

Psychology and Biblical Counseling

Instead of "Integration", "Contextualization"

By John Woodward

Introduction: Matt. 10:16; Col. 2:8

1. An Overview of Psychology

A. WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

"The science that studies behavior and the physiological and cognitive processes that underlie it, and the profession that applies the accumulated knowledge of this science to practical problems."

B. WHAT ARE PSYCHOLOGY'S ROOTS?

1). Physiology

Philosophy provided the attitude; Physiology contributed the method.

"Physiology informs us about those life phenomena that we perceive by our external senses. In psychology, the person looks upon himself as from within and tries to explain those interrelations of those processes that this internal observation discloses."

- Wilhem Wundt (1832-1920) "Founder of Psychology" as a discipline

2). Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

"Psychoanalytic theory attempts to explain personality, motivation, and psychological disorder by focusing on unconscious determinants of behavior."

3). Behaviorism

John Watson (1878-1958)

"...a theoretical orientation based on the premise that scientific psychology should study only observable data." Behaviorism contended that organisms tend to repeat responses that lead to positive outcomes, and they tend not to repeat responses that lead to neutral or negative outcomes. "I submit that what we call behavior of the human organism is no more free than its digestion."

- B. F. Skinner (1904-) Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971)

4). Humanism

"...a theoretical orientation that emphasizes the unique qualities of humans, especially their freedom and their potential for growth."

e.g. Carl Rogers (1905-1987), Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

"It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking 'Who am I, really? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior?'"

- Carl Rogers

C. THEMES RELATED TO PSYCHOLOGY

1. Psychology is empirical. (Knowledge is gained through observation.)
2. Psychology is theoretically diverse. (Many systems of interrelated ideas are used to explain observations.)
3. Psychology evolves in a socio-historical context. (The trends, issues, and value of one affect the other.)
4. Behavior is determined by multiple causes. (We are complex; oversimplified explanations are resisted.)
5. Heredity and environment jointly influence behavior. (Are we made or born? - both.)
6. Our experience of the world is highly subjective. (Our motives and expectations color our experiences.)

- Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations*

2. APPROACHES TO CORRELATING PSYCHOLOGY AND BIBLICAL TEACHING (compiled by Dr. Cary Lantz)

A. Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling* - (1977)

1. Separate but Equal
2. Tossed Salad
3. Nothing Buttery
4. Spoiling the Egyptians

B. John Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology* - (1980)

1. Against (Religion)
2. Parallels (Religion)
3. of (Religion)
4. Integrates (Religion)

- C. Charles Solomon "Counseling Modalities" (1970) see chart 1 on CD
- D. Siang-Yang Tan, Religion in Clinical Practice: Implicit and Explicit Integration - (1996)
- E. Cary Lantz, A Continuum of Attitudes Toward Integration (1996)
- F. Anderson, Zuehlke & Zuehlke, Christ-Centered Therapy (2000)

3. TENETS FOR ADVOCATING "INTEGRATION" (Mixing psychology with biblical counseling)

- A. General Revelation - Psalm 19; Romans 1:19,20
- B. Investigative Method - Ecclesiastes; Luke 1:1-3
- C. All Truth is God's Truth
Acts 17:28 - Aratus; Titus 1:12 - Epimenides; Jude 9 - Assumption of Moses
- D. Dominion Mandate - Genesis 1:26-28; 2 Corinthians 10:3,4
- E. Willingness to Learn - Exodus 18; Joseph; Daniel; Luke 16:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:21

4. DANGERS OF PSYCHOLOGY

"Orthodox, western psychology has dealt very poorly with the spiritual side of man's nature, choosing either to ignore its existence or to label it pathological."
- Charles Tart, Transpersonal Psychologies

- A. Its Philosophical Nature -Colossians 2:8
- B. Its Humanistic Bias - 2 Corinthians 10:12; Genesis 3:1-7
- C. Its Use of Labels - Genesis 2:19-20; Isaiah 5:20,21
- D. Its View of Religion - Acts 17
- E. Its Focus - (Therapist/Client)
- F. Its Rejection of God's Word - Isaiah 8:20
- G. Its Ineffective Results - Jeremiah 2:13

Cf. James 3:13-18; Psalm 1:1-2; Isaiah 55:8-11

5. DANGERS OF INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY AND BIBLICAL COUNSELING

A. Compromising with Humanism

Motives: Money or Ministry?

Training: Secular academics or Biblical truth?

Biblical Interpretation: Biased or Balanced?

Atmosphere: Clinical or Pastoral?

Goals: Adjustment or Sanctification?

B. Biblical Counseling's Ultimate Goal is the Glory of God

Psalm 11; Isaiah 42:8; Colossians 3:17

6. SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

Psychology professes to discover and interpret insights about human functioning and behavior; this is relevant to counseling. However, psychology's humanistic orientation is at odds with biblical teaching. Does this mean that the only option is to totally disregard psychology as a field of study?

7. HOW TO AVOID THE PERILS WITHOUT IGNORING PSYCHOLOGY: INSTEAD OF INTEGRATION, CONTEXTUALIZATION

A. What is Contextualization?

Contextualization refers to the process of understanding a culture and tailoring the method of communication so that the people of that culture more readily understand the gospel.

"It has long been recognized by the social sciences that we are creatures made for culture and by culture. We cannot escape culture just as we cannot escape our physical bodies. Understanding culture is at the heartbeat of the missionary enterprise. Certainly it is also of core concern in the effort to contextualize the gospel. At the outset we should note that the goal of contextualization is not to make the Gospel relevant; it is relevant whether or not we recognize it. Rather, it is to enable a people to understand the significance of the gospel in terms which they can understand. On occasion, this will involve bringing new terms into a culture. However, by and large, it generally focuses on communicating or embodying the truths of the gospel in a particular people through their language, thought forms, world view, and way of life.

- "The Human Universals of Culture: Implications for Contextualization," International Journal for Frontier Missions 12:3 (July-Sept 1995), pp. 121-125

Therefore, psychology is to biblical counseling what cultural anthropology is to world missions. Missionaries study the target people's culture in order to more effectively communicate the unchanging Gospel message. This is a standard method that has been abundantly confirmed as a strategy that improves the effectiveness of the unreached group's reception of the gospel.

Conversely, Liberation Theology is to world missions what explicit psychological integration is to Biblical counseling—it compromises or corrupts the message of the gospel. In an attempt to make the Gospel relevant, this expression of modern theology redefines essential doctrines (such as sin and redemption) into a paradigm of social change.

Similarly, the Emergent Village (a group of leaders in the Emerging Church movement) have compromised the authority of the Bible, the meaning of Christ's atonement, and the objective nature of truth in their desire to relate the gospel and church to postmodern culture. (http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/brett_kunkle_2006-11_essential_concerns_regarding_the_emerging_church.pdf)

B. Even those from the non-integrationist side acknowledge that psychological data can potentially contribute something beneficial to Biblical counseling.

Examples:

"I readily admit that some of what integrationists write is helpful and biblically solid. The danger is the integrationist foundation, which rests upon the psychological concepts of man rather than on the scriptural precepts of God."

"I do not dispute the fact that biblical counselors can glean from psychology some helpful ideas, observations, illustrations, and generic methods with which to communicate God's solution for man's problems. But these are not the same as accepting psychological 'findings' as essential truths about man's nature, problems, needs, and solutions."

- Dr. Ed Bulkley
Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology, P. 28, 32

"[Christian counselors] may have considerable knowledge of psychology, nevertheless realize that psychologists may be only good observers of behavior. The psychologist may (or may not) have garnered some accurate principles about the behavior of man through laboratories, surveys, and research studies, but he is not qualified to draw accurate conclusions to man's problems... Man's mental and behavioral problems are spiritual and must be solved spiritually (1 Corinthians 2:14). To solve counselee's

problems, the effective Christian counselor decides to use only Bible principles in solving the non-organic or non-medical problems of those whom he counsels."

- Walter and Trudy Fremont

Becoming an Effective Christian Counselor, (Bob Jones University Press), P.

"Our primary need is not to 'integrate' fields, whether as bodies of knowledge or as spheres of professional activity. The goal is much simpler: accurately understand people and help them. The Faith has anchors in Scripture..."

- David Powlison, Psychology and Christianity, P. 146

C. Guidelines for contextualization

1). Biblical revelation is the source of the counselor's authority and philosophy. The Sufficiency of Scripture for giving answers:

2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Romans 15:14; Psalm 119

2). Psychological observations

and skills are recognized as potentially valuable if they are:

- a) Consistent with Scripture
- b) Limited to a diagnostic role.
- c) Facilitate communication of Biblical wisdom

Psychological data are descriptive, not prescriptive.

3). Examples of acceptable use of psychology:

a) Use of Assessment Tools...For example: the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (TJTA.com)

* Not a source of identity

* Not personality types

*Tool to diagnose symptoms of the self-life

The Prepare-Enrich couple's Inventory (LifeInnovations.com)

b) Use of Insights on the Rejection Syndrome

* Absence of meaningful love is described as a result of the Fall.

* An understanding of one's unique self-life helps the counselee deny that "self" and take up the Cross.

* Applied Cross would be necessary even without the patterns and consequences of rejection.

c) Birth order issues/tendencies

d) Communication and Listening Skills

- * Active listening
- * Small group dynamics

