
BACK TO THE BASICS IN ATTACHMENT TO GOD: REVISITING THEORY IN LIGHT OF THEOLOGY

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This article argues that contemporary theories of attachment to God lack a clear and coherent theological basis. The absence of theological argument weakens attachment theory as applied to relationships with God on three main grounds. First, cognitive social models easily slip into reductionism. Second, these models fail to consider fully the attributes of God to whom the individual attaches. Third, these models overlook that relationships with God and humans could include inter-subjectivity. Trinitarian theology as proposed by Colin Gunton is discussed and its usefulness for attachment theory examined. It is argued that models of attachment to God based in trinitarian theology can provide a coherent account of the origins of human relationship with God and of human inter-subjectivity. They can also suggest reasons for the existence of compensatory motivation, offer developmental models of spiritual maturity and draw attention to the importance of relationships with the Christian community for spiritual development.

Attachment theory is a powerful account of the formation of relational bonds that provide for physical survival and psychological security throughout the lifespan. It integrates findings from ethology, and from biological, psychodynamic, and cognitive-affective theories in psychology. Analyses of attachment bonds between infants and caregivers have been extended to attachments between romantic partners and other adult relationships. Work by Kirkpatrick and colleagues from the 1990s (Kirkpatrick 1992, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) extended the scope of attachment analyses to the relationship between a believer and God. They argued God is a perfect attachment figure for believ-

ers, and that behaviours of believers with respect to God at times of crisis or distress could be viewed as attachment behaviours. This was an important new direction in the psychology of religion. Nonetheless, their theory is limited because it relies on cognitive-affective approaches to attachment, and neglects a fully-developed theological basis. Todd Hall (2004) more recently presented a relational theory of attachments (including attachment to God), labelled the implicit relational representational theory. It represents a careful synthesis of attachment, contemporary psychoanalytic and emotional information processing theories. However, neither the cognitive nor the relational theories of attachment to God refer to a clearly articulated theological framework. A theological framework is particularly important if psychology is to interact with any confessional theological position, one which assumes the existence of, and revealed nature of, God. This article examines the consequences of such a deficiency, proposes one alternative approach by outlining a corrective grounding in trinitarian theology, and sketches some implications of trinitarian theology for understanding attachment to God.

The problem

Psychological theories of attachment to God have developed as analogues of human attachments, with little attention paid to ways in which God might be different from human attachment figures- most obviously, that God is not a physical being whose form and response to human beings can be observed. The relationship between a person and God has been conceptualised as an attachment relationship in the work of Kirkpatrick and colleagues since 1990. God theoretically functions as an attachment figure because monotheistic religions hold to belief in a personal God whose loving qualities are similar to the ideal parent (Kirkpatrick, 1997a). One's relationship

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with God serves many of the functions of attachment, such as providing a safe haven and secure base, while the individual may demonstrate attachment-characteristic behaviours towards God such as seeking proximity, a safe haven and a secure base, and manifesting separation anxiety (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Specifically, Kirkpatrick (1992) cited supplicatory prayer, attendance at church to experience closeness to God, and glossolalia (likened to infant babbling and demonstrating a need for confidence and security, although or it could also be likened to more erotic or intimate connections) as examples of behaviours related to religious attachment. Nonetheless, he recognized that these behaviours are multiply determined and hence, they cannot reliably indicate attachment behaviours in themselves. The concept of separation anxiety is problematic in relation to a being presumed to be omnipresent, although accounts of people experiencing God as being distant, or utterly transcendent, are common (Hood, 1995). Indeed there is a long tradition of reflecting upon God's perceived absence in theology, understood as 'the long dark night of the soul.'

Subjective experiences of God also vary considerably and are influenced by situational and cultural factors (Hood 1995). Sacred texts and related theological writings shape human knowledge of God, and attributions of experiences to God (Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). There are obvious differences between Jewish, Christian and Muslim understandings of God, yet accounts of attachment to God, although based on research within Christian cultures, are presumed to apply across all the monotheistic religions, and even to religions in which God is seen as impersonal and distant (Sim & Loh, 2003). This is a contentious claim and requires careful theological examination.

Psychological theories depict attachment to God as shaped, or mediated, by early relationships between the infant and caregiver. The cognitive model of attachment to God (as proposed by Kirkpatrick and colleagues, noted above) holds that mental representations of a person's attachment relationship with God are generalizations from representations, or internal working models (IWMs), of human attachment figures. For this reason measures of IWMs associated with parents or romantic partners generally correspond to IWMs associated with God (Kirkpatrick, 1992). However, partial support was also found for compensatory attachment (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1997b;

Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990) where persons with insecure attachment histories are likely to experience sudden, compensatory religious conversion. The role of religious socialization is also critical for the development of secure attachment to God in those with secure parental attachments (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Hagerkull, 1999). Whereas the cognitive models hold that the motivation for attachment to God is an evolutionary-based drive for survival through protection from predators (Bowlby, 1969, 1986, 1988) and working models are potentially available to conscious awareness (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992) the relational model of attachment to God proposed by Todd Hall (2004) holds that the motivation for religious attachment is a need for felt security and that working models are unconscious, implicit representations of relationships. Preliminary findings give qualified support to the relational model (Hall, Halcrow, Hill & Delaney, 2005) that views patterns of relating to God as shaped by implicit relational representations formed through attachment interactions with caregivers.

The idea that implicit or explicit representations of human attachments underpin, or mediate, representations of attachment to God is very close to the projection hypotheses – that our representations of God are nothing but ascribing human qualities to God. Theological considerations of attachment to God can be helpful in avoiding such reductionism. On the other hand, it would be possible to provide a limited theory of attachment to God by bracketing the question of God's existence and then examining perceptions of purported relationships with God. Such an approach would be non-reductionist. No theological considerations are necessary for this position, although it could not provide a complete explanation of attachment to God if God does exist. As will be shown below, the foundational theory of attachment to God, as proposed by Kirkpatrick and colleagues, refers to theologians who uphold the existence of God as partial warrant for their claims and hence does not bracket the existence of God.

There is no theological analysis in the work of Kirkpatrick, although it appeals to selected theologians for support, and theorists who have revised his formulations have not attempted to relate their work to theology. In one article (Kirkpatrick, 1992) there is reference to the equation by the nineteenth century German Christian theologian, Schleiermacher, of religious experience with "feelings of absolute dependence" as buttressing Kirkpatrick's claim that religion

is rooted in the need for security. However, the sense of absolute dependence for Schleiermacher (1821/1928) is not a consequence of humans striving for security in God. Rather, it is a consciousness of God found in all people and reflects the dependence of the world on God as creator and sustainer, despite the fact that not all people are aware of this dependence and some deny it:

The immediate feeling of absolute dependence is presupposed and actually contained in every religious and Christian self-consciousness as the only way in which, in general, our own being and the infinite Being of God can be one in self-consciousness. (p. 131)

Hence, the idea of absolute dependence is not the product of self-reflection, nor a projection of our needs upon the divine, but can be understood as “an intuition of God . . . preceding any particular language or culture. . . . God is the prior reality behind all such constructions and entanglements of history” (Hoggard Creegan, 1995, p. 68). For this reason, the appeal to Schleiermacher to support the view that a relationship with God develops from a sense of insecurity cannot succeed.

More consistently in his theoretical papers, there is an appeal to Gordon Kaufman for theological warrant (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Typically, Kirkpatrick refers to Kaufman as a modern theologian who has considered links between Bowlby’s description of attachment and Christian views of God. One quotation from Kaufman’s work is commonly cited:

the idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure . . . We need not debate here whether mother-imagery or father-imagery would be more to the purpose: the point is that God is thought of as a protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need. (Kaufman, 1981, p. 67)

Although Kaufman is referenced repeatedly in Kirkpatrick’s writings it would be unwise to develop a theological grounding for attachment to God solely in Kaufman’s theology which is rooted in existential and historical analysis. Kaufman’s (1981) thesis is that God cannot be known directly but only through symbols constructed throughout history to give an overall world view, including the purposes and goals of the cosmos. Images that constitute the symbol ‘God’ have elements of transcendence (power) and humaneness (extensions of human wishes and desires). For Kaufman, descriptions of God (as mighty warrior in the Mosaic period, for example) were reified into an independently existing being,

forming a character in a story and then lifted out of the story to become the notion of God. Hence, God is thoroughly transcendent. God’s humaneness is specified essentially as suffering love, shown in the man Jesus Christ who is regarded as the definitive revelation of God in history. The purpose of theology, he asserts, is to provide concepts of God that will function as an ultimate point of reference in contemporary life where a key problem is ontological anxiety. Such anxiety about death and the meaning of life arises because of problematic human relationships and human finitude.

There are a number of difficulties in Kaufman’s (1981) book if a theological basis for religious attachment is sought. First, God is viewed as utterly transcendent, thus ruling out all possibility of direct experience of God. Kaufman’s work is also inconsistent with traditional Christian (and Jewish) understandings of God as personal and immanent and relational, all of which are incorporated within a Trinitarian theology. It fails to account for the initial descriptions of God (such as a mighty warrior) and their accuracy (as based on actual encounters with God or as human projections). Second, his grounds for an adequate concept of God are questionable. Kaufman asserts that his concept of God is not based on revelation, but on what is “an appropriate focus for human devotion and service” and provides “proper understanding of human existence” (p. 46). Thus he is not working within a realist orthodox Christian paradigm which includes Scripture as revelation and as the primary source of knowledge of the divine. Kaufman addresses what is proper and appropriate in terms of “authentic human fulfilment” (p. 41) and community values such as love and freedom. This is a human-focused and functional approach to God and projects culturally conditioned ideals onto God. Third, his view of attachment to God is limited to a cognitive perspective because he holds that one can know oneself, and God, only as symbols and not directly. Fourth, the empirical work cited in the last decade of research on attachment to God (Granqvist, 2002; Hall et al., 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1997b, 1998) demonstrates that people do not consider God to be a symbol, nor an impersonal object of devotion, but rather a personal being who is held to interact with humans. Thus Kaufman’s symbolic view of God is not immediately relevant to most people’s thinking about God. Fifth, Kaufman sees concepts of God arising out of ontological anxiety, the anxiety of confronting death and the meaning of life, but fails to show how

human symbolic and imaginative activity can bear the weight of existential anxiety. Finally, although a Christian theologian, Kaufman does not address the trinitarian nature of God in his discussion of attachment. This makes his notion of God inconsistent with much that is revealed about God in Christian and Jewish Scriptures.

The need for a Trinitarian theology

Current theories of attachment to God lack a clear presentation of the God to whom humans are supposed to attach. These theories assume that a generic description of "God" will apply to all religions, and where theology is mentioned it is not contemporary theology and cannot fully address issues of relationality. Since theological differences between the monotheistic religions are important, this article will address specifically Christian theology. Nonetheless, theologies of attachment to God based on Jewish and Muslim belief systems are also needed, and only then can commonalities and differences be specified. Much that is argued here, however, will be relevant to a Jewish understanding which also affirmed both the immanence and the transcendence of God, together with many names or hypostases for God, who was always known as personal and relational.

When we are considering an attachment relationship with God it is important to remember that for Christians, God is Trinity. Much of recent Christian theology has an explicitly trinitarian basis (Barth, 1975; Edwards, 1999; Gunton, 1993; Gunton, 2002; LaCugna, 1991; McGrath, 1997; Moltmann, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1998; Rahner, 1970; Torrance, 1996; Volf, 1996) although there is a broad spectrum within Christian trinitarian theologies. In addition to differences between Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians, there are differences within these traditions, corresponding to emphases on particular political and social concerns. For example, Catholic theologian Anne Hunt asserts:

Social models of trinitarian theology are evidently in favour. By social models, I mean trinitarian theologies that focus on the Trinity as a community of persons and seek to explicate the social and political ramifications of that understanding of the Trinity for human community. It is as though, after centuries of concern for trinitarian orthodoxy, we have now come to the point of seeking a trinitarian orthopraxis. (1998, Footnote 1)

Theological statements about God as Trinity arose from the need to give an account of the divinity of Jesus, and then the nature of the Holy Spirit.

Alister McGrath (1997) traces the development of the doctrine from New Testament references to where prayers were offered in the name of Father, Son and Spirit, through the writings of the apostolic fathers, and then through a more extensive examination of theology in the ecumenical councils of the fourth century. By the time of the Chalcedonian Council of 451 western Christianity held to one Godhead (one *ousia*, substance or being) in three *hypostases*, or persons, or modes of origin (the Son begotten, Spirit proceeding, Father neither begotten nor proceeding). The coinherence, or *perichoresis*, of the three was also asserted. Translated as "mutual interpenetration" in English, *perichoresis* "allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two" (McGrath, 1997, p. 298). It is an important statement of how God can be understood as both a unity, but also as distinct persons, and how God can be very near, but also the ultimate causes of all there is.

Since much of the literature on attachment to God considers the analogy of parental-child relationships, are there good reasons for viewing God the Father as a member of the Trinity, rather than simply as Creator/Father? A trinitarian perspective is important because a focus solely on the Creator/Father ignores a) the roles and characteristics of other members of the Godhead and how they contribute to God as Father, b) how God as Father acts, c) how God as Trinity acts, and d) the relationships within the Godhead of importance for understanding human relationships with God and with other humans. Divine relationships can be seen as models for human relationships, particularly relationships within the communion of the church, and hence a trinitarian view of the mutuality of self-giving love both explains and motivates human relationships (Volf, 1996).

Which trinitarian theology is likely to be most helpful for an understanding of attachment to God? Clearly, a contemporary social model is needed because a social model will allow for psychological and communal applications, and hence will elucidate how humans can relate to God. In the preferred model the problem of whether and how people can know God must be addressed. In addition, a careful analysis of the unity of the Trinity together with the particularly of the Persons constituting the Godhead must be given. Basic to a trinitarian model of God is the concept of God as distinct but inter-relating persons (McGrath, 1997). However, this could be seen

as projective. La Cugna (1991) recognizes this critique from thinkers such as Freud and Fierbach, and states that such criticism arises from a doctrine of God constructed from philosophy, not the self-revelation of God in Christ. Hence she (and many contemporary theologians following the work of Karl Rahner (1970)) argues that a core premise for theology is that God's nature is revealed through salvation history. Although many theologians in the late twentieth century were thoroughly trinitarian this article will focus on one as a model for the psychology/theology interface. Other theologians will be briefly mentioned, and their ideas will be developed in future essays. A contemporary systematic theologian who carefully considers how people can know and relate to the Trinitarian God, with full consideration of God's revelation in salvation history is Colin Gunton (1985, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2003). Gunton's writing is lucid and accessible to psychologists who may not be trained in theology and philosophy. His work will be examined in detail as a foundation for a theology of attachment to God. It is not possible to give a full critique of his work in this article; rather, major themes will be summarized, some difficulties noted, and relationships with some contemporary theologians will be considered.

Gunton's Theology a) God is Knowable and a Trinity.

A critical first question, if an attachment relationship with God is to be postulated, is whether humans can have subjective (experiential) and/or objective (propositional) knowledge of God. A key premise of Gunton's theology is that "God is trinitarianly knowable" (Gunton, 2002, p. 110). God is objectively knowable, but sets conditions and limits to human knowing of God. No person can know God by direct vision, but we can know God by God's activity towards the created world. "If we know the Father through the Son and in the Spirit we know the being of God" (2002, p. 112). The knowledge is a form of personal relation. We know God through God's entering the world as the Son and transforming human relations, but this also gives rise to knowledge that God is love. Here, Gunton asserts a movement from relational knowing to objective knowledge. Nonetheless, Gunton is aware of the (post-Wittgenstein) relativity of human language and thought to cultural context, and he asserts that the Spirit makes the words expressing our knowledge adequate to the

task. As well as being knowable, Gunton asserts, the Trinitarian God is Spirit and love. God's Spirit is communicable—it is what enables human beings to be open to God and is one implication of our creation in the image of God. God is Spirit, we have spirit, and God's Spirit means he crosses ontological barriers to interact with and become part of what he is not. Also, as revealed in 1 John 4, God is love: Gunton states that this is God's being. Since God is relational love and Spirit, three persons in loving relationship, humans can have experiential knowledge of God. This experiential knowledge, in turn, is the basis for human relationships (asserted by Gunton via his exegesis of 1 John 4).

Gunton's epistemology is radically different from Kaufman's (1960, 1981) position that works within a Kantian model separating the knower from the known and hence maintains that things are only grasped as appearances and not directly. In Kaufman's view the mind imposes form on reality (provides a framework of meaning) and there is a rupture between sense and reason. In contrast, Gunton (1985) argues that since Kuhn (1970) and Polanyi (1962) critiqued the modern contention that only rational, objective knowledge can lay claim to truth, there is genuine personal knowledge; reality is prior to rationality and genuine knowledge establishes contact with reality. This is consistent with a Trinitarian personal, immanent creator God. Scriptural texts are not just human projections, but human language about (at heart) shared reality. The reason that words fit the real world is because the world as created is inherently rational. God as Spirit, operating within worldly reality, enables us to understand and speak the truth. For Gunton, personal knowledge of God (through Jesus in the world) gives rise to intellectual knowledge (that God is love). In giving priority to relational knowing, although still maintaining objective knowledge of God, Gunton (1985) manages to avoid the charge of essentialism but nonetheless allows for genuine knowledge of God.

In asserting a God who is partly knowable, Gunton (2002) uses biblical exegesis of John 1: 18 and I John 4:7 to support his position. However, he is denying the tradition of negative theology that holds to the utter mystery and transcendence of God (via adjectives such as invisible, uncreated, indefinable etc.). Other contemporary theologians argue that God's attributes can be known through God's salvation acts (see the emphasis on equality in LaCugna (1991); Moltmann's (1981) account of God as loving; Torrance's (1996)

claim that God as Trinity may be apprehended through daily Christian life, Scripture and theological reflection, although the deep mystery of the Trinity remains). Nonetheless, it is a difficulty in Gunton's work that he strongly attacks negative theology and does not address intermediate positions, such that God may be apprehended (but not known) via immediate intuition. Gunton's strong claim that God is knowable through salvation history places some weight on biblical texts (including accounts of Jesus) and human capacity to interpret them correctly since these texts point to Jesus as God-in-the-world and are a means of knowing God in Christ. Intermediate positions that allow for at least some immediate intuition of God and do not assert knowledge of God in a strong sense are also compatible with the thesis of this article. Both strong and intermediate positions allow for attachment relationships of varying directness. In his 1993 book, "The One, the Three and the Many" Gunton advocates a trinitarian understanding of reality. His aim is to demonstrate that God "writes plurality into the being of things" (p. 151) and hence, God is revealed through the relationality of creation; by this Gunton completely reverses Kaufman's project. Gunton develops his trinitarian theme by first arguing that God's actions in the world and relationship with the world (the 'economy' of God's actions as Father, Son and Spirit in the world) necessarily reflect the being of God. He asserts:

Because the one God is economically involved in the world in those various ways, it cannot be supposed other than that the action of Father, Son and Spirit is a mutually involved personal dynamic. It would appear to follow that in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and interanimation. (p. 163)

The second aspect of the trinitarian argument relates to substance. The substance of God is Spirit and Gunton uses a theology of Spirit in order to establish the particularity (three Persons) of God. As revealed by God the Holy Spirit's actions in the world, Spirit crosses boundaries and brings what is separated into particularities together, but in a way that maintains each particular. A key doctrine of the Holy Spirit in patristic theology is that the Spirit perfects creation, and hence "realizes the true being of each created thing" (1993, p. 189). If the Spirit has this latter work in creation, then Gunton argues that the Spirit must also have the same work of realizing particular being with respect to the other Persons of the Trinity: "Therefore, not only must we say, with Augustine, that the Spirit is the unifying link between Father and Son;

it is even more necessary to add that he is the focus of the distinctiveness of Father and Son—of their unique particularity" (1993, p. 190). Hence, Gunton argues that God is a community of persons who nonetheless retain distinctiveness through the action of the Spirit. This leads to a general conclusion that the universe as a whole is marked by relationality—things are particulars constituted by relation. God essentially is a being in relation. Such a view of God as the present and knowable Being-in-Relation to the world is very different from Kaufman's (1981) view of God as utterly transcendent and known indirectly through symbols.

b) God's Subjectivity and the Divine Attributes Foundational for Relationality

Gunton's view of the relationality of God offers a way of asserting subjectivity *and* objectivity in God-world relationships. The relationality of God includes both subject and object. Since God's being is relational, or reciprocal, there is the safeguarding of subjectivity (agency, emotion) and objectivity (a real other):

Corresponding to the reciprocity of the Father and Son in the Spirit is conceived the reciprocity of the "I" and the "it", of subject and object. Because of the polarity of being in God, the polarity of self and world is also maintained. (Gunton, 1985, p. 88)

Jesus as the revelation of God is also a demonstration of objectivity and subjectivity: He is subjectively God but also an objective revelation of God to others. Whereas Gunton (1993) takes a classical theological stance in that he emphasises the otherness of God and the world, he also asserts the immanence of God acting within the believer through the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit acts to: 1) make possible now what is promised at the end of time, including moral goodness; 2) relate people to Jesus and to each other in community; 3) work within the believer while respecting the independence and autonomy of the agent. In brief, the Spirit is "God creating authentic human reality in the here and now" (1985, p. 103). Here, Gunton is arguing that God is the basis for all human relationships (including attachment relationships). In contrast, Kaufman's constructionist theology fails to assert God's objectivity and his emphasis on God's transcendence denies God's subjectivity in attachment relationships.

In "Act and Being" (Gunton, 2002) the attributes of God and their implications for human relationships are addressed. God is Spirit and since this is a

communicable attribute it is imparted to other beings. That God is Spirit is not simply that God is non-material, but that God encompasses spirit and matter. Hence, God crosses ontological boundaries and is able to become and redeem what God is not. In addition to being spirit, God is love: God's loving actions are grounded in the reality that God is love (1 John 4). The paradigm loving action is sending the Son as a sacrifice for sins, thus revealing God's holiness (a description that includes God's "otherness from the world as its creator, purity as its redeemer and judge, holiness as the consistency between God's being and his action" (p. 117). Other attributes of a holy, loving God follow: patience, mercy, wrath, grace and justice. These are all attributes seen in God's actions in time, mediated through the Son and Spirit, and revealing the eternal being of God. Hence, Gunton draws on God's actions and trinitarian relations to posit core qualities of spirit and holy love—qualities that are foundational for relationship with humans. God demonstrates his agape love in the world through the Spirit. Hence, "men and women may become what they were created to be, those who are, because they are made in his image, like God" (p. 132) and thus share some of God's attributes by means of the Spirit of God. They are made to be open to God, and "share in that elusive reality called spirit" (p. 114). It is the love of God, present to all humans who are gifted with spirit at creation, that enables human agents to engage others in loving relationships (1 John 4:8, cited by Gunton, 2002, p. 116). This, then, is warrant for asserting that all humans can experience an attachment relationship with a loving God through the Spirit of God and then, equipped by spirit and love, can relate to others.

Gunton also addresses the question of whether God is affected by relationships with humans. This is important for attachment theory: if God is not moved by human sin and suffering, the attunement and reciprocity necessary for the inter-subjectivity of attachment relationships may be limited. Gunton argues that just as God suffers in the actions of the trinitarian members, although there are distinctions between persons of the Godhead, so God is moved by human suffering. The Crucifixion is a central example of perichoresis (mutual indwelling), and of Father, Son and Spirit involved in suffering. The Father "must be seen both to command and to suffer his Son's total identification with man under judgment" (2002, p. 129); the Son "actively allowed him-

self to be passively subject to the principalities and powers" (p. 128); the Spirit as the means of the Son's identifying with the lost human condition "enables Jesus' suffering to be redemptive, to make it of eschatological significance" (p. 130). Volf (1996) puts this more poetically in the idea of God' embrace of humanity on the Cross, where "the equality and reciprocity that are at the heart of embrace can be reached only through self-sacrifice" (p. 146) "which is nothing but the mutuality of trinitarian self-giving in encounter with the enemy" (p. 147).

In short, Gunton's trinitarian theology reveals a God who is ontologically relational, encompassing subjectivity and objectivity in God's being and actions. Whereas particularity of the Persons of the Godhead is emphasized, there is also unity achieved by the action of the Spirit to bind reality in love. God's attributes can be viewed as reflecting Father, Son and Spirit in unity, but mediated through the particular actions of Son or Spirit. In this way, all the work of God, and not just the 'Fatherly' role of creation, is also the work of the Father. God the Father, Son and Spirit suffer with and for humanity, as a means of embracing creation and thus affecting redemption. Such a view of God has specific implications for a theory of attachment to God. This will be examined in the next section.

Implications of trinitarian theology for attachment to God

It has been suggested previously that mediated theories of explicit attachment to God are problematic because they can slip into reductionism. In addition, they give a limited account of how an attachment relationship with God might arise and continue to meet human needs for safety and security. Basic to current theories of attachment to God by Kirkpatrick, Granqvist, and their colleagues (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1997) is the language and perspective of cognitive-affective representations. Attachment to God develops because mental representations of attachment to caregiver/s provide a template for religious socialization. Thus, explicit knowledge of God as communicated by formal teaching, behavioural examples and the like forms the content for "God representations" that have the same structure as "mother", "father" or "caregiver" representations. The structure of the caregiver representation comprises generalized notions of the self as worthy of care, and the other as able to provide appropriate care

as needed. Largely available to consciousness, attachment representations provide the template for incorporating explicit knowledge of God. There is no direct relationship with God: at most, there is human activity with respect to representations of God. From a theological perspective, this mediated view of God reduces God's power to intervene in human affairs directly, and hence reduces God's immediacy and potency as an attachment figure.

In contrast, trinitarian accounts of God can deepen relational psychological accounts of implicit attachment to God. Hall (2004; Hall et al., 2005) views the structure of attachment representations as unconscious. Hence, implicit aspects of relationships with caregivers form the foundation for appraising the meaning of information about God, and for developing a relationship with God. Explicit knowledge about God (such as religious teaching) that is consistent with this structure of relationship with God is retained, whereas inconsistent material is not processed and may remain as separated and unsystematized elements. Hall et al. (2005) assert that 'spiritual' processes that govern one's relationship with God are mediated by psychological processes for dealing with emotional information; similarly, psychological processes have spiritual foundations. As an example of a spiritual foundation they suggest "the longing to transcend one's self in relationship with God" (p. 15). If such a (psychological) longing is viewed as spiritual because of its content, it is hard to see how it differs from other psychological longings (such as for beauty) and how it can underpin basic psychological processes. However, if a longing for God is spiritual because it is derived (in some sense) from God, then it can govern psychological processes in a causal sequence. Trinitarian theology suggests how longing for God could arise, since humanity is created for relationship with God, and how psychological processes of attachment could reflect a broader ontological relationality. Moreover, Hall (2004) refers to relational psychoanalytic theories and recent work on biological bases of attachment (Schore, 1994; 2003a, 2003b). Both types of theories emphasize relationality as an encounter between two subjects, yet previous theories of attachment to God do not acknowledge that it could exhibit such inter-subjectivity. Again, trinitarian theology suggests such an inter-subjective account of attachment to God.

Gunton's trinitarian theology asserts that God is knowable in the personal sense of knowing rather

than merely as a symbol or other human construction. From such a theology the origins of an attachment relationship with God can be found, not as a projection or generalization from parental attachments, but based in the spiritual ontology of humans (we have spirit as part of our mind-body-spirit unity given by God at creation). Our capacity for human relationships is an outworking of this unity. Thus, the order of priority is changed. The capacity for, and actuality of, relationship with God is primary. Relationality is built into the fabric of all being because of the nature of God. We relate to others because we are capable of relating to God by being made in the image of God: we do not just develop an ability to relate to God because we relate to humanity, or to carers. From this contemporary trinitarian theological understanding Kaufman has the sequence backwards. Additionally, if humans are created in the image of God as ontologically relational and gifted with spirit, then there is an actual relationship between all humans and God, as Schleiermacher (1821/1928) insisted! Whether one is conscious of the relationship or not, the Spirit as the outward expression of love that perfects relationships holds all of humanity in unity with God (Gunton, 2002). This is not a realized *attachment* relationship unless it is sought by a person to fulfil needs for safety and security. Nonetheless, in attachment language the Spirit, acting as agent of the Father, holds each person in relationship just as a mother holds the newborn in relationship even before the newborn and mother can develop patterns of attunement. That is not to say that human relationship may not significantly interfere with natural capacities for relating to God. What is denied is that the God/human attachment is utterly dependent upon these relationships with carers.

Yearning for God can be seen as evidence of an 'inbuilt' awareness of the possibility of relationship:

The deep yearning and desire for God we find inscribed in our hearts is more intelligible if that desire is rooted in the very nature of God, that is, if God, too, yearns for and desires another, not out of need or lack but out of plenitude of love... Love seeks attachment and affiliation, never fragmentation, solitariness, or autonomy. Divine self-sufficiency is exposed as a philosophical myth (LaCugna, 1991, p. 353).

In this view, God is attuned to and desires relationship with humans. Human longing for God is a result of an innate, God-given capacity to pursue relationships. Humans are made in the image of God, thus sharing some of God's attributes as gifts

of the Spirit of God (Gunton, 2002). They are made to be open to God, "sharing in that elusive reality called spirit" (Gunton, 2002, p. 114). Hence there is the possibility for the attachment of two subjects, human and divine, interacting in a relationship.

In addition to maintaining humans in relationship with God, the Spirit of God bestows spirit on human beings so they can develop relationships with others. Thus, human attachment relationships develop between an infant and caregiver, allowing for the internalization of human attachment experiences in implicit (unconscious and nonverbally symbolized) and explicit (subsequently symbolized) representations (Hall, 2004). Consistently with trinitarian theology Hall et al. (2005) argue that implicit relational knowledge, rather than explicit theological teaching, is foundational for the quality of one's experience of attachment to God. Hence, Spirit-given capacities for human relationality, developed in primary attachment relationships, can become expressed in attachment relationships with God, in which God is sought as a haven of safety and a secure base. The caregivers who promote secure attachments can be seen as fulfilling a spiritual task because they are developing a means for a person to be able to *experience* relationship with God. Caregivers who are also members of a Christian community represent the church in this formative work since the whole congregation functions as 'church mother' to children engendered by the Spirit of God (Volf, 1998). In addition, parents and congregations provide teaching about God in order that implicit attachment experiences may become symbolized in verbal forms. This occurs when a person receives and incorporates content about God into the implicit structures of an attachment to God framework.

The above account, consistent with trinitarian theology, extends the correspondence model of attachment, such that secure attachment to a caregiver is associated with secure attachment to God (whether measured by explicit or implicit tools). However, it does not address consequences for a person with insecure attachment to a caregiver: can this person ever find security of attachment to God? For theories of explicit attachment this is the problem of whether God can compensate for insecure human attachments (Kirkpatrick, 1992; 1997b, 1999) and in Hall et al.'s (2005) implicit model it is the problem of motivational correspondence. Motivational correspondence refers to cases where an insecurely attached person is motivated towards reli-

gious conversion to overcome such attachment insecurity, but experiences of God are less than optimal because the new relationship with God is appraised via unconscious templates derived from early human attachment experiences. Trinitarian theology can provide a new perspective on this issue. Insecure human attachments might increase the salience of spiritual longings for relationship with God, but also God as Spirit is engaging the person with love and attunement. Human teaching about God as loving and relational would also motivate attachment behaviours towards God. In addition, qualities of secure attachment relationships offered and modelled within the Christian community would allow the explicit teaching about God to affect unconscious relational representations of God. This is also buttressed by the actions of the Holy Spirit since the capacity to relate scripture to the specific needs of a person in their emotional context is traditionally seen as the work of the Spirit in convicting the world of human sin, Christ's righteousness and the Father's judgment (John 16:8-11). Hence the Spirit working in the world, through psychological and social processes, gradually promotes spiritual transformation.

A trinitarian perspective thus suggests development in an attachment relationship with God. In human relationships an attachment with a caregiver is represented in cognitive-affective structures having conscious and unconscious components. These representations serve to provide filters and expectations concerning future relationships with people who are sought as providers of safety and security – other family members, romantic partners, close friends and counsellors (Hall, 2004). Hence, attachment relationships may move from greatest dependency in the infant-parent attachment phase to greater equality and reciprocity in later phases involving friends and partners, for example (Kobak, 1999). There could be similar development in one's attachment relationship with God. Initially it is God the Father who is sought as a haven of safety and a secure base and the attachment relationship with the Father is mediated by the Spirit. As the person develops in their spiritual maturity and security of attachment with God the Father they may experience more of a relationship of friendship with God the Son. This attachment relationship would still have qualities of approaching God as a safe haven, and moving into the world from God as a secure base, but would be marked by greater reciprocity of attachment behaviours. A study of New Testament narratives

(Popp et al., 2003) that analysed relational themes involving God, Jesus and people showed some significantly different responses to God and Jesus. Towards God (the Father) people responded with themes of “happy” (e.g. comfortable, loved, accepted) and “humble” whereas they responded to Jesus with the theme of “cooperate” (e.g. obeys, likes me, respects me, understanding). This suggests people today might differentiate between the Father and Jesus in attachment relationships. Some conflictual patterns were also evident, for example in the analysis of responses of the apostle Peter towards Jesus, a reminder that attachment relationships can be marked by degrees of anxiety and avoidance as well as security. However, this work by Popp et al. (2003) provides indirect evidence, and direct data from longitudinal studies of people’s attachment relationships to the Father and Jesus are needed.

Conclusion

This article has pointed to a lack of rigorous theological dialogue in the development of psychological theories of attachment to God. The cognitive-affective model of attachment to God, as developed by Kirkpatrick and colleagues, holds that representations of God are based on experiences with primary caregivers. Hence it is a mediated model, in which experiences of God are mediated by experiences with primary caregivers. A contemporary social theology of the Trinity, as presented by Gunton, allows for a fully inter-subjective attachment relationship between a person and God in which there are circular and reciprocal relationships involving the individual, parents, partners, the Christian community and the Trinity. It is both a direct and mediated model. This inter-subjective model of attachment to God would be partially consistent with mediated models, but it also gives theologically grounded reasons why people should be drawn to God as an attachment figure, how relationships of attachment to God might develop, and how scriptural texts might be powerful means of religious change and development in conjunction with attuned caregivers from the Christian community. This article can only mention some initial possibilities resulting from a dialogue between theories of attachment to God and Trinitarian theology. It is hoped that it will stimulate further dialogue between theologians and psychologists as they investigate how secure (and insecure) attachment relationships with God might operate.

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