspects of healthy Beliefs about Sin, including Self-Improvement (.58), Perfectionism Avoidance (.72), Healthy Humility (.54), and Self-Reflective functioning (.60)."[26] In a subsequent refinement, researchers discovered a general correlation between the RGS and the Self-Compassion Scale.[27] Based upon this analysis, it appears that, psychometrically, the RGS possesses good internal consistency and validity. As a result, it was concluded that the RGS, DTS, and BAS scales were suitable instruments for assessing the constructs awareness of the value of sin-

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Religious Orientation," *Edification* 4, no. 2 (2011): 67.

[23]Watson, Chen, and Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2," 67.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 60.

[27]Ibid., 66.

beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. In all, the questionnaire included six scales, excluding demographic information items, totaling 125 statements. The next section discusses the procedures undertaken in conducting this study.

Preliminary Considerations

Before conducting this study, a risk assessment to determine the appropriateness of using human test subjects for this project was conducted. The assessment was comprised of the following steps. First, a research profile was created requesting permission to conduct research. In this step, the Assessment of Risk to Human Subjects Research form was completed. Second, express permission to use all instruments in this project was obtained from each instrument's author. Third, the research profile was submitted for approval. In this step, approval was obtained from both the dissertation committee and the seminary's research ethics committee. Finally, after procuring approval, the research process began.

Research Design

This project was a quantitative study that examined the data from two perspectives. First, this study was correlational because it sought to determine whether significant relationships exist between God attachment, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. This study also investigated the potential relationships that the intervening roles of gender and religiosity played in God attachment.

Second, this study was also causal-comparative because it examined the effect of the independent variables of "awareness of the value of sin-beliefs," "evangelical beliefs about grace," and "religious defensiveness" (and their corresponding subscales) had on the dependent variables of "avoidance of intimacy with God" and "anxiety over abandonment from God."

Because this study dealt with beliefs and experiences, the self-report method was appropriate for this research design. The self-report method also allowed a large number of individuals to participate over a relatively short time span.

This study used both correlation analysis and multiple linear regression to determine the relationships and effects of these variables. From this analysis, tentative conclusions could be drawn on how God-attachment relates to and affects the Christian faith and life.

Procedure

A purposive sample was recruited for this project. Several local church pastors and others in denominational service were approached about this research project. After I discussed the aims of this study with these leaders, those open to assisting with the project were sent a web link containing the instruments via email. A Survey Monkey link contained the questions for the six instruments as well as an informed consent item. These leaders were briefed, in detail, about the nature of the study, requirements for participation (i.e., professing Christians over 18 years of age, etc.), and how the information would be used. From there, these leaders forwarded the instrument through social media and email to their constituents.

After gathering the data from Survey Monkey, the information was entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Each scale was scored in accordance to its developer's instructions. After scoring and tallying the data in each instrument, totals were checked to verify calculation accuracy. Then, after checking for accuracy, I uploaded the scores to the statistical software package SPSS for further analysis.

Statistical Analyses

Correlational Analysis

Correlational analysis was performed to test the existence of relationships between the variables. First, an analysis was conducted to determine the intercorrelations

among avoidance of intimacy with God, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. Second, an analysis was performed to ascertain the intercorrelations among anxiety over abandonment by God, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. A third analysis was performed to discover the intercorrelation between avoidance of intimacy with God and intrinsic religiosity. A fourth analysis was conducted to discover the intercorrelation between evangelical beliefs about grace and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs. Lastly, an intercorrelation analysis was computed to determine the relationships among avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety over abandonment by God.

Analysis of Means

An independent sample *t*-test was executed to discern the relationship between avoidance of intimacy of God and gender.

Multiple Linear Regression

After evaluating the correlational analyses, it was determined to test the relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. In the analysis, a stepwise regression was performed on the statistically significant sub-scales of the beliefs about sin scale (i.e., self-improvement, perfectionism avoidance, healthy humility, and self-reflective functioning), beliefs about grace scale (i.e., graceful forgiveness orientation, graceful acceptance of responsibility, graceful avoidance of personal legalism, and graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism), and the total score on the religious defensiveness instrument. Of the scales tested, graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism, graceful avoidance of personal legalism, and religious defensiveness were included in the analysis.

In testing the relationship between abandonment by God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness, a multiple

linear regression analysis was performed. In the analysis, a stepwise regression was performed on the statistically significant sub-scales of the beliefs about sin scale, beliefs about grace scale, and the total score on the religious defensiveness instrument. Of the scales tested, religious defensiveness and graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism were included in the analysis.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The previous chapter presented the research methodology of this project. The results of the study are now presented.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was that there would be a negative relationship between avoidant attachment to God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness.

In seeking to understand the relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God (M = 37.47, SD = 14.38), awareness of the value of sin-beliefs (M = 95.11, SD = 6.76), evangelical beliefs about grace (M = 96.22, SD = 7.91) and religious defensiveness (M = 115.71, SD = 14.22), three Pearson's r analyses were calculated. Higher scores on the avoidance of intimacy scale reported a higher level of avoidance of intimacy with God. The first analysis showed a significant, but weak, negative relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God scores and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs (r = -.163, p < .012, one tailed). The second analysis revealed a significant, but moderate, negative relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and evangelical beliefs about grace (r = -.385, p < .001, one tailed). The third analysis revealed a significant, but weak, negative correlation between avoidance of intimacy with God and religious defensiveness (r = -.210, p < .004, one tailed). Individuals with higher reported avoidance of intimacy with God scores

reported lower levels of awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, as well as lower levels of religious defensiveness (see table 3).[1]

Table 3. Inter-correlations of among avoidance of intimacy with God, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness

	Avoidance	Sin	Grace	Defensiveness
Avoidance	-	-.163*	-.385**	-.210**
Sin		-	.403**	.197**
Grace			-	.293**
Defensiveness		.		-
Note. * $p < .01$ (1-tailed), ** $p < .05$ (1-tailed).				

To gain a better understanding of the variables related to avoidant attachment with God, a more detailed analysis of the results reported in table 3 was conducted. Consequently, the measures for healthy humility, self-reflective functioning, graceful forgiveness orientation, grace and responsibility, graceful avoidance of personal legalism, graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism, and religious defensiveness were selected as predictor valuables of avoidance of intimacy with God.

A correlation table is presented in table 7. A review of this data related to avoidance showed that self-improvement (p=.125) and perfection avoidance (p=.116) were not significant predictors of avoidance attachment and were removed from the analysis. At that point, graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism entered into the regression equation and was significantly related to avoidance of intimacy with God $F(1,187) = 26.19$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .35, indicating that approximately 12.3 percent of the variance of the avoidance of intimacy with God score could be accounted for by graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism.

[1]In table 3, avoidance is avoidance of intimacy with God; sin is awareness of the value of sin-beliefs; grace is evangelical beliefs about grace; defensiveness is religious defensiveness.

At step 2 of the analysis, graceful avoidance of personal legalism was added into the regression equation along with graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism. This addition was also significantly related to avoidance of intimacy with God $F(2,186) = 17.88$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient as .40, indicating that approximately 16.1 percent of the variance of the avoidance of intimacy with God could be accounted for by graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism and graceful avoidance of personal legalism.

At step 3 of the analysis, religious defensiveness was added into the regression equation along with two previously entered variables. This addition, too, was significantly related to avoidance of intimacy with God $F(3,185) = 13.78$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .43, indicating that approximately 18.3 percent of the variance of the avoidance of intimacy with God could be accounted for by these three variables.

Table 4. Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting avoidance of intimacy with God (N = 189)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
Variable	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
GAIL	-1.80	.35	-.35	-1.38	.38	-.27	-1.27	.37	-.25
GAPL				-1.11	.38	-.21	-1.07	.38	-.20
RD							-.15	.07	-.15
R		.35			.40			.43	
R^2		.12			.16			.18	
Adjusted R^2		.12			.15			.17	
F		26.19*			17.88*			13.78*	

Note. * $p < .05$.

In light of this regression analysis, graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism, graceful avoidance of personal legalism, and religious defensiveness were significant predictors of avoidance of intimacy with God. Individuals with greater avoidant attachment to God reported lower levels of the avoidance of legalism and religious defensiveness. However, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs was not found to be significantly related

to avoidant attachment with God, when included in this analysis. Thus, hypothesis 1 was only partially confirmed (see table 4).[2]

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was that there would be a negative relationship between anxious attachment to God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and levels of religious defensiveness.

In seeking to understand the relationship between anxiety over abandonment by God ($M = 27.57$, $SD = 8.55$), awareness of the value of sin-beliefs ($M = 95.11$, $SD = 6.76$), evangelical beliefs about grace ($M = 96.22$, $SD = 7.91$) and religious defensiveness ($M = 115.71$, $SD = 14.22$), three Pearson's r analyses were calculated. The first analysis disclosed a significant, moderate negative relationship between anxiety over abandonment by God scores and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs ($r = -.235$, $p < .001$, one tailed). Likewise, the second analysis brought to light a significant, moderate negative relationship between anxiety over abandonment by God and evangelical beliefs about grace ($r = -.372$, $p < .001$, one tailed). Finally, the third analysis revealed a significant and moderate negative correlation between anxiety over abandonment by God and religious defensiveness ($r = -.449$, $p < .001$, one tailed). Individuals with higher reported anxiety over abandonment by God scores reported lower levels of awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, as well as lower levels of religious defensiveness (see table 5).[3]

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[2]In table 3, GAIL stands for Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism; GAPL stands for Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism; and RD stands for Religious Defensiveness.

[3]In table 5, Anxiety is anxiety over abandonment by God; sin is awareness of the value of sin-beliefs; grace is evangelical beliefs about grace; defensiveness is religious defensiveness.

Table 5. Inter-correlations among anxiety over abandonment by God, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness

	Anxiety	Sin	Grace	Defensiveness
Anxiety	-	-.235**	-.372**	-.449**
Sin		-	.403**	.197**
Grace			-	.293**
Defensiveness		.		-
Note. ** $p < .05$ (1-tailed)				

In order to gain a better understanding of the variables related to anxiety over abandonment by God, a more detailed analysis of the results reported in table 5 was conducted. A review of the correlations in table 7 related to anxiety revealed that the subscales of healthy humility (p=.092) and graceful acceptance of responsibility (p=.061) were not significant, and therefore were excluded from the regression.

Of the correlations presented, the measures for self-improvement (p=.002), perfection avoidance (p=.039), self-reflective functioning (p=.006), graceful forgiveness orientation (p=.001), graceful avoidance of personal legalism (p=.007), graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism (p=.001), and religious defensiveness (p=.001) were chosen as predictor valuables for anxious attachment with God.

At step 1, religious defensiveness was the first variable entered into the regression equation and was significantly related to anxiety over abandonment by God $F(1,187) = 47.22$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .45, indicating that approximately 20.2 percent of the variance of the anxiety of abandonment by God score could be accounted for by religious defensiveness.

At step 2 of the analysis, graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism was added into the regression equation along with religious defensiveness. This addition was also significantly related to anxiety over abandonment by God $F(2,186) = 34.93$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .52, indicating that approximately 27.3 percent

of the variance of the anxiety over the abandonment by God could be accounted for by religious defensiveness and graceful avoidance of interpersonal legalism.

Therefore, religious defensiveness and interpersonal legalism were significant predictors of anxiety over abandonment by God. Individuals with higher reported levels of anxiety over abandonment by God reported lower levels of religious defensiveness and a less likelihood of avoiding interpersonal legalism. However, awareness of the value of sin beliefs was not found to be a significant predictor. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was only partially confirmed (see table 6).[4]

Table 6. Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting anxiety over abandonment by God (N = 189)

	Model 1			Model 2		
Variable	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
RD	-.27	.04	-.45	-.24	.04	-.41
GAIL				-.83	.19	-.27
R		.45			.52	
R^2		.20			.27	
Adjusted R^2		.20			.27	
F		47.22*			34.93*	
Note. ** $p < .05$.						

[4]In table 6, RD is Religious Defensiveness; and GAIL is Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism.

Table 7. Inter-correlations of avoidance of intimacy with God, anxiety over abandonment by God, value of awareness of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness

Descriptive Statistics (N=189)											
Variable	Avoidance	Anxiety	SI	PA	HH	SRF	GFO	GAR	GAPL	GAIL	RD
Avoidance											
Anxiety	.258**										
	p=.001										
SI	-.084	-.214**									
	p=.125	*p*=.002									
PA	-.087	-.129*	.147*								
	p=.116	*p*=.039	*p*=.022								
HH	-.145*	-.097	.146*	.225**							
	p=.023	*p*=.092	*p*=.023	*p*=.001							
SRF	-.121*	-.181**	.410**	.185**	.391**						
	p=.049	*p*=.006	*p*=.001	*p*=.005	*p*=.001						
GFO	-.228**	-.346**	.248**	.184**	.245**	.314**					
	p=.001	*p*=.001	*p*=.001	*p*=.006	*p*=.001	*p*=.001					
GAR	-.163*	-.113	.188**	.153*	.057	.132*	.190**				
	p=.012	*p*=.061	*p*=.005	*p*=.018	*p*=.216	*p*=.035	*p*=.005				
GAPL	-.317**	-.179**	.123*	.368**	.182**	.111	.254**	.388**			
	p=.001	*p*=.007	*p*=.046	*p*=.001	*p*=.006	*p*=.065	*p*=.001	*p*=.001			
GAIL	-.350**	-.335**	.070	.201**	.052	.159*	.384**	.198**	.391**		
	p=.001	*p*=.001	*p*=.169	*p*=.003	*p*=.237	*p*=.014	*p*=.001	*p*=.003	*p*=.001		
RD	-.210**	-.449**	.199**	.021	.106	.220**	.398**	.052	.111	.159*	
	p=.002	*p*=.001	*p*=.003	*p*=.388	*p*=.074	*p*=.001	*p*=.001	*p*=.237	*p*=.065	*p*=.014	

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

Note. SI = Self Improvement, PA=Perfectionism Avoidance, HH=Healthy Humility, SFR=Self-Reflective Functioning, GFO=Graceful Forgiveness Orientation, GAR=Graceful Acceptance of Responsibility, GAPL=Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism, GAIL=Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism, RD=Religious Defensiveness.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was that there would be a negative relationship between avoidant attachment to God and intrinsic religiosity.

In seeking to understand the relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God (M = 37.47, SD = 14.38) and intrinsic religiosity (M = 41.48, SD = 3.04), a Pearson's r data analysis was performed. The analysis revealed a significant but weak negative relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and intrinsic religiosity (r = -.262, p < .001, one tailed). Individuals with higher reported levels of avoidance of intimacy with God reported lower degree of intrinsic religiosity. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was confirmed. Surprisingly, and although not part of the hypothesis itself, the analysis also revealed a moderate, negative correlation between anxiety over abandonment by God and intrinsic religiosity (r=-.412, p<.001, one tailed) (see table 8).

Table 8. Correlations of avoidance of intimacy with God, anxiety over abandonment by God, intrinsic religiosity, and extrinsic religiosity

	Avoidance	Anxiety	Intrinsic	Extrinsic (P)	Extrinsic (S)
Avoidance					
Anxiety	.258** *p*=.001				
Intrinsic	-.262** *p*=.001	-.412** *p*=.001			
Extrinsic (P)	.184** *p*=.006	.089 *p*=.112	-.173** *p*=.009		
Extrinsic (S)	.149* p=.021	.103 *p*=.079	-.114 *p*=.059	.324** *p*=.001	

Note. Descriptive Statistics (N=189)
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).
(P) = Personal, (S) = Social.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 was that males would have higher scores of avoidant attachment to God than females.

In order to corroborate earlier research,[1] an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare avoidance of intimacy with God scores for males and females. It was predicted that males would score significantly higher than females in avoidance of intimacy with God. However, the analysis revealed that there was no significant mean difference in the scores between males ($M = 35.65$, $SD = 14.17$) and females ($M = 38.32$, $SD = 14.45$); $t(187) = -1.189$, $p = .236$. So, the hypothesis was not confirmed (see table 9).

Table 9. Results of t-test and descriptive statistics for avoidance of intimacy of God by gender

	Gender						95% CI for Mean Difference		
	Male			Female					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n		t	df
Avoidance	35.65	14.27	60	38.32	14.45	129	-7.10, 1.76	-1.19	187
Note. *$p < .05$									

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 was that there would be a positive relationship between evangelical beliefs about grace and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs.

In an attempt to understand the relationship between evangelical beliefs about grace (M=96.33, SD=7.91) and the awareness of the value of sin-beliefs (M=95.11, SD=6.76), a Pearson's *r* analysis was calculated. The analysis revealed a moderate, positive relationship between beliefs about grace and beliefs about sin (r=.403, p<.001, one tailed). Thus, hypothesis 5 was confirmed (see table 5).

[1]Karissa D. Horton et al., "Examining Attachment to God and Health Risk-Taking Behaviors in College Students," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 2 (2012): 552-66.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 was that there would be a positive relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety about abandonment by God.

In seeking to understand the relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God (M=37.47, SD=14.38) and anxiety over abandonment by God (M=27.57, SD=8.55), a Pearson's r analysis was calculated. The analysis revealed a weak, positive relationship between avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety over abandonment by God (r=.258, p<.001, one tailed). Thus, hypothesis 6 was confirmed (see table 7).

The next chapter discusses the significance of the examined results. In addition, consider is given to the limitations of this study and possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 presented the results of the study, and this chapter considers their significance in five ways. First is a reflect on what the results mean in detail. Next is a review of the overall implications. Third is a consideration of some of the study's applications for pastoral ministry. Fourth is a note on the study's limitations and some future directions. Last is a conclusion with a summary of the lessons learned in carrying out this research project.

Review of the Main Results

The findings from this study offer much in the way of a better understanding the relationship between God attachment and the Christian faith and life. For example, the study suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between God attachment, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. There is also some evidence about the relationship between God attachment and religious orientation. Also, surprisingly, no significant difference was found in how males and females attach to God. Finally, the study offers insights into the nature of how the awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and overall religious defensiveness might function in relation to God attachment.

One of the guiding theses of this project is that, from a Christian perspective, secure attachment to God is a primary indicator of psychological wellness. Thus, healthy Christians tend to score low in both avoidance of intimacy with God and anxiety over abandonment by God, because they are properly dependent upon God. This dependence could be, in part, related to awareness of the value of sin beliefs, grace beliefs, and greater

religious defensiveness. In contrast, those with insecure attachment (both avoidant and anxious), report lower awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, more legalistic views of grace, and lower levels of religious defensiveness.

Sin, Grace, Religious Defensiveness, and God Attachment

The study showed that there was a significant, negative, relationship between both avoidantly- and anxiously-attached individuals and their awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical views of grace, and levels of religious defensiveness. If one considers the nature of insecure attachment, then these relationships make sense.

For example, when thinking about awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, dismissing avoidantly-attached individuals are more likely than securely-attached people to affirm statements such as, "I refuse to believe in sin because I don't need to change anything about myself," or "people who believe in sin are just insecure and lack the strength to rise above others."[1] These beliefs corroborate previous research which shows that people with avoidant attachment tend to hold a higher perceived view of self and less need for others.[2]

Similarly, those with anxious attachment, as well as those with fearful avoidance, are also less likely to see the value of sin-beliefs. For instance, the anxiously-attached are less inclined than secure people to believe statements such as, "knowledge of my personal sinfulness has lifted the burden from my shoulders of trying to be perfect," or "my beliefs about sin free me from an unhealthy and hopeless attempt to be perfect."[3]

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[1]P. J. Watson et al., "Beliefs about Sin: Adaptive Implications in Relationships with Religious Orientation, Self-Esteem, and Measures of the Narcissistic, Depressed, and Anxious Self," *Edification* 1, no. 1 (2007): 66-67.

[2]Kim Bartholomew, "Avoidance of Intimacy: An Attachment Perspective," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 7 (1990): 147.

[3]Watson et al., "Beliefs about Sin," 66-67.

Such attitudes align with previous research which reports that those with anxious attachment tend to engage in maladaptive perfectionism more than the securely attached.[4] Perhaps the negative self-concept inherent in anxious attachment leads to "Martha" instead of "Mary" behaviors when it comes to participants' awareness of sin (Luke 10:25-37). As such, while those with dismissing-avoidant attachment tend to maintain a positive view of self, and both those with anxious and fearful-avoidant attachments often hold a negative self-concept, all three are likely to not recognize the value of their sin-beliefs. It seems that, in general, those with dismissing-avoidant attachment tend to believe they are *too* good,[5] while those with anxious or fearful-avoidant attachment are inclined to think they are *not good* enough.[6]

Both those with avoidant and anxious attachment are also more inclined than securely-attached individuals to hold beliefs that tend toward legalism and away from orthodox views of grace. One way this becomes evident is in considering how the insecurely attached are predisposed to view the concept of forgiveness.

Both avoidantly- and anxiously-attached individuals are likely to struggle with a legalistic view of grace. People with avoidant attachment are less likely to extend grace by forgiving others while the anxiously-attached are less prone to appropriate grace by forgiving themselves. For example, those with avoidant attachment are more inclined to believe that "others must earn [their] forgiveness," or "if someone wrongs [them], they need to make it right."[7] On the other hand, anxiously-attached people are more likely to

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[4]Philip B. Gnilka, Jeffrey S. Ashby, and Christina M. Noble, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism as Mediators of Adult Attachment Styles and Depression, Hopelessness, and Life Satisfaction," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 91, no. 1 (2013): 91.

[5]John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development* (London: Routledge, 1988), 124.

[6]Kim Bartholomew and Phillip R. Shaver, "Methods of Assessing Adult Attachment," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships*, ed. Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes (New York: Guilford, 1998), 31.

[7]P. J. Watson, Zhuo Chen, and Timothy A. Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part

believe statements like, "the harder I work, the more I earn God's favor," or "I must work hard to experience God's grace and forgiveness."[8] Both groups have some difficulty understanding forgiveness, but differ in terms of whether the problem is with themselves or with others. Their similarity in this finding is in line with earlier research that demonstrates that insecurely-attached individuals are less forgiving in general than those with secure attachments.[9]

Besides having a lower degree of awareness concerning the value of sin-beliefs and a poorer understanding of evangelical grace, insecurely-attached individuals are also more apt to exhibit lower views of religious defensiveness. At first, this statement may sound counter-intuitive. For, on the surface, it would seem that using religion as a defense would be psychologically unhealthy.[10] However, religious defensiveness, as it is used in this project, actually measures how individuals use their faith to calm their uneasiness related to being in the world. Far from defensiveness as it is used in psychology, religious defensiveness is characterized "as a faith commitment devoted toward producing happy, peaceful thoughts: a faith of positivity and upbeat optimism."[11] Therefore, the higher the score, the more willing people are to rely on their faith to soothe their anxieties. For example, securely-attached Christians in this study were more likely to believe that "God has a very specific plan for my life that I must search for and find," or "before I was even

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2: Psychometric Refinements and Relationships with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs About Sin, and Religious Orientation," *Edification* 4, no. 2 (2011): 72.

[8]Watson, Chen, and Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2," 72.

[9]Jeni L. Burnette et al., "Insecure Attachment and Depressive Symptoms: The Mediating Role of Rumination, Empathy, and Forgiveness," *Personality and Individual Differences* 46, no. 3 (2009): 276.

[10]Consider how, historically, many have used religion to oppress others or commit human atrocities.

[11]Richard Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion: Is Religious Defensiveness Predictive of Worldview Defense?" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 143.

born God had a detailed plan for the course of my life."[12] In contrast, the insecurely-attached were more prone to believe such things as, "I don't think God intervenes much in the small details of my life, even if I do care about them," or "God doesn't give me clear directions as to what I should do with the big decisions in my life."[13] Thus, those who score low in religious defensiveness are apt to cope with anxieties in their lives by using defenses other than their faith. Those with dismissing-avoidant attachment are more inclined to depend on themselves in coping with life difficulties, while those with anxious or fearful-avoidant attachment may be more apt to perform good works to distract themselves from their worries.[14] Either way, insecurely-attached individuals are less likely than their secure counterparts to think that they are special enough in God's eyes to rest and find comfort in their relationship with him while dealing with existential anxiety.

To review, this analysis demonstrated that there is a significant, negative relationship between insecure God attachment and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, beliefs about evangelical grace, and levels of religious defensiveness. However, correlation does not equal causation, and as such, future researchers should explore more deeply these connections. For example, it would be helpful to learn how those with secure God attachment differ from the insecurely-attached in practicing Christian forgiveness, managing perfectionistic tendencies, and implementing their faith in coping with anxiety.

Grace and Legalism

The last chapter reported that individuals characterized by higher measures of avoidance of intimacy with God reported lower scores of graceful avoidance of both personal and interpersonal legalism. Following are two possible reasons for this finding.

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[12]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion," 152.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Laura B. Cooper et al., "Differentiated Styles of Attachment to God and Varying Religious Coping Efforts," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 2 (2009): 134.

First, it may be that those with avoidant attachment in this study perceived less of a need for personal grace than those with secure attachment. Given that individuals with avoidant human attachment tend to maintain a high view of self and are not, in general, as empathetic,[15] it makes sense that they might tend toward personal legalism in their religious lives. For example, Watson, Chen, and Sisemore state that it could be that avoidantly-attached subjects, overall, feel, as little compunction to "need to get things in order before [they] go to God," or to believe that "the harder [they] work, the more [they] earn God's favor."[16] In simple terms, those with avoidant attachment to God may not think of themselves as being *bad enough* to need God's grace.

Second, it is reasonable to assume that individuals with avoidant attachment are probably less inclined to extend grace to others. This could be, according to Mikuliner and Shaver opine, because "the avoidant strategy of achieving attachment system deactivation through emotional distancing" hinders their interpersonal graciousness.[17] Said another way, avoidantly-attached individuals may not desire to make the emotional investment required to enforce the righting of wrongs, accepting forgiveness from others, or demanding others earn their respect.[18] They may simply decide that extending grace to others to too emotionally demanding.

Those with anxiety over abandonment by God in this study also scored significantly lower on the measure of extending grace toward others. This result may come from the anxiously-attached person's tendency to harbor anger toward attachment

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[15]John Bowlby, *Attachment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 124; and Micha Popper, "Narcissism and Attachment Patterns of Personalized and Socialized Charismatic Leaders," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 19, no. 6 (2002): 803.

[16]Watson, Chen, and Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2," 72.

[17]Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, "Attachment Theory and Emotions in Close Relationships: Exploring the Attachment-Related Dynamics of Emotional Reactions to Relational Events," *Personal Relationships* 12, no. 2 (2005): 154.

[18]Watson, Chen, and Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2," 72.

figures.[19] Whereas those with avoidant attachment may wish to steer clear of the emotional investment needed to extend grace to others, the anxiously-attached are more likely to experience emotional distress in relationships.[20] As a result, those with anxious attachment are more likely to, in Watson, Chen, and Sisemore's words, "need to see remorse before [they] offer forgiveness" or believe that "others must earn [their] forgiveness."[21]

In both cases, although most likely motivated for different reasons, those with insecure God attachment demonstrated a greater trend toward certain kinds of legalism than did those with secure attachment. Further research should be undertaken to discern how a legalistic upbringing shapes one's God attachment. This kind of study would benefit those working with parishioners coming out of hyper-fundamentalist churches.

Religious Defensiveness

As mentioned, religious defensiveness is characterized "as a faith commitment devoted to producing happy, peaceful thoughts: a faith of positivity and upbeat optimism."[22] Those with high religious defensiveness also tend to feel they are special in God's eyes.[23] This study seemed to indicate that insecurely-attached individuals were less likely to use religious defensiveness as a coping strategy than their secure counterparts. It might be that the insecurely-attached participants in this study did not tend to feel as special in their relationships with God as those with secure attachments did.

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[19]Mario Mikulincer and Victor Florian, "The Relationships between Adult Attachment Styles and Emotional and Cognitive Reactions to Stressful Events," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships,* ed. Simpson and Rholes, 145.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Watson, Chen, and Sisemore, "Grace and Christian Psychology—Part 2," 72.

[22]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion," 143.

[23]Ibid.

Religious defensiveness is a useful construct for helping better understand how people relate to God when experiencing existential anxiety. However, one must use caution in applying this construct to the Christian faith and life.

First, much is commendable about using religious defensiveness as one measure of understanding the Christian faith and life. For example, this study found a positive correlation between religious defensiveness and beliefs that individuals can improve themselves, reflect upon their inner worlds, practice a lifestyle of forgiveness, and maintain a gracious and not legalistic view of other people (see table 7). These are positive benefits of religious defensiveness, and those with insecure attachments would do well if they could develop some of these perspectives in coping with existential anxiety.

Second, one must not assume that religious defensiveness equates with spiritual maturity because religious defensiveness measures the feeling of specialness in the God relationship and not the level of development. This caution is advisable, for as Beck states, this instrument "describes the *function* of the faith system, it does not characterize the *accuracy* of the faith system."[24] For example, although this study found that those with secure attachments reported higher levels of religious defensiveness, it did not ascertain the ability of those with secure attachment to empathize with the suffering of others. It may be that the securely-attached may be less inclined to show Christian love to hurting individuals because suffering has not played a large role in their own attachment histories.

Third, since religious defensiveness focuses on one's feeling of specialness before God, it may also be an indication of religious narcissism in both the securely- and insecurely-attached. For example, those with secure attachment may feel as though they can use their relationships to manipulate God. Beck observes that the securely-attached

[24]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion," 143.

may be more likelyto think that "God will help me get to a meeting when I am late."[25] In other words, those scoring high in religious defensiveness may craft a god in their own image and after their own likeness.

In contrast, those scoring low in religious defensiveness may exhibit narcissistic tendencies in other ways. They may either harbor unrealistic feelings of unworthiness or hold over-inflated estimations of self-sufficiency. In either case, these narcissistic leanings will most likely hinder them from coping with existential anxiety through their relationships with God.

To sum up, those scoring high on religious defensiveness are more likely to feel special in God's eyes, and this specialness may encourage them to draw near him when coping with existential anxiety. However, this drawing near to God should not necessarily be equated with holiness, for it seems that the motivation behind this movement toward God is more likely based on how one's attachment history has shaped one's self-concept and less due to one's spiritual development. Likewise, those with insecure attachments should not be considered spiritually immature just because they may hesitate more in relying on God during these times than those with secure attachments for their attachment experiences have taught them that others are either unsafe or undependable.

This finding provides a rich opportunity for researchers desiring to better understand the underlying motivations of those with insecure and secure God attachments. One path that researchers may explore is how early attachment history affects subsequent attachment to God, particularly the development of fearful avoidance. This work would help church leaders better understand the motivations behind some of the distancing behaviors of their parishioners. Another research option would be to examine the effect of both secure and insecure God attachment and narcissistic behaviors in local church life. This information would help church leaders better understand congregational conflict,

[25]Beck, "Defensive versus Existential Religion," 152.

improve church discipline procedures, and promote a more harmonious life in their faith community.

Religious Orientation and God Attachment

As noted in the previous chapter, individuals with higher reported levels of avoidance of intimacy with God reported lower levels of intrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity measures people's capacity to live their lives in light of their religious beliefs,[26] and it would seem to imply submission to a transcendent authority. This result corroborates previous research related to the relationship between avoidant attachment to God and intrinsic religiosity.[27] In addition, this result suggests that the religion of avoidant individuals tends to be characterized by less closeness to God and therefore greater independence from God, instead of a relationship of submissive dependence and communion.[28] This tendency squares with human attachment research which reports that those with avoidant attachment are less prone to engage in close, personal, human relationships.[29] Furthermore, those with dismissing-avoidant attachment are more likely to feel superior to others, and thus, may feel uncomfortable submitting to authority of any kind.[30]

In addition to the connection between avoidant attachment and intrinsic religiosity, this analysis also uncovered that those in this study with anxious attachment

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[26]Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Ralph W. Hood, "Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The Boon or Bane of Contemporary Psychology of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 4 (1990): 447.

[27]Wade C. Rowatt and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990): 637.

[28]Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 172.

[29]Bartholomew and Shaver, "Methods of Assessing Adult Attachment," 31.

[30]Ibid.

reported a higher negative correlation with intrinsic religiosity than did their avoidantly-attached peers. This finding may be due to the tendency for anxiously-attached people to desire acceptance in their relationships with God. For example, those with anxious attachment are more likely to believe, "I crave reassurance from God that God loves me" than those with avoidant attachments.[31] As such, it seems that those with anxious attachment may be even more predisposed to seek to have their relationship needs met by God instead of simply enjoying the relationship for its own sake. Thus, it would make sense that the anxiously-attached would be less likely to hold an intrinsically-religious orientation when compared to either securely-attached individuals.

Since this analysis showed a negative correlation between insecure attachment and intrinsic religiosity, it would be interesting if future research would examine whether the lower intrinsic religiosity was attributed to fearful avoidance, dismissing avoidance, ambivalent attachment, or some combination of all three. This new information could help counselors develop therapeutic approaches for helping insecurely-attached clients draw near and submit to God in dealing with their problems.

Gender Differences and God Attachment

In addition to sin, grace, religious defensiveness, and religiosity, this project also examined whether there were any gender differences related to God attachment. Studies show that men are less likely to engage in spiritual exercises that emphasize intimacy.[32] It was hypothesized that males would be more avoidant in their attachment to God than females. Surprisingly, this analysis did not confirm such a difference.

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[31]Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 103.

[32]For an in-depth discussion, see Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas: Spence, 1999); and David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

Consequently, this result runs counter to the established pattern that, in general, males are more likely to have avoidant attachment to humans than women.

This result might be due to an insufficient sample size and disparity between numbers of males and females. A larger sample size with a more balanced distribution of participants by gender may solve this problem. In addition, it might also be partially due to the religious characteristics of the males in the study. Generally, men are less active in religious faith communities than women.[33] There may be a couple of reasons for this discrepancy in church participation. First, men with avoidant attachment to God may eschew church attendance because they do not want to associate with other people. Second, they may not participate in organized religious communities because they would not be inclined to be religious in the first place.

However, men who attend worship regularly, are members of a church, and are willing to participate in projects such as this one may be less likely to have avoidant attachment than men in the general population. Either way, additional research is needed to determine the relationship between avoidant God attachment and church attendance by gender. In particular, this research could provide churches with insights that would assist them in developing more effective men's ministries including evangelism and outreach programs.

Overall Implications

This dissertation examined the relationships between attachment to God and awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, evangelical beliefs about grace, and religious defensiveness. As a correlational study, it did not attempt to show how these variables cause an individual's attachment style. However, this project did show that there were significant relationships between these variables. Furthermore, this work brought out

[33]Alan S. Miller and John P. Hoffmann, "Risk and Religion: An Explanation of Gender Differences in Religiosity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 1 (1995): 63.

connections between secular attachment research and its application to God attachment. It also pointed to specific areas that future researchers may find fruitful areas of endeavor. For instance, the results of this project encourage future research on the connection between God attachment and the dynamics of grace and legalism in the Christian life. Thus, in the overall analysis, this dissertation provides a helpful summary of attachment literature, including God attachment, that provides the context for the studies of the Christian religion related to adult God attachment.

Applications for Pastoral Ministry

Those who counsel in the local church can benefit from this dissertation in four ways. First, information developed through this project might help counselors better understand (and communicate) the concept of grace and the dynamics of legalism to their counselees. Counselors can explore with clients the way their experiences have contributed and shaped the way they perceive God's love and his justice, which will give counselees a context for better understanding some of the reasons why they think and behave the way they do. After that, counselors can assist them in bringing into their awareness how these experiences affect the way they interact with other people, as well. Then, counselors can help their counselees reorient their lives back to God by encouraging them to repent of their sins, boast of their weaknesses, and confess faith in the midst of their sufferings.

Second, in thinking about religious defensiveness, counselors can affirm and encourage counselees to draw near to God in dealing with their existential anxiety without mistaking counselees' desires to do so (or lack thereof) with spiritual maturity (or immaturity). Counselors can now better think through how their counselees' attachment needs work themselves out in the ways they use their faith. For example, those with high religious defensiveness, at least in this study, tended to be forgiveness-oriented and inclined toward self-reflection—two important skills for solid Christian growth. However, just because someone has the ability and willingness to forgive or self-reflect does not mean they are necessarily psychologically or spiritually healthy. As such, the findings of

this dissertation suggest there may be value in exploring the underlying motivations for counselees' interactions with God. By exploring these deeper drives with counselees, counselors can help them better understand how their attachment histories have affected the way they experience their relationships with God, and thus, help them better understand why they find it easy (or hard) to do things like forgive or self-reflect. Therefore, the information in this dissertation encourages the exploration of possible reasons why counselees may or may not practice things like forgiveness or self-reflection. Counselors' knowledge of the connection between religious defensiveness and God attachment equip them to better engage in enriching conversations with their counselees about why counselees may do the things they do in their Christian lives. These conversations can help counselees better understand how they use their relationships with God to calm their anxieties.

Third, this project pointed out that there is a negative correlation between intrinsic religiosity and insecure attachment. This correlation mildly suggested that insecurely-attached participants, both avoidantly- and anxiously-attached in this study, may relate to God, at least in part, for what they can get from God, most likely, relationship acceptance. For example, they may have drawn near to God so that God could meet their relational needs instead of seeking him for him being himself. This finding, like the finding related to religious defensiveness, provides counselors with a possible avenue of exploration with counselees. Counselors can use this information to ask probing questions related to how counselees view their relationships with God. Do their counselees love God for what God can give them? Or, do they love God for God's own sake? This research reminds counselors of the importance of such questions.

Fourth, this study reminds Christian counselors that God attachment influences a person's perception of God, self, and the Christian life. Counselors often become frustrated when working with clients who struggle to accept their true identities in Christ. These counselors may lament that Christians find it difficult to believe a truth like, "you

are a child of the King," even though they affirm the truths of the Bible. However, this study suggests that the beliefs and perceptions Christians have regarding God, grace, and sin-beliefs are interrelated. Consequently, they may believe biblical statements about Christians are true, but have difficulty believing them for themselves. In these cases, awareness of God attachment can help counselors think through the best way to approach such counselees. For example, in such cases, the counselor's role should not be one of simple verbal persuasion—i.e., "You need to believe this!"; but one of introduction—i.e., "I can see you are struggling to accept these truths from God are for you personally. There seems to be a discrepancy in the perception you have of God and the God who is revealed in Scripture. How about if we discuss some of those kinds of discrepancies, so that you can have a clearer picture of this God who you are struggling to believe wants to help you?" Instead of trying to convince counselees of God's love for them, counselors who understand counselees' God attachments can approach their clients in ways that more effectively introduce them to the "God who is there." This approach will likely improve counselor effectiveness.

Limitations

Five limitations in this project must be noted. First, the sample reflected a small demographic of Christian adults from one region of the United States. Moreover, this sample was skewed heavily by Baptists, and other Protestant denominations were underrepresented. The sample size did not allow for a broader generalization of the study results to the wider population. As such, this dissertation served as a pilot project instead of a replicable study. Moreover, a large portion of the sample was comprised of Caucasian females. Future researchers may want to develop a sampling methodology that provides a more balanced representation of males and females.

In addition, I used a purposive sample, and as such, it is possible that participants volunteering to participate in the study may hold distinctive views of God, sin, grace, and religious defensiveness than those who chose not to participate that would

make the results of this study less representative of the views of the Christian population of interest than would be desirable.

A second set of limitations revolves around the measures used in the study. First, for all its usefulness, the AGI does not necessarily capture the subconscious aspects of an individual's IWM. Thus, the AGI tends to "reflect the nature and operation of problems with the testing instrument. Unlike the AAI, which captures subconscious attachment responses, the AGI records conscious attachment answers.[34] Since the participants in this study were for the most part evangelicals from conservative churches in the Bible-belt, they may have reported the "right" answers to the awareness of the value of sin-belief items in the survey. In other words, the testing methodology may have investigated more what the participants "thought" rather than how they "lived" in regard to their awareness of the value of sin-beliefs and their attachment to God beliefs.

A third limitation of this project dealt with the ambiguity of the religious defensiveness measure. As used in this study, the measure's name of "defensive" was confusing and easily misinterpreted. Future studies should clarify this measurement's meaning or use an alternative measure instead.

A fourth limitation of this study deals with its procedure. This study made use of e-mail, social media, and some face-to-face interactions. Future researchers may want to spend more face-to-face time with participants. This type of interaction would provide clearer instructions and quicker access to answers if participants have questions related to the questionnaire. Perhaps a mixed methods design would improve this limitation.

A fifth limitation, related to the previous one, was the design of the Survey Monkey software program. Some participants failed to answer all the questions because of the software program's layout. In the future, researchers may want to use a software

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[34]Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes, "Attachment in Adulthood," in *Attachment Theory and Close Relationships,* ed. Simpson and Rholes, 6-7.

program without that limitation or perhaps administer the project questionnaire with paper and pencil.

Future Directions

In the future, it is hoped that researchers will build upon the initial insights reported in this study. Along with these discoveries, several questions emerge as it relates to the findings of this project. First, more research should be conducted examining how one's understanding of legalism and grace relates to God attachment. Does one's attachment influence their tendency toward legalism or is it the other way around? In the same way, does one's graciousness flow from one's attachment or is one's attachment influenced by one's graciousness?

Second, more studies should be undertaken to better understand how Christians use their relationships with God to alleviate existential anxiety. Do people with different attachment styles find comfort from God during existential crises in the same way or do they experience God differently during these times? If they experience God differently, how do their attachment histories affect these experiences?

Last, more research needs to explore the intrinsic motivating factors of how religiosity compares with an individual's God attachment. For each God attachment style, what are the motivating reasons for faith? Do securely-attached individuals pursue God for purer reasons than their insecurely-attached peers, or are all people worshiping God for similar reasons?

These are all questions that future researchers may endeavor to answer. Now that we have looked forward, it is time to glance back at what I have learned through this project.

Lessons Learned

As this dissertation concludes, three lessons have emerged from this experience. First, a study on the Christian life is a complex interweaving of a multiplicity of variables

that defy easy explanation. Human beings are simply too complicated to be explained with two or three variables. This cannot be done. With that said, Christian researchers can still carry out the cultural mandate by studying things like God attachment, for, just because something is difficult does not mean that it should not be attempted.

Second, and this is a more personal lesson, I learned that I am more gifted as a counselor and pastor-teacher than as a researcher. With that said, I am content with acknowledging my weaknesses and limitations. I am certain that God has humbled me both spiritually as well as intellectually over the course of this project. Despite my self-described ineptitude as a scholar, I hope that others will find this work helpful in their research efforts related to God attachment and the Christian faith and life.

Finally, this project rests in the knowledge that Christ is the Sovereign Lord of the entire universe, and that includes the discipline of psychology. As such, studies like this one encourage Christian counselors and theorists to collaborate with Jesus in redeeming God's good creation for his glory confident that Scripture, science, and human life all cohere in a beautiful and masterful way. Christ's redemption project may be accomplished, in part, by claiming the phenomenon of attachment for Christ, and Christians can do this by building upon the broad body of research on attachment as well as the work presented in this dissertation. I hope that Christians will take up this challenge for the glory of God and the healing of his church.

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ABSTRACT

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOD ATTACHMENT
AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE AMONG
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

Gary Todd Hardin, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017
Chair: Dr. Eric L. Johnson

This pilot study explored the possible relationships between attachment to God and the Christian faith and life among a small sample of evangelical Christians. A quantitative analysis was performed on Christian adults (N=189) in local churches in the southeastern region of the United States. The study examined the relationships between attachment to God, awareness of the value of sin-beliefs, beliefs about sin, and levels of religious defensiveness. The project used correlational and stepwise regression analyses. The study found there was a significant negative variance between avoidance of intimacy with God, anxiety over abandonment by God, avoidance of legalism and religious defensiveness. Implications for Christian psychology and pastoral ministry were also discussed.

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