

CRI's “Psychology & the Church” Series

This current response to the Christian Research Institute (CRI) position on psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies seems like *deja vu* to us. Some years back Walter Martin, the founder of CRI, left the door open for hypnosis under certain conditions. Now the president of CRI, Hendrik (Hank) Hanegraaff, supports the position of Bob and Gretchen Passantino, which leaves the door open to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies under certain conditions. The publication of the Passantinos' four articles establishes clearly that this is the CRI position. And, just as Walter Martin was in error about hypnosis, so too Hank Hanegraaff is in error about psychotherapy.

Hanegraaff and the Passantinos may protest that there is no relation between hypnosis and psychotherapy and therefore no relation between Walter Martin's leaving the door open to hypnosis and Hanegraaff's leaving the door open to psychotherapy. However, there is a definite connection. In a section titled “Mesmerism: The Beginning of American Psychology,” the American Psychological Association's book on the *History of Psychotherapy: A Century of Change* says:

Historians have found several aspects of mesmerism and its offshoots that set the stage for 20th-century psychotherapy. It promoted ideas that are quintessentially American and have become permanent theoretical features of our 20th-century psychological landscape (Freedheim, 32).

In his book *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*, Robert Fuller describes how the thrust of mesmerism changed directions as it came to America (Fuller, 46,47). Its promoters garnered great expectations of psychological and spiritual advantage. Non-Christians especially welcomed its promises for self-improvement, spiritual experience, and personal fulfillment. Fuller says that mesmerism offered Americans “an entirely new and eminently attractive arena for self-discovery—their own psychological depths” and that “its theories and methods promised to restore individuals, even unchurched ones, into harmony with the cosmic scheme” (Fuller, 104). The anticipated possibility of discovering and developing human potential, which emerged from mesmerism, stimulated the growth and expansion of psychotherapy, positive thinking, the human potential movement, hypnosis, and mind-science religions. Fuller's description of mesmerism in America accurately portrays twentieth-century psychotherapy.

Mesmer's far reaching influence gave an early impetus to scientific-sounding religious alternatives to Christianity. Moreover, his work established the trend of medicalizing the mind and replacing religion with treatment and therapy. Mesmer gave the world another false religion and another false hope. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz describes Mesmer's influence:

Insofar as psychotherapy as a modern “medical technique” can be said to have a discoverer, Mesmer was that person. Mesmer stands in the same sort of relation to Freud and Jung as Columbus stands in relation to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Columbus stumbled onto a continent that the founding fathers subsequently transformed into the political entity known as the United States of America. Mesmer stumbled onto the literalized use of the leading scientific metaphor of his age for explaining and exorcising all manner of human problems and passions, a rhetorical device that the founders of modern depth psychology subsequently transformed into the pseudomedical entity known as psychotherapy (Szasz, 43).

Because of their position on psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies, CRI and the Passantinos are guilty of what we call *psychoheresy*. We coined the term *psychoheresy* with the following definition: a psychological heresy, a heresy because it is a departure from the Word of God and from the fundamental truth of the Gospel, a psychological heresy because the departure is the use of and support of unproven and unscientific psychological opinions of men instead of absolute confidence in the biblical truth of God. CRI, through the Passantinos, leaves the door open to the integration of secular psychological counseling theories and therapies with the Bible. These teachings have become so accepted in Christian schools, seminaries, churches, missionary organizations, books, radio and other media that many Christians assume such psychological ideas are true and even biblical. Thus, the tentacles of the psychological way have strangled the thinking of many Christians. CRI must now accept part of the responsibility for the church’s ongoing capitulation to and use of psychotherapy.

Bob and Gretchen Passantinos’ four-part series on “Psychology & the Church” was published in the *Christian Research Journal*. The four-article series represents nothing new or revelational about either psychology or about what the Passantinos refer to as the “Biblical Counseling Movement (BCM).” Their position supports the psychotherapists’ view rather than that of the psychotherapy critics. There is little that a professional psychotherapist would disagree with in the Passantino articles and the Christian psychologists are no doubt delighted that the Christian Research Institute (CRI) has left the door open to continued business as usual for professional psychotherapy.

While the Passantinos will protest, stating that their articles are critical of psychology, all of the integrationists named in their articles have also been critical in some way of psychology. So to say the Passantinos are critical of psychology separates them from none of the integrationists on that count.

In their series the Passantinos provide enough information to condemn the idea that psychotherapy is science, but seem to be confused about it. They reveal enough about psychotherapy to condemn it as being of any value for Christians, but avoid doing so. They criticize certain theories and practices of psychotherapy, but do not link their charges with the specific individuals and organizations involved. They laud certain theories and practices of psychotherapy, but, with only a one brief paragraph exception, they refrain from saying which individuals and organizations they recommend. While they expose many of the problems of psychotherapy, they fail to warn about the widespread encroachment of psychotherapeutic theories and practices throughout the church. Their oleaginous approach undermines the effect of the evidence they do present. The Passantinos give evidence of knowing enough to shut down the psych-industry in all its forms throughout the church, but instead they tenaciously hang onto the idea that it’s fine if done their way.

A repeated recommendation in the Passantino series is the open door to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies under certain conditions. Even with these conditions, they are not able to produce one integrationist who would admit to violating the Bible with his theories and techniques. Worse yet, in one brief paragraph they name two individuals (William Backus and James Dobson) as models of what they recommend, but these two individuals are found to be grossly unbiblical. The Passantinos' failed formula with those two individuals leaves them with zero individuals who exemplify what they recommend. With zero integrationists whom the Passantinos can name that admit they violate the Bible with their therapies and techniques and zero individuals who actually comply with their recommendations when tested, the Passantinos have come up with zero reasons for leaving the psychotherapeutic door open. Their recommendations add up to one big zero for God's people.

The Passantinos have enough information to close the door on psychotherapy for Christians, but they do not. The question for the reader throughout is: Have the Passantinos provided adequate scientific and biblical evidence to support their leaving the door open for psychotherapy under the conditions they describe? We demonstrate that they have failed to do so. As we say later, "The Passantinos promise much . . . but provide little. With all their razzle-dazzle about using psychology under certain conditions, they were not able to give one example of an insight from psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies that is of any use to the Christian, and they could not name one individual whose work would demonstrate what they claim. These facts alone should condemn the entire series."

Even before the Passantino articles appeared, many of us accurately predicted their substance. Their leaving the door open to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies and their use of John Coe's psychotheology* to support their own position were no surprise. And, who is Coe, whose theology dominates the CRI/Passantino position? Coe is a professor at the Rosemead School of Psychology, which produces numerous integrationists who are active participants in psychoheresy. What else would one expect from a faculty member at a school that dispenses and promotes psychoheresy? In our critique of Part Two, we present a diametrically different view than the CRI/Passantino/Coe psychotheology.

After the first Passantino article appeared we wrote the following letter to the editor of the *Christian Research Journal*:

In the first of a four-part series on psychology and the church, the Passantinos identify us. We are unabashedly opposed to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies for both biblical and research reasons, described in a number of our books. Unless they have changed their minds, the Passantinos are pro-psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies. In other words, they support the integration position. The Passantinos' articles need to be read with their pro-psychology bias in mind.

The editor suggested that we hold off responding until the series was completed. The editor mentioned that psychotherapy would be critiqued in the third installment. We did not need to wait until that third installment as we had already accurately identified the Passantinos' position.

After the Passantino series first came out we were called by someone in Texas whom we had never met and did not know, but who has an apologetic ministry. He asked if we were willing to have a debate with the Passantinos on his radio program. We immediately agreed and waited for confirmation of the date. After much time had elapsed we were told that the Passantinos declined, even though they were repeatedly contacted and given an option on the date.

While the Passantinos, the integrationists, and most people in the church support the open door to psychotherapy, many secularists are closing the door on it. Dr. Tana Dineen is a clinical psychologist who has written a book titled *Manufacturing Victims: What the Psychology Industry is doing to People*. Dineen relates in detail how the psychological manufacturing of victims takes place. She differentiates between real victims and the ones manufactured by the "Psychology Industry," which involves a blurring between the two and spreads a net to include virtually everyone. She concludes her book by saying:

The Psychology Industry can neither reform itself from within nor should it be allowed to try. It should be stopped from doing what it is doing to people, from manufacturing victims. And while the Psychology Industry is being dismantled, people can boycott psychological treatment, protest the influence of the Psychology Industry and resist being manufactured into victims (Dineen, 309).

Dineen's conclusion also applies to the "Christian Psychology" industry. The following was admitted at a meeting of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS), which is an organization of psychologists who are professing Christians:

We are often asked if we are "Christian psychologists" and find it difficult to answer since we don't know what the question implies. We are Christians who are psychologists but at the present time there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology. It is difficult to imply that we function in a manner that is fundamentally distinct from our non-Christian colleagues . . . as yet there is not an acceptable theory, mode of research or treatment methodology that is distinctly Christian (Sutherland & Poelstra).

As more and more Christians are supporting psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies over the past 25 years, more and more secularists are coming against it, because they are willing to pay serious attention to the research. It is a tragedy when conclusions reached by many secular researchers would lead one to close the door on professional psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies, while the Passantinos and integrationists reach conclusions that leave the door open to such practices. Any objective reading of the Passantinos' series will reveal that this complex issue is simplistically concluded to the advantage of the psychotherapist and at the expense of the church.

Because the Passantinos' warnings finger no one and their qualifications for seeing a therapist are so easily confirmed by integrationists, no one will stop from using even the most corrupt of therapies or therapists. If Hanegraaff wrote his critiques in a similar fashion, the door would be left open to all kinds of aberrations, heresies and cults, under certain conditions of course.

Prior to the appearance of the Passantinos' articles, we made a presentation to Hanegraaff and his staff on the subject of psychoheresy. CRI sent the following reply to those who inquired about their position on psychology and the church:

CRI is still in the process of evaluating the proper relationship between psychology and the Christian church and formally establishing a position on this controversial topic. We have met with prominent people on both sides of this debate and it remains an issue that must be carefully studied and assessed. If you would like information on this subject from opposing points of view so you can prayerfully study and come to your own conclusions, we recommend materials from Martin and Deidre Bobgan (anti-psychology) and John Coe (pro-psychology).

CRI was correct in saying that our position is “anti-psychology” and Coe’s position is “pro-psychology.” The prominence of Coe’s pro-psychology theology in the Passantinos’ series confirms that CRI chose the pro-psychology position. In opposition to Coe’s pro-psychology paper, Hanegraaff had a copy of a paper opposing Coe’s position, which was written by Doug Bookman, a professor at The Master’s College.

In a letter to Hanegraaff one of us said:

I would like to suggest that you sponsor a debate at Rosemead Graduate School on this issue. I have tried in the past to arrange such a debate or even to speak there with no success. If your staff has heard them and us separately, why not now put the two sides out in public together? . . . I believe you would do the church a great service if you would sponsor such a debate. Please give it some thought and prayer. I look forward to your reply.

Hanegraaff never replied. It cannot be said that Hanegraaff lacked information to make a decision regarding what should be the CRI position on psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies. But, it can be said that his decision is harmonious with the many integrationists we have accused of psychoheresy over the years and would certainly be applauded by the many integrationists quoted in the Passantinos’ articles.

Leaving the door open to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies is an overwhelmingly popular position in the church. Many are satisfied and others are ecstatic about the CRI/Passantino position on the integration of psychology and the Bible. It is always difficult to combat the popular socio-cultural mores of a society, but it is more difficult to fight against the absorption of these mores into the church. Admittedly, we are presenting a minority view and unfortunately we are left with proving the case against something for which the case has never been made to begin with.

Based on hundreds of research studies, Dr. Robyn Dawes, professor at Carnegie-Mellon University and a widely recognized researcher on psychological evaluations, declares:

. . . there is no positive evidence supporting the efficacy of professional psychology. There are anecdotes, there is plausibility, there are common beliefs, yes—but there is no good evidence (Dawes, 58).

While the Passantinos refer to Dawes’ book in a footnote, they give little evidence to suggest they read it.

Those who have been paying attention to the research have been sounding alarms about psychotherapy. In his book *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, Dr. Thomas Szasz warns:

My point is rather that many, perhaps most, so-called psychotherapeutic procedures are harmful for the so-called patients . . . and that all such interventions and proposals should therefore be regarded as evil until they are proven otherwise (Szasz, xxiii).

Michael Scriven, when he was a member of the American Psychological Association Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility, questioned “the moral justification for dispensing psychotherapy, given the state of outcome studies which would lead the FDA to ban its sale if it were a drug” (Scriven, 96). The outcome studies continue to confirm the results upon which the remarks by Szasz and Scriven were based.

After reviewing all the research, one could conclude that professional psychotherapy is one of the biggest and most vicious ripoffs that has ever been perpetrated on the American public and that it is one of the greatest deceptions in the church today. When he was president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, Dr. Lawrence LeShan said, "Psychotherapy may be known in the future as the greatest hoax of the twentieth century." It may also be known as the greatest heresy of twentieth-century Christianity.

Even *The Family Therapy Networker*, a publication by and for psychological counselors, is honest enough to report:

Money is not the only worm in the golden apple of old-time therapeutic practice. Books citing the irrelevance, incompetence, venality and even downright criminality of therapists have become this year's literary growth industry, aimed at a mass market of apparently disillusioned therapy consumers. At the same time, a plethora of outcome research studies paints a troubling picture of the profession, finding virtually no empirical evidence that any one therapy model is significantly more or less effective than any other.

Finally, as if this weren't enough bad news, therapists over the past 10 or 15 years have been made to realize just how culture bound, parochial and downright discriminatory some of their most cherished theories and models actually have been (Nov/Dec 1994, p. 10).

Because the efficacy of professional psychotherapy has not been fully demonstrated, Alexander Astin contends that "psychotherapy should have died out. But it did not. It did not even waver. Psychotherapy had, it appeared, achieved *functional autonomy*" (Astin, 62, italics his). Functional autonomy occurs when a practice continues after the circumstances which supported it are gone. Astin is suggesting that psychotherapy has become self-perpetuating because there is no support for its efficacy. Astin concludes his comments with the following dismal note:

If nothing else, we can be sure that the principle of functional autonomy will permit psychotherapy to survive long after it has outlived its usefulness as a personality laboratory (Astin, 65).

Professional psychotherapy has not been affirmed by scientific scrutiny and only remains because of the usual inertia that results when a movement becomes established and then entrenched. Worse yet, because integrationists have mixed psychotherapeutic theories with the very Word of God, many professing Christians have incorporated these notions into their belief system and added them to the scenery of their so-called Christian world view.

In *The Emperor's New Clothes* after the little boy cried out, "He has no clothes!" the people knew that what the boy said was true. The greatest tragedy was not the discovery (no clothes), but the continuation of the deception by the emperor. The story goes on:

The Emperor squirmed. All at once he knew that what the people said was right. "All the same," he said to himself, "I must go on as long as the procession lasts." So the Emperor kept on walking, his head held higher than ever. And the faithful minister kept on carrying the train that wasn't there (Andersen).

And so, like the naked emperor, psychotherapy and all its psychologies will go on “as long as the procession lasts.” And, CRI and the Passantinos will probably continue in that charade of a parade “as long as the procession lasts.” For many of us the procession is over. The cure of minds (psychotherapy) never was and never will be a satisfactory replacement for the cure of souls (biblical ministry).

Perhaps the Passantinos consider that their openness to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies demonstrates open-mindedness. However, Jonathan Adler, a professor of philosophy at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, has said, “What truly marks an open-minded person is the willingness to follow where evidence leads. The open-minded person is willing to defer to impartial investigations rather than to his or her own predilections” (Adler, 44). The Passantinos’ lack of open-mindedness should leave many open-mouthed at their open-door recommendations and conclusions.

Some of those who have researched the effectiveness of psychotherapy have likened themselves to the doggedly optimistic boy in the old joke, who was found cheerfully digging his way through a large pile of horse manure. When asked why, he responded, “With all of this horse manure, there must be a pony in here somewhere!” The Passantinos’ hoped-for pony is not there; what you see in this illustration is what you get.

Much more could be written about the failure of the Passantinos to deal objectively and extensively with the complexity of the issues involved. This book only touches upon some of their errors. To make it convenient for the reader to compare our response to the Passantinos’ articles, we respond to each article (Part One, Part Two, etc.) in the series and use the same section headings as they do, though for the sake of brevity we do not respond to all of them.

While the Passantinos have written on a variety of issues, the psychology and the church issue is one they should have left alone. Their many failings in this four-part series are probably traceable to their “predilections” about psychology and were possibly supported and influenced by their friendships with certain individuals. Their foregone conclusions were visible throughout all of the four parts and were no doubt the driving force behind their use of so many logical fallacies to “prove” their position.

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Published by EastGate Publishers
Santa Barbara, California

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