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Neil O. Annandale

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Personality Theory and Pre-mortal Life

NEIL O. ANNANDALE, M.S.
Brigham Young University

Interest in the study of psychology and religion has increased in recent years. Leading researchers in this field have specified areas in need of further investigation, one of which is the development of personality theory from a theistic perspective. This article highlights the significance of a doctrine unique to LDS theology – pre-mortal life – and its potential contribution to personality theory. Implications of such a far-reaching view of personality for research and practice in counseling and psychotherapy are also presented.

Research in the field of Psychology and Religion has increased rapidly in recent years (see Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Scientists and practitioners alike are becoming more and more interested in the interplay between religion and psychology. Mental health professionals, whether they are primarily engaged in research or clinical practice, seem to be seeking answers to questions such as:

- What is the nature of the relationship between psychology and religion?
- What value does religion hold for psychology, and vice-versa?
- What significance does the study of psychology and religion offer for informing research, theory, and practice?

Many questions like these remain unanswered or only partly answered at best – and frequently controversy arises over the answers that have been posited.

The current motivation to advance knowledge in this area represents a remarkable change of attitude in a relatively short span of time. Though psychology, as well as medicine and science in general, can trace roots back to a time when religion was integral to a knowledge of healing (Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001a; Vande Kemp, 1996), approximately the past 100 years of psychology research represents a stark departure from – or even animosity towards – the inclusion of religion and the spiritual (Bergin, 2002).

Such ill feeling was clearly illustrated in the swift rebuttals, written by some of the most well-known psychologists of that time (Walls, 1980; Ellis, 1980), to an article advocating incorporating religion and spirituality in psychology (Bergin, 1980a).

In this article, Bergin (1980a) boldly pointed out psychology’s then-blatant neglect of values in research and practice, and affirmed the need for clinicians to consider and integrate a theistic belief system in their work. Met with fast and pointed resistance on the one hand, Bergin also received an overwhelmingly positive response from
a vast majority in support of his stance on the other hand (see Bergin, 2000; Swedin, 2003a). Bergin's article (1980a) and subsequent reply (1980b) to Ellis and Walls, combined with courageous efforts by concerned psychologists (Richards & Bergin, 1997) as well as influences outside of psychology (see Swedin, 2003b), seems to have blazed the way for a plethora of journal articles, books, and conferences focused on the study of Psychology and Religion.

Many leading researchers in the field of Psychology and Religion have shared their vision of the needed research agenda for the future (see Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001b). Future directions point toward, among other things, the need for further development of personality theory within a theistic framework (as called for by Richards & Bergin, 1997). In harmony with Richards & Bergin's call, this paper highlights the significance of a doctrine unique to LDS theology – the pre-mortal life – and its contribution to personality theory.

A basic examination of personality will first be presented, followed by a discussion of how the LDS doctrine of pre-mortal existence relates to personality theory. Finally, implications of this far-reaching view of personality for research and practice in counseling and psychotherapy will be presented.

**Personality Theory Definitions and Perspectives**

In this section, key terms are defined, developmental contributions to personality and the role of personality in mental functioning are examined; and finally, gospel perspectives regarding pre-mortal life which enhance the understanding of personality are discussed.

"Personality" seems to play a routine role in everyday conversation and vernacular. It is not uncommon for people to render judgments about another person's personal qualities in terms of personality. Although the public's "assessment procedures" stand in stark contrast to those of mental health professionals in terms of sophistication and comprehensiveness, it is nonetheless common practice for people to make references about one another in terms of "personality."

While frequent use of the term personality may seem to equate to broad familiarity with the term, this does not necessarily lead to uniform understanding. In order to establish a common ground for further discussion, it is helpful to clarify some basic definitions of the term, differentiating it from similar terms.

Millon, Davis, Millon, Escovar & Meagher (2000) provide helpful definitions for the word personality as well as for the related words temperament and character. The meaning of the word personality, which comes from the Latin term persona, "originally representing the theatrical mask used by ancient dramatic players," over time shifted in meaning from "external illusion to surface reality and finally to opaque or veiled inner traits" (Millon, et al., 2000, p. 4); thus, in the present definition:

Personality is seen as a complex pattern of deeply embedded psychological characteristics that are expressed automatically in almost every area of psychological functioning ... [and] is viewed as the patterning of characteristics across the entire matrix of the person. (Millon, et al., 2000, p. 4)

It follows that a personality trait is, then, "a long-standing pattern of behavior expressed across time and in many different situations" (Millon, et al., 2000, p. 4).

On the other hand, the word character refers to characteristics acquired during our upbringing and connotes a degree of conformity to virtuous social standards" while the word temperament "refers not to the forces of socialization, but to a basic biological disposition toward certain behaviors ... character thus represents the crystallized influence of nurture, and temperament represents the physically coded influence of nature" (Millon, et al., 2000, p. 4). Thus, notwithstanding the specific differences in definition, the terms temperament and character seem to lie within the circumference of the broader, more encompassing term of personality.

Having defined the term personality, it is useful to consider its role in mental functioning. According to Millon, et al. (2000), "personality may be seen as the psychological equivalent of the body's immune system" (p. 8). That is, just as the ability to stay healthy in an environment replete with harmful microorganisms is largely determined by the strength of the immune system, so does "the structure and characteristics of personality become the foundation for the individual's capacity to function in a mentally healthy or ill way" (p. 8). In other
words, when confronted with the stresses of life, it is a
person’s “overall personality pattern— that is, coping
skills and adaptive flexibilities— that determine whether
we respond constructively or succumb to the psychoso-
cial environment” (p. 8).
Millon, et al. (2000) also pointed out that “personality
inclines us toward the development of certain clinical
disorders rather than others” (p. 7). This is an important
point—it implies that the potential value of exploring
personality could extend far beyond just knowing
whether or not someone would be compatible, but to
the spiritual etiology of basic personality characteristics.

Theories of personality development, which fall within
theories of human development, enrich the understanding
of what it means to be human. A variety of perspectives
and approaches have contributed to knowledge in this area
e.g., Freud, Erickson, Piaget, Kolberg; see Berk, 2000), in
addition to theories focused on biology—anatomy, physi-
ology, genetics, and evolution theory (see Funder, 1997).
These perspectives more or less emphasize the inter-

c., cognitive, and biological aspects of personality.
Alternative views of personality and human develop-
ment include those that focus more on external environ-
mental influences, such as behaviorism and social learn-
ing theory. Berk (2000) points out that these two
schools of thought view development as “the result of
conditioning and modeling” (p. 32). Correspondingly,
from the point of view of social psychology, situations
and not personality are seen as the primary motivation

Despite the diversity of perspectives and emphases,
these theories serve as a valuable foundation. Although
there is no general consensus as to a comprehensive the-
ory of human and personality development, it seems
very true that personality combines internal biological
factors plus external environmental influences (Bergin,
2002). But left out of these theories is the role that pre-
mortal life plays in personality development.

Pre-mortal Life

The purpose of this section is to provide some founda-
tional truths about the pre-mortal life, or first estate
(Abraham 3:26, Jude 1:6), from which implications for
practice and research in counseling and psychotherapy can
be extrapolated. An overview of key principles related to
pre-earth life lead to suggestions of how knowledge of the
pre-mortal life can inform the practice of psychotherapy.
Also, implications for personality research incorporating
knowledge of the pre-mortal life will also be explored.

Both ancient (Romans 8:16) and modern (Hinckley,
1995) scriptures repeatedly affirm this remarkable truth
regarding individual human identity: all are the spirit
children of God. The following excerpt from the LDS
Bible Dictionary is especially instructive:

Every person is literally a son or a daughter of God, having
been born as a spirit child to Heavenly Parents previous to
being born to mortal parents on the earth (Hebrews 12:9).
Thus, each one of us is a dual being: an immortal spirit
body, clothed with a body of flesh and bone. (p. 776)

As spirit offspring of God, everyone lived with God in
a pre-mortal existence (Abraham 3:22) and received
“first lessons” in heaven (D&C 138:56); God’s plan of
salvation was taught during this time (Abraham 3:24-
27). In this primordial state every individual child of
God had agency and progressed to the same degree that
he/she chose right and exercised faith (Alma 13:3-4).
Writing about the conditions of the first estate,
President Joseph Fielding Smith stated, “During the
ages in which we dwelt in the pre-mortar state we not
only developed various characteristics and showed our
worthiness and ability, or lack of it, but we were also
where such progress could be observed” (Smith, 2000,
p. 14). Further, president David O. McKay noted that, as a
result of prevailing opportunities for growth during our
pre-earth life, “there were among those spirits different
degrees of intelligence, varying grades of achievement,
retarded and advanced spiritual attainment” (Smith,

From these beginning early stages of development, the
children of God progressed and developed to the point
that they, as spirits, were given the opportunity to become
clothed in a physical body via birth into mortality.
Regarding the dynamic interplay between biology,
environment and spirit as these relate to personality
development, Bergin (2002) has written:

Upon birth, mortal experience and pre-mortar disposi-
tions begin interacting to create our mortal personality
and character traits. As the brain and body mature, we
express our inclinations and acquire distinctive ways of
acting that emerge from within (our eternal spiritual
intelligence), from the body (genetics, brain chemistry, hormones, etc.), from learning (in the family, church, and social context) and from new impressions to our spirits from the Spirit of God. (Bergin, 2002, p. 29)

This perspective presents a more comprehensive understanding of personality development. Such a broad view of a person's development, then, extends beyond biology and environment, to beginnings that predate mortal birth. Such a transcendent view of human development empowers clinical counselors as well as researchers in numerous ways — in making sense of life, reinforcing the worth of souls, encouraging the eternal nature of the individual, improving career counseling, in enhancing the individual sense of Self, and increasing respect in viewing others.

**Implications for Practice**

1. **Making Sense of Life**

   Elder Boyd K. Packer (1983, p. 18) definitively declared, “There is no way to make sense of life without a knowledge of the doctrine of pre-mortal life. The idea that mortal birth is the beginning is preposterous. There is no way to explain life if you believe that.”

   This statement sets the precedence for the potential value of “likening” this doctrine to one’s own life, as well as integrating it into the professional work of clinical counseling. It is important to remember, however, that as fruitful as endeavors to do so might likely be, the use of explicitly spiritual interventions is ethically predicated on an assessment of the client's readiness and willingness to participate in such spiritual-based interventions (Richards & Bergin, 1997).

   One immediate implication that knowledge of the pre-earth life could have for counseling is in helping clients to understand life situations from an eternal perspective. Clients who are weighed down by the stress, trials, and vicissitudes of life can be immensely buoyed up when their overall outlook of life encompasses three phases of existence (pre-mortal, mortal, post-mortal), not just two (mortal, post-mortal), or even just one (mortality alone). Helping clients to see their present situations in life within the context of their earlier pre-mortal existence (and potential post-mortal), can be at once a healing and empowering experience. Clients who can view their present dilemmas from an eternal perspective may readily find solace and gain hope in God’s plan for their salvation as well as in their ability to endure life well (Edgley, 2002).

2. **Worth of Souls**

   Secondly, knowledge of the doctrine of a pre-mortal existence also empowers therapists to resist rejecting difficult clients as helpless, lost, and/or not worth the struggle to help them. Of course therapists prefer or enjoy working with certain clients and not with certain others. Although therapists may not noticeably alter their approach to therapy on account of client preference when working with different clients, it is likely that subtle differences in effort, interest, and energy do indeed exist. Unchecked biases toward certain clients may result in less than optimal service to those clients who, although difficult to work with, are often the most in need.

   Knowledge of the pre-mortal life can help therapists see clients, particularly those who are not very enjoyable to work with, in a more favorable light. While on the surface these individuals may appear aloof, unmotivated, irritating and a burden, beneath this “mortal overlay” resides a divine spirit with infinite potential — albeit presently far from being realized (Bergin, 2002; Ellsworth & Ellsworth, 1980). When counselors are able to clearly see this aspect of clients, they are then able to see far more than merely how the clients present themselves. In a sense, then, when counselors see clients for who they truly are, they may begin to curiously wonder about the client’s eternal potential and how to tap into innate resources. This view of clients enhances counselors’ abilities to conceptualize cases, by looking beyond the data obtained in a clinical interview or standardized assessment.

   Therapists already know to look for aspects of innate strengths and abilities that may only need to be pointed out in order to empower clients and instill hope. A significant change in therapeutic relationship and patterns of interaction may come about once counselors and clients begin working from a vantage point which includes knowledge of the pre-earth life.

3. **Eternal Nature**

   As alluded to in the previous paragraph, a counselor’s depth of assessment, understanding of the client, and case conceptualization abilities increase once the eternal spirit of the client is considered along with the presenting earthly-manifested problems. Speaking about the role of the spirit in clients’ well being, Elder Boyd K. Packer explained:
There is another part of us, not so tangible, but quite as real as our physical body. This intangible part of us is described as mind, emotion, intellect, temperament, and many other things. Very seldom is it described as spiritual. But there is a spirit in man; to ignore it is to ignore reality. There are spiritual disorders, too, and spiritual diseases that can cause intense suffering. The body and the spirit of man are bound together. Often, very often, when there are disorders, it is very difficult to tell which is which. (Packer, 1977, p. 59)

Adding the spiritual dimension (especially the potential influences of a person's first estate to current functioning) to the assessment process greatly enhances the clinician's ability to accurately and effectively understand and help clients.

4. Career Applications

Fourth, this view of personality development has application as a career counseling strategy. This view presupposes that clients possess innate strengths and unique individual qualities stemming from their progression in pre-mortality. Divine qualities are difficult if not impossible to assess in standard measures of values, likes, and interests commonly used in career exploration. Clients who are seeking help in choosing a career and/or a major in school may profit most from learning more about their core identity - who they truly are - their inherent strengths and natural abilities (see Ellsworth & Ellsworth, 1980).

When appropriate, clients may be encouraged to review their Patriarchal Blessings for glimpses into spiritual gifts and talents with which they have been endowed. Clients who engage in self-reflection, pondering about their mission in life, may thus experience profound insights about hopes and aspirations related to their purpose on earth - that may have originated in their life before.

5. Broadened Self-Concept

The fifth implication for counseling and psychotherapy involves the broadening of the concept of "self" and how clients view themselves and others. Client concerns generally comprise interpersonal difficulties and/or intrapersonal problems. Many clients are discouraged in life due to personal weaknesses or disabilities; others have developed negative views about others and interact correspondingly with them (to their detriment). Whatever the cause or manifestation of interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges, it is often the case that clients have lost sight of who they and others truly are - and thus think, act, and feel in accordance with this limited vision of human potential.

Clinical Application

Many clients' struggles are sustained by faulty views of themselves and/or others. Such clients may respond positively to exploratory discussions about their and others' intrinsic worth in light of the doctrine of pre-mortal life. Speaking about the power of gospel doctrine to change lives, Elder Boyd K. Packer stated:

True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. (Packer, 1986, p. 17)

Initial exploratory sessions of this doctrine - supporting intrinsic worth - may evolve into educational experiences for the client and motivate the client to seek further information about pre-mortal life and other remarkable truths. Counselors may also encourage clients to read certain books or passages of scripture, and to review/receive their Patriarchal Blessings - all in an effort to learn more about their pre-earth life characteristics and what applications this might have for them.

The idea that each person is much more than he/she may appear to be, that each has infinite potential and divine worth, may help parents to feel increased love and hope for their unruly children. It may help husbands and wives to more readily look for the good in each other, and strive to bring that good out. It may help individuals to love themselves and develop increased compassion for others, and to treat themselves and others with increased respect. Clients who are able to see themselves and others as more than simply people who live on earth with limited potential may find significant hope in such a transcendent concept as the "true doctrine" (Packer, 1986, p. 17) of pre-mortal life.

To illustrate how knowledge of this doctrine can be applied in individual counseling, a case study highlighting the fifth implication noted above is presented here.

Case Study

John, a single white male in his early 20's, was self-referred to the university counseling center for anger man-
agement concerns. Early sessions were devoted to information gathering and exploring his presenting concerns. In later sessions, John used the time to share experiences and bring up issues that arose during the week, as well as to discuss his concerns about the way he handled anger.

Throughout the course of treatment, several recurring themes began to emerge. One theme was the prominent role of God in John's life. This theme, as well as John's spiritually-oriented worldview, were readily noticeable in his use of religious words, in the way he would ascribe positive events and good fortune as blessings from God, and in his requests to pray. It was common for John to talk about things of a spiritual nature and from a religious point of view. This facilitated comfortable conversations with religious content that flowed easily between the secular and the spiritual.

Another of John's themes pertained to his desire to identify the root cause for his present predicament. He would regularly express frustration about his inability to change his resentment toward what he saw were the two primary sources of his anger problems: his environment and his biology. John frequently made reference to what he considered to be the poor, counter-productive parenting style of his parents — a style of relating to people that he felt was transferred to him — and to which he wanted to attribute his present problems. His affective intensity would rise and emotion would begin to show whenever he talked about the heated arguments and blaming battles that characterized all too many of the interactions between him and his parents.

Also relevant was that John had been diagnosed with hyperthyroidism just prior to beginning therapy, so some sessions focused on the possible role this condition might play on his inability to manage anger appropriately.

It was during a later session when the doctrine of the pre-mortal life was introduced into the therapy. This particular session had focused on his relationship with his mother and father, his upbringing, the possible interplay between his biology and the environment, and what influence all these contributed to who he is today. Since the focus had been primarily on weaknesses, thus far the search for answers had been limited to his present life only. At this point, a discussion about what made John uniquely "himself" was initiated — what the "pre-mortal John" might have been like, and what aspect of this spiritual side of John's development was expressed in his life. Essentially, this took the form of saying:

John, we have been talking about what influence biology and environment have had on your development. I am wondering, though, what it is that makes you uniquely you. It's something we haven't talked much about, what makes you uniquely you? For example, what do you think the "pre-mortal John" must have been like, and in what ways does that part of you find expression in your life now?

This intervention helped to shift the discussion from a deficit-focus to a strength-focus, and encouraged John to look beyond the limiting influences of this mortal world. It immediately helped to change his attitude and demeanor. The feeling in the room changed from a complaining, restless looking-outward for something/someone to blame to a more reflective and curious looking-inward. After some thought, and then with a smile born of discovery on his face, John shared his newly gained insight. He spoke of his sense of humor and the fact that he sings everywhere he goes as being personal qualities unique to himself. He also spoke of identifying a certain "stick-to-it-ness" about him, a persistence that he described as a faith-based principle he remembered learning on his mission, but something he felt was nevertheless unique about him.

In the following session, John mentioned that this intervention had really stimulated his thinking, that he had thought about this idea for sometime afterward and felt it was a good thing to consider what makes him uniquely himself, and what he may have brought with him from the pre-mortal life.

Implications for Research

Research into the divine as it relates to developing a personality theory from a theistic perspective is limited in the traditional sense of research methods. Trying to devise a highly controlled experimental design to measure the influence of the pre-mortal life on personality development seems to be a futile endeavor, for such influences would likely be near-impossible to quantify. Efforts to operationalize the impact of spiritual interventions that draw on the doctrine of the pre-earth life will probably be disappointing. Indeed, Slife, Hope & Nebeker (1999) have pointed out that fundamental assumptions of traditional science or modernism — i.e., universalism, materialism, atomism — are in competition
with basic conceptions of spirituality, leaving empirical methods at a disadvantage for accomplishing effective research in this area.

Although the study of spiritual phenomena in general does not readily fit with empiricism, alternative research methods (including a plurality of research methods) have been suggested as more conducive ways for investigating spiritual phenomena as it relates to mental health and the behavioral sciences (see Slife, et al., 1999; Slife & Williams, 1995). For example, qualitative research methods that “allow subjects to describe their own behaviors and experiences in the language native to their experience” (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 199) appear to be a reasonable approach for assessing pre-mortem life influences on personality development from the perspective of the individual.

It seems, however, that even alternative research methods may be limited in their ability to help researchers get at the nature of this relationship. Assuming that people believe in this doctrine, have reflected on the interplay and continuity of development from the pre-earth life to this life, and are willing to discuss such an intimate truth - the research task is, then, for people to accurately convey in words what they wish to communicate, and for researchers to accurately capture and understand what is being communicated. As it turns out, information on this topic appears to be primarily realized via post-hoc observations, personal reflection, personal revelation, and by studying the teachings of ancient and modern prophets. Limitations notwithstanding, quantitative and qualitative methodologies still have much to offer. For example, in the opinion of Richards & Bergin:

As long as researchers keep in mind the advantages and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies as they use them, progress can be made and they can avoid discounting or ignoring phenomena simply because they do not conform to their methodological assumptions. (Richards & Bergin, 1997, p. 322)

These authors also identified six quantitative research designs (analogical, survey, experimental, correlational, single-subject, and discovery-oriented designs) and five qualitative research strategies (phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, biographical, and case study) that hold great potential for advancing the knowledge base of “a spiritual strategy in personality and psychotherapy” (p. 322). By the same token, many of these research designs may offer workable means for productive study of the relationship between pre-mortem life and personality development.

For example, single-subject and discovery-oriented designs allow for convenient investigation with actual clients of pre-mortem life influences on personality development, as well as the impact of like interventions by counselors and psychotherapists who are willing to investigate spiritual phenomena and document their work (see Richards & Bergin, 1997). As noted earlier, qualitative research methods readily lend themselves to an in-depth look at such a profoundly personal process. Client/participant interviews, a common qualitative approach to data collection, may be conducted in clinical and/or research settings by the collaborative or solitary efforts of clinicians and academicians. Sample questions that may be posed to clients include:

- Do you believe you lived before you were born?
- What experiences in your life have led you to believe this, or confirmed this belief to you?
- What impact do you believe your pre-mortem life has had on your life?

The content of these interviews may then be approached using different research paradigms such as phenomenology and grounded theory.

A phenomenological approach to the questions asked would seek to uncover “the essence or structure of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 93: italics in original). Merriam (2002) explained, “The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it” (p. 93). Therefore, from this perspective, clients’ reports of how they came to believe in the pre-mortem life, experiences in earth life that have confirmed or reinforced these beliefs, as well as their perception of what impact this earlier state of eternal existence has had on their present life, would be the focus of the researcher’s attention. Statements such as “Please describe for me …” and “Tell me about …,” coupled with invitations to elaborate on comments and asking questions that probe into “the subjective experience of the individual” (p. 93), are key for facilitating rich data collection.
With respect to grounded theory, "the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the mode of inquiry is inductive" (Merriam, 2002, p. 142). This concept is similar to other qualitative research strategies. A unique aspect of this approach is the objective or goal of the research: "The end product of a grounded theory study is the building of substantive theory—that emerges from or is grounded in the data" (p. 142). Thus, following a process of data collection common in grounded theory studies, i.e., interviews and observations, not to mention other optional information gathering strategies that have been put forward, i.e., literature, previous research, letters, documentary materials, speeches, fictional material (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 142), researchers analyze the information obtained from participants using a procedure known as "the constant comparative method of data analysis" (p. 143; ital. in original). With this method, Units of data deemed meaningful by the researcher are compared with each other in order to generate tentative categories and properties, the basic elements of grounded theory. Through constantly comparing incident with incident, comparing incidents with emerging conceptual categories, and reducing similar categories into a smaller number of highly conceptual categories, an overall framework or substantive theory develops. (Merriam, 2002, p. 143)

This approach appears particularly useful when seeking to develop a personality theory that incorporates the role of the pre-mortals life, based on participant responses to questions about the relationship between the pre-earth life and their development in this life.

Case studies and biographical reports also hold much potential for illuminating the processes involved in personality development when pre-mortals life influences are taken into account. The impact of spiritual interventions centered on the doctrine of the pre-mortals life with clients in counseling may also be profitably highlighted in such reports.

Consistent with the foregoing qualitative strategies, an alternative approach may be to invite persons to share their "life-story," inviting the inclusion of a pre-earth life chapter in their personal narratives, the substance of which stories may be analyzed by "a provisional framework for studying the individual person in the cultural context of modernity" as put forward by McAdams (1996, p. 316). It is hoped these example research designs will promote creativity and engender optimism for future research on this subject.

Difficult as it may be to study the connection between pre-mortals life and personality development, communicating this notion with non-believing colleagues and clients can be an even greater challenge. Perhaps the lines for communicating such sacred truths in language that is likely to be foreign to many non-LDS psychologists will open when theistic psychotherapy becomes recognized as a viable and credible approach to counseling and psychotherapy. The fact that challenges (to researching and communicating results) exist does not mean LDS researchers should disregard this fundamental aspect in research or clinical practice. Until events transpire that open the way for further research and opportunities to communicate the connection between the pre-mortals life and personality development, LDS psychologists should be "anxiously engaged" (D&C 58:27) in preparing for opportunities to do so.

Conclusions

The literature on psychology and religion continues to grow. More and more studies are being conducted, theoretical work is being carried out, and other efforts are underway to advance knowledge in this expanding field. One of the areas of work within this subdiscipline is the development of personality theory from a theistic framework. This paper has highlighted the significant contribution the LDS doctrine of pre-mortals life can make to the understanding of personality and human development. Elder Neal A. Maxwell eloquently and concisely conveys the essence of this paper's intended message:

"Genes and environment by themselves will never provide an adequate explanation for human differences because there is a third factor in the equation of this life: all that occurred before we came here ... trailing traits from our lengthy and extensive experience in the pre-mortals existence. (Maxwell, 1997, p. 264)

Numerous implications for counseling and psychotherapy arise in light of this connection between our first and second estates (see Swedin, 2003b). For example, hope is
engendered, counselor positive regard for the client is increased, and case conceptualization ability is improved. While research methodology and efforts to communicate these truths to non-LDS colleagues and clients seem to be obstacles now, the ideas discussed herein represent just one example of an effort to rise to the challenge and advance the understanding of psychology in light of “doctrines [that] were restored in this, the dispensation of the fullness of times, a time of refreshing” (Maxwell, 2003, p. 35).

References


