

Integration: An Amalgamation of Psychology with Theology

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986 (Rev. 90,99)

Introduction: The trend among some "Christian counselors" has been to see where psychological approaches can be brought into one's system of Christian belief. The thought behind this concept of "integrating" psychology with one's theology is that the error's within psychology can be stripped away leaving something that compliments or even enhances Christian counseling. One group of psychologists who practice "integration" have done so because they believe, "both psychology and the Bible provide information for daily living as well as information about how human beings can be expected to think and behave in various environments...."¹

THEME: Is psychology compatible with theology (and God's Word)? Can they be mixed together? Or, are they mutually exclusive?

1. WHAT IS "INTEGRATION?"

The term "integration" is defined as "to make into a whole by bringing all parts together; unify: to join with something else; to unite."²

Two integrationists tried to clarify this position by stating, "Psychology is raising questions and providing data that bear on our theological understanding of the human being; and theology expresses divinely revealed truths that speak to psychology's developing view of humanity."³

Two well known "integrationists" state, "We will continue to use this term, even though we regard it as problematic. The word implies that things that don't naturally mix willfully be brought into connection, to be integrated."⁴

The problem is if they don't naturally mix, how are they willfully brought into one profitable system? If integration is problematic why try to do it?

2. WHY DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF "INTEGRATION?"

There are four major reasons Christian counselor's develop a system of integrating psychology with the application of God's Word.

A. Integration is the conviction that "theology" (and "God's Word") alone is not enough to solve the Christian's problems. One team of integrationists state, "The Bible is limited in its scope (i.e., Scripture doesn't cover everything). Thus it is not unfaithful to search out how to reasonably expand our understanding beyond what God chose to reveal in the Bible." Note that, while inspired ("God-breathed"), Scripture is not declared to be the only and all-sufficient source for every word ever needed anytime by anyone for any purpose related to human need; rather it is called useful."⁵

B. Integration is the search for a more "man centered" (i.e. "holistic") approach to Christian problems.

One integrationist writes, "Pastoral care and counseling seek to utilize and integrate both psychology and theological insight regarding the human situation and the healing of persons. Pastoral care and counseling must be holistic, seeking to enable healing and growth in all dimensions of human wholeness."⁶

C. Integration is the believe that "General Revelation" is equal with Special Revelation.

One integrationist writes, "Truth is assumed to come from God to man in two ways which theologians call general revelation and special revelation. General revelation, sometimes called natural revelation, refers to truths that God has revealed through nature, science, or history; and which man can know by observation, empirical investigation, logical deduction, intuition, feeling, the study of tradition, or any other technique apart from the Bible... It is the purpose of all science, including psychology, to study carefully what God has revealed through nature and to attain a better understanding of the universe and its operation."⁷

D. Integration is the development of an alternative means of Christian living (i.e. this affects "the doctrine of sanctification").

Another integrationist writes, "...We also desperately need a vision of how we can be healthy in our whole beings, how spirituality and psychology can work together to make us more complete in Christ. This working together is what integration is all about...."⁸

3. HOW IS AN APPROACH TO "INTEGRATION" ACHIEVED?

There are six basic approaches to integration.

A. The "everything has a psychological base" model. (religious academics)

"This is the academic pursuit finding psychology inherent in all other areas of life. Human beings are described as being neutral/active in their nature, born neither good nor bad but developing as they interact with their environment. Psychology becomes the missing answer for all questions."⁹

B. The "separate but equal" model. (once only held by religious liberals like Seward Hiltner, now held by Clyde Narramore) "Advocates of this position believe that Scripture deals with spiritual and theological problems.... If a person has pneumonia, send him to the physician, not to the pastor. If he wants to build a home, have him consult an architect and a contractor. If he has money to invest, recommend a financial consultant. And, continuing in parallel fashion, if he has psychological problems, if he is mentally ill, have the wisdom to refer him to a trained professional counselor."¹⁰

C. The "synthesis" model. (two book approach used by most so called "Christian" Counselors and by James Dobson) "The collection of ideas derived from our direct observation of people we call psychology. The organized product of biblical study is called theology. These are regarded as complementary disciplines, each contributing important data to our theory of counseling."¹¹

D. The "eclectic" model ("what ever works," used by Quentin Hyder, Norman Wright, and Paul D. Meier) "...Combine the insights and resources of Scripture with the wisdom of psychology and a truly effective and sophisticated Christian psychotherapy will emerge.

Christian integrationists tend to align the two disciplines of theology and psychology, determine where the subject matter overlaps, and then blend the insights from both disciplines together."¹²

E. The "mutual partners" model ("complimentary," held by Gary Collins, Stanton Jones, and Richard Butman) "Psychology and theology do not exist to supplant each other or to explain each other into irrelevance; rather they exist to serve one another as mutual partners in pursuit of knowledge. All truth is God's truth, and though there are many ways to perceive God's revelation (i.e., nature/Scripture), all academic disciplines handled honestly lead to the Creator."¹³

F. The "Spoiling the Egyptians" model. (held by Larry Crabb) "When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he took freely of the goods of the Egyptians to sustain God's people on their journey to the Promised Land. God not only approved of this spoiling (taking from), but also planned for it to happen and intervened to make it happen." "A Christian who has spoiled the Egyptians of secular psychology, carefully weeding out the elements which oppose his commitment to the revelation of Scripture, will be better equipped to counsel....."¹⁴

CONCLUSION: The best model for Christian counseling is that "psychology" and "theology" (and God's Word) are "**mutually exclusive**" (i.e. **separate and incompatible**). Integration must be avoided by the truly "Christian" Christian counselor. One historian wrote, "The fields of psychology and theology are mutually exclusive. They do not mix because each will either destroy or relegate to a place of irrelevance the other. In almost every instance, there is nothing substantial to gain from integrating the two."¹⁵

This view is growing in acceptance among counselors who believe in the authority of God's Word and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. The following well known Christian counselors and groups support this view: Jay Adams, Martin Bobgan, David Powlison, David Hunt, John MacArthur, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, and Christian Counseling & Education Foundation, etc.

Reference:

¹Introduction To Psychology and Counseling, by Paul D. Meier, Frank B. Minirth, and Frank Wichern, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982, page 16.

²The American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language, William Morris, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975, p. 682.

³The Integration Of Psychology And Theology, John Carter and Bruce Narramore, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p 20.

⁴Modern Psychotherapies, Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, Downers Grove: IVP, 1991, p. 19.

⁵Jones and Butman, p. 26.

⁶Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling, By Howard Clinebell, Nashville: Abingdon, 1984, p. 26.

⁷The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration Of Psychology and Christianity, Gary R. Collins, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1977, p. 121.

⁸Me, Myself & I, by Archibald D. Hart, Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1992, p. 31.

⁹Opening Of The American Mind, by W. David Beck, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, p. 113.

¹⁰Effective Biblical Counseling, by Lawrence J. Crabb Jr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977, p. 34.

¹¹Understanding People, by Lawrence J. Crabb Jr., Winona Lake: BMH, 1987, p. 37.

¹²Effective Biblical Counseling, Crabb, p. 36.

¹³Beck, p. 114.

¹⁴Effective Biblical Counseling, Crabb, pgs. 47, 52.

¹⁵(Beck, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, p. 113.