

## CHAPTER TWO

### COMPATIBILITY OF PSYCHOLOGY WITH THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

In psychological terminology, the theological notion of sin is described as failure, guilt is replaced by self-awareness, atonement becomes resolution, and redemption is changed to self-acceptance. The question that emerges, however, is whether these psychological descriptions are synonymous in meaning with the theological terms they replaced, or do these terms convey different meanings within the framework of psychology? Stated differently, is there a marked difference in a psychological description and understanding of human beings and their needs when contrasted with a theological description and understanding of human beings and their needs? Specifically, how does one's approach to counseling differ, if one's frame of reference is psychological rather than theological or visa versa? How does bringing a psychological perspective to the counseling process differ from approaching the process from a theological perspective? Or, does it even matter, that is, are the two fields of inquiry compatible? Do both fields of inquiry result in parallel conclusions with their respective terminologies conveying equivalent meanings?

Hunsinger (1995, p. 6-7), in her book, *Theological and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach*, presents a persuasive argument that psychology and theology are not compatible. She contends that they “represent material that cannot be integrated into a unified whole.” Elaborating, she writes: “They are logically diverse; they have different aims, subject matters, methods, and linguistic conventions.” Conceding the fact that both perspectives are “integrated into the person” and are “existentially connected,” Hunsinger explains “that as

language and thought worlds, they are not to be integrated with one another in any systematic way ... one could not systematically correlate the two.” She aptly concludes that each perspective “is understood to offer categories of perception and discernment in the counseling situation ... each has a vocabulary that pertains to diagnosis and treatment ... they may each illumine aspects of the self and its situation, ... and analogies might be drawn between them,” but, she emphasizes “they are not really talking about the same thing.” She explains that “it is one thing, for instance, to think of oneself as beset with a terrible negative mother complex and as needing to learn to trust one’s feminine side,” but it is “quite another to think of oneself as mistrusting God’s providential goodness and needing to confess the sin of unbelief.” But she asks, might not “both ways of conceiving one’s predicament” be apt in a particular case? Therefore, Hunsinger concludes, fluency in the usage of both the language of psychology and theology will result in more “differentiated perceptions ... more apt questions, and at least theoretically, more helpful interpretations.”

Hunsinger (1995, p.p. 61-75) attempts to clarify the relationship between theology and psychology by introducing what she refers to as the “Chalcedonian pattern.” Developed in the fifth century “to sort through various christological controversies and to guide the church in its understanding of Jesus Christ as both human and divine,” this complex pattern of reasoning has been used by the noted theologian, Karl Barth, to examine a wide range of doctrinal or substantive questions. Three significant features of the Chalcedonian pattern include “*indissoluble differentiation*,” “*inseparable unity*,” and “*indestructible order*.” *Indissoluble differentiation* means that terms are “related without confusion or change.” *Inseparable unity* means that the terms “coincide in an occurrence without separation or division.” And *indestructible order* means that “in and with their differentiated unity, the two are

asymmetrically related, with the one term having logical precedence over the other.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the “two terms are thus *differentiated, unified, and ordered* in a particular way.”

To illustrate Barth’s usage of the Chalcedonian pattern, Hunsinger cites Barth’s analysis of Mark 2:8b-12, where the story line deals with Jesus’ forgiveness and healing of the paralytic.

Hunsinger explains:

All three aspects of the Chalcedonian pattern—the *unity* of forgiveness and healing, the clear *differentiation* between them, and the *asymmetrical* order of their relation—are all present in his interpretation of the story. Healing and forgiveness are seen to occur in a differentiated unity. They occur together (unity), yet each remains distinct (differentiation), and the divine power to forgive sins is understood as conceptually prior to and independent of the act of healing (ordering). The healing points as a sign to the forgiveness in a way that the forgiveness does not in turn point to the healing. The divine act of forgiveness is seen as being free and unconditioned, while the healing is seen as existing in the service of Jesus’ power to forgive sins. The concepts are so ordered that the forgiveness is logically prior and the healing is logically subsequent.

Hunsinger reasons that “the kind of definitional or logical priority that we are speaking of, therefore, clearly has to do with the arrangement of therapeutic concepts in relation to theological beliefs.” Further explaining, she writes: “From a Barthian perspective, the significance of healing is logically subsequent to salvation because although salvation does not necessarily point to healing, healing can be defined as ultimately pointing to salvation.” This fact, she concludes, “will have far-reaching implications for developing a Barthian approach to interdisciplinary relationships between theology and psychology,” because from a Barthian position, “although psychological categories are both logically independent of *and* dependent on theological categories in different ways, theological categories are by definition both logically prior to and independent of psychological categories with respect to their significance.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hunsinger explains that logical priority or precedence pertains to the question of “priority in definition.” “A is logically prior to B, ... when the definition of B mentions A, but the definition of A does not mention B.”

Hunsinger (p. 69) qualifies her conclusion by pointing out that what is at question “are logical relationships that pertain to *concepts*.” She explains:

We are speaking of theological and psychological concepts, not directly of theological and psychological *realities*. In reality, there is no reason why these factors may not all come together at one time. The paralytic, for example, was both forgiven and healed in a single event or sequence of events, and his healing was understood to be significant both for its own sake and yet also for the sake of its analogy to forgiveness. Any particular event may have both psychological and spiritual or theological aspects at the same time. The presence of the former aspects would not invalidate the significance of the latter, nor would the presence of the latter aspects invalidate the significance of the former. Although they could be conceptually differentiated, they could not finally be separated or divided from one another. At one level the psychological aspects would be significant within a larger pattern of meaning. The spiritual or theological aspects, on the other hand, would be significant in themselves as well as for the way in which they would establish the larger pattern of meaning within which the psychological aspects were ordered.

Hunsinger is also quick to point out the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between psychology and theology. She explains that “the relationship between healing as the sign and salvation as the thing signified is not only analogical but also asymmetrical.” She further elaborates: “Although healing points to salvation, the relationship is not reversible, as though salvation would also point in the same sense to healing.” “The relationship would be symmetrical (and therefore reversible),” she emphasizes, “only if the two were essentially or materially equivalent.” But, she explains, “healing and salvation are not so equivalent, for they occur on two different levels and indicate two different contexts of meaning. Whereas the significance of the one is temporal, the significance of the other is eternal; whereas the one is penultimate, the other is ultimate.”

She further argues that:

the relationship of signifier to signified cannot be reversed without effacing this important difference in levels. The theological significance of salvation can be stated without reference to healing, but the theological significance of healing cannot be stated without reference to salvation. The significance of salvation as the ultimate term is thus independent of that of healing as the penultimate term, but the relationship is irreversible, for the significance of the penultimate depends on that of the ultimate. The significance of the one

(salvation) is logically prior to that of the other (healing). Salvation thus sets the terms within which to think of healing but not (as the asymmetry requires us to add) the reverse.

Hunsinger concludes that any proposal that attempts to examine the compatibility of psychology with theology must address the “formal features of the Chalcedonian pattern—unity, integrity, and asymmetry.” Any such proposal must address “the ‘*indissoluble differentiation*’ between the two fields” allowing “each discipline to define its own boundaries, to secure its own self-defined integrity, to proceed with the investigation of its own subject matter according to the methods that are appropriate to the discipline.” Any such proposal must also “allow for the possibility of their “*inseparable unity*” from a theological point of view, for in practice “a theological or spiritual perspective cannot always be neatly separated from psychological considerations or vice-versa.” Finally, any such proposal must “recognize and appreciate the ‘*indestructible order*’ between the two disciplines,” acknowledging “that a certain asymmetry exists between them by virtue of their respective subject matters existing on different levels.” Therefore, any such proposal must observe “how the psychological concepts are properly understood within a larger theological frame of reference rather than the reverse.” Any such proposal must recognize “that the two sets of concepts cannot be systematically correlated with one another,” because any such correlation would suggest that they exist on the same level.

It should be emphasized that by adapting Barth’s reasoning, especially his notion of asymmetry, Hunsinger precludes viewing the language of each discipline as interchangeable, thereby reducing the effectiveness of bilingual counseling. Hunsinger explains:

Taken by itself, the idea of being “bilingual” would imply a situation of “symmetry” because two different languages (like French and English) can be thought of as being materially equivalent to one another so that (in general) one can translate freely back and forth between them without any loss in meaning. The stipulation of asymmetry, however, implies that no such material equivalence exists between theology and psychology, for their essential subject matters are fundamentally different.

Therefore, even though a counselor is competent in both fields of discourse, care should be taken “not to translate theological into psychological categories or vice versa,” especially since “theological and psychological modes of discourse are conceived as existing on different levels.” But even if areas of overlap are present “only analogies not equivalences can be drawn between them.”

Oden (1966, p.p. 15-20) in his book, *Kerygma and Counseling: Toward A Covenant Ontology For Secular Psychotherapy*, pursues the question: “In what sense is the psychotherapeutic process analogous to the self-disclosure of God?” “How,” he asks “is a psychotherapy of *human self-disclosure* related to a theology of *divine self-disclosure*? How does the kerygma illuminate the counseling process?” Specifically, he asks: “Can a humanistic therapy and a theology of revelation be meaningfully and self-consistently conjoined in a single ministry of preaching and counseling?” He explains:

The question that we are today pressed to ask ourselves is: How can a therapy which assumes that man has within himself the capacity for appropriate self-direction (provided he has a safe context in which to explore his feelings) be consistent with a theology which assumes that the possibility for authentic existence comes to man as a gift mediated once for all through the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ?

Oden (p. 43) contends that humanistic therapy and a theology of revelation can conditionally be meaningfully and self-consistently conjoined in a single ministry of preaching and counseling.

He elaborates:

If genuine therapeutic growth is based upon human self-disclosure, as Jourard’s thesis suggests, and, if authentic human self-disclosure exists as a response to divine revelation, as the kerygma suggests, then, the divine self-disclosure is properly the precondition of authentic psychotherapeutic growth. An adequate theory of therapy must not only understand therapeutic growth as a product of human self-disclosure, but authentic human self-disclosure as a response to the self-disclosure of God in being itself.

Oden (p.p. 81-82) argues that “the psychotherapeutic process, although distinct from revelation, implicitly presupposes an ontological assumption” that enables “by means of the analogy of

faith,” to identify “Christologically the so-called secular counseling situation as the arena of God’s self-disclosure.” Oden elaborates:

If the self is understood, by definition, as unavoidably standing in relation to the One who gives it life, then understanding of oneself must in some sense be an understanding of that ultimate reality which is the ground and source of selfhood. This does not mean that self-understanding is synonymous with the divine self-disclosure, since revelation differs from insight in that the initiative for it comes from another. But the Other who speaks in authentic insight is spoken of in the witness of the Christian community. Revelation is related to insight as speaking is to hearing, however inadequately the hearer may know of the nature of the reality speaking to him in his insight into himself.

Oden (p.p. 162-163) concludes therefore that “all psychotherapy embodies an expectation for deliverance analogous to the Christ hopes of the Judeo-Christian tradition.” For all psychotherapies ultimately reveal a quest for the Christ as an “extricable ingredient.” They all imply an “expectation of deliverance from human bondage.” Oden explains that if one is still waiting for meaning to be revealed in their life, they are still waiting for Christ. Is Jesus the Christ? This “remains a question for decision in every context, not the least of which is the psychotherapeutic relationship.” But to affirm that Jesus is the Christ, Oden (p. 170) emphasizes, “is to affirm that the reality which we meet in the *now* is the reconciling, forgiving, renewing reality which is proclaimed and celebrated in the therapeutic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus if psychotherapy exists in quest for the Christ, the *kerygma* announces the end of all our Christ quests.”

Oden (p. 83) also notes that it is possible for theologians “to take a phenomenological view of the process of psychotherapy.” For example, the psychology of Carl Rogers can be interpreted in theological terms viewing his entire work “as a kind of demythologized (or perhaps dekerygmized) theology.” Rogers can be readily understood within the systematic theology frameworks of sin (humanities predicament), grace (deliverance from the predicament), and authenticity (maturity and self-fulfillment). Therefore Roger’s notions of “incongruence,

introjected values, and conditions of worth” are analogous to the human predicament of sin.

“Empathy, congruence, unconditional positive regard” become synonymous with expressions of redemption or God’s grace. “Openness to experience, congruence, and the fully functioning person” incorporate the notion of authenticity or “growth in grace” (p. 109).

Oden (p.p. 109-113) is quick to point out, however, that whereas Rogers’ terms are analogous to classical Protestant theological notions, they do not necessarily convey the same meaning. For example, Rogers “develops a soteriology without a Christology ... a humanistic soteriology without any acknowledged celebration of God’s act, God’s acceptance, God’s unconditional positive regard.” Oden elaborates:

Rogers’ theology is a restricted humanism, which in the last analysis is a kind of dehumanization that fails to see man in his deepest dimension as under God, and exaggerates the human capacity for ultimate self-fulfillment apart from God’s own delivering activity. ... His concept of *man* as a gifted and estranged creature fails to perceive man in the profound dimension of his being created, claimed, and judged by God. His doctrine of *redemption* is narrowly limited to personal self-reconciliation of society or a broader hope for the redemption of the cosmos. His view of growth toward *authenticity* lacks a fuller perception of human wholeness illuminated by the divine wholeness, a deeper full-functioning enriched by God’s own gracious functioning. Thus what we have called a “saving event” in Rogers’ theology is, according to Christian wisdom, not a saving event at all in the fullest sense, if the ultimate redemption of human history is finally in God’s hands.

Oden further explains that “Rogers’ concept of introjected values tends toward antinomianism ... toward a blanket rejection of legitimate means of social control, ignoring the validity of moral constructs and external demands in the growth of personal freedom toward a mature conscience and social responsibility.” Rogers’ quasi-theology also neglects any concept of authentic human community. For as Oden’s understanding of traditional Christian wisdom reveals, “if genuine healing is to take place in the estranged man, he stands in dire need of a nurturing, disciplining, supportive community which would mediate to him the means of grace by which to feed and enable his freedom to love and serve in the midst of human alienation.”

Oden (1984) in a book entitled, *Care of Souls in the Classical Tradition*, revisits many of his previous concerns, as he once again, questions whether the Christian proclamation of unmerited grace can be “made consistent with humanistic-Socratic counseling” (p. 20). Oden proceeds to make a passionate plea for the return to classical models of pastoral care as represented by the likes of Cyprian, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory, Luther, Calvin, Herbert, Baxter, and Taylor. He cites compelling evidence that twentieth century pastoral writers such as Hiltner, Clinebell, Oates, Wise, Tournier, Stolberg, and Nuten make no reference to classical texts of pastoral care, but instead frequently reference modern psychotherapies as presented by Freud, Jung, Rogers, Fromm, Sullivan, and Berne (p.p. 30-31). Fearing that modern psychotherapies have usurped the classical tradition of pastoral care, Oden vehemently argues that “a major effort is needed to rediscover and re-mine the classical models of Christian pastoral care” (p. 26).

Oden further explains that a revitalization of the classical models hold the promise of an “enriched synthesis” between the classical models and modern psychotherapy. Oden (p. 37) explains:

The task that lies ahead is the development of a postmodern, post Freudian, neoclassical approach to Christian pastoral care that takes seriously the resources of modernity while also penetrating its illusions and, having found the best of modern psychotherapies problematic, has turned again to the classical tradition for its bearings, yet without disowning what it has learned from modern clinical experience.

Oden (p.p. 37-40) argues that such an enterprise will require “intelligent resistance to the narcissistic imperialism and hedonistic reductionism that prevail both in the culture and, to a large extent, in the churches.” Such an undertaking would require the “reconstruction of a pastoral care that is informed by Christian theology.” This would result in a pastoral care that incorporated the use of intercessory prayer, combated antinomianism, upheld the doctrine of holy matrimony, and included “empathy training” that was “grounded in an incarnational

understanding of God's participation in human alienation." It would result in a pastoral care that emphasized Christian anthropology, reintroduced "corporate responsibility, mutual accountability, moral self-examination, and social commitment," and advocated the return to the study of scripture and Christian tradition. Evangelical witnessing would once again be part of the therapeutic dialogue. This would result in a pastoral counseling that once again was "an integral part of the pastoral office, intrinsically correlated with liturgy, preaching, and the nurture of the Christian community and relatively less identified with purely secularized, non-ecclesial, theologically emasculated fee-basis counseling."

Browning (1987, p.p. xi-17) in his book, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychotherapies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture*, is careful to distinguish between psychology as "a relatively objective and scientific discipline dedicated to the development of a body of knowledge about the patterns in human symbolic and behavioral activity" and a view of psychology "which conceives psychology as a practical discipline based on a critical ethic and a critical theory of society." Browning further elaborates that "*scientific psychologies* claim to have a more rigorous relation to highly specifiable orders of concrete data than is the case with the *philosophical psychologies*." The practice of clinical psychology, Browning contends, mirrors more a philosophical psychology. Although the clinical psychologies "want their concepts to "fit" or "account" for certain observations they make in the clinical settings," they do not "achieve prediction or repeatability as do the experimentalists." Their notions, unlike the experimental psychologies, are not fully derived from "controlled observations so that variables can be isolated, causes or correlations statistically stated, and publicly repeatable verification achieved." For example, the likes of "Freud, Jung, Erikson,

Kohut, and the humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Fritz Perls are largely clinical psychologists, whereas B. F. Skinner is clearly an experimental psychologist.”

Browning claims that after clinical (philosophical) psychology has been clearly distinguished from experimental (scientific) psychology, at least four cultures of contemporary psychology remain--the culture of detachment, the culture of joy, the culture of control, and the culture of care. Browning presents these cultures in light of his overriding investigative theme of examining “the potential relationships between two sources of modern individual identity—religious faith as it has been formed by the Judeo-Christian tradition of the West and the disciplines of psychology as these have developed in the twentieth century.” Browning argues that such an investigation is warranted because “traditional religion and modern psychology stand in a special relation to one another, because both of them provide concepts and technologies for the ordering of the interior life.” Browning’s inquiry focuses on an overarching question. Will our culture be “oriented and directed by our inherited religious traditions or will it increasingly gain its orientation, especially with regard to the inner life, from the modern psychologies?” Furthermore, are the two compatible? Is there a way “to state the appropriate relationship between these two perspectives thereby giving each its proper space?”

Browning asks:

How do individuals who have been taught to orient their lives around the wisdom of Judeo-Christian religious thought handle the social sciences, especially the psychologies? How do they read these psychologies, understand what knowledge they give us, comprehend their boundaries, and most importantly of all, discern both their limits and what they cannot, do not, or should not tell us or claim to tell us?

Browning explains that historically, Christianity has been variously affected by the philosophies of the “Stoic, neo-Platonic, Aristotelian, Thomistic, Hegelian, Kierkegaardian, Heideggerian, and Whiteheadian psychologies.” These *philosophical psychologies* were more

than “hatched up, or imagined, or mere products of speculative reason,” but accounted for “rather wide ranges of human experience—so wide, in fact, that they do not easily fit within the confines of rigorous experimental procedures or the narrow focus of behavioral or affective problems associated with the clinic.” Similarly, Browning argues, modern twentieth century psychologies, by means of their impact on the symbols and norms that guide a society, and their impact on culture, have developed “religio-ethical dimensions,” that entitle them to be challenged as any other *philosophical psychology*. Browning explains: “If these different psychologies were strictly psychologies, Christian thought would have little to say about them. But insofar as these psychologies give rise to cultures with genuine religio-ethical dimensions, Christian thought is entitled to engage them in critical conversation.” For in reality, twentieth century clinical psychology has moved beyond the narrow confines of a rigorous science and now infringes on the theological task of orienting “the believer to the broadest ranges of human experience, to describe and represent what experience testifies to be its ultimate context, and to induce the appropriate existential and ethical response.” Browning explains:

The clinical psychologies, on the other hand, stand somewhere between experimental psychology and theology; rather than prediction and control based on the manipulation of discrete facts of sense experience, the clinical psychologies—or at least some of them—are thought to be concerned with the interpretation of basic patterns, modalities, themes, and narratives which give lives their underlying cohesion.

Browning elaborates that, what was once left up to systematic Christian theology, “the specific sense of taking basic questions about the meaning of human existence that each cultural expression characteristically asks and correlating them with the answer provided by Christian revelation,” was now being usurped by the renderings of modern clinical psychology. But in doing so, Browning argues, clinical psychology has moved beyond its scope of inquiry, beyond describing “the tensions and ambiguities of existence in the language, symbols, and forms of a

particular era and a particular region of experience,” to attempting to give “answers to the basic problems of existence” and to this extent, psychology begins to compete with theology.

Critical to the understanding of Browning’s presentation is his bold assertion that there are “metaphorical underpinnings” in both science and theology. Citing the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Browning emphasizes that metaphorical language is especially evident in theology and psychology. Browning defines metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” that enables one to link “the known to the unknown” by selectively transferring “the familiar associations of a word to the new context.” Browning points out that metaphors help us “investigate the unknown” and “talk about the unfamiliar,” especially when religious discernment and scientific discovery are involved. Browning explains: “We represent our sense of the holy in terms of metaphors, but through metaphors we also probe with our imaginations the unknown realms of nature in our effort scientifically to represent its otherwise unfathomable reaches” (p. 19). Browning concludes, therefore that “it is not only in theology but, to a surprising extent, in the modern psychologies as well that the way we metaphorically represent the world in its most durable and ultimate respects influences (although not necessarily determines in all respects) what we think we are obligated to do” (p. 20).

Browning bolsters his position when he shows how “Freud’s early use of mechanistic metaphors and his later use of the metaphors of life and death imply a particular view of life,” setting “the stage for what he thought was ethically possible for humans to achieve, that is, a modest and cautious degree of reciprocity that would not overtax our limited libidinal investments or arouse our ready hostilities.” Therefore Freud introduces the metaphor of *civilized detachment* into the culture.

Browning further strengthens his argument by showing how “humanistic psychology’s implicit metaphors of harmony” introduce a metaphor of *expressive joy* into the culture. This *expressive joy* is evidenced when we remain true to our deepest selves, true to our inner plan for self-actualization. His argument is also enhanced when he shows how Skinner introduces the metaphor of *ultimacy* into the culture that “build’s around the Darwinian doctrine of natural selection and what it implies for the selective and reinforcing power of the environment.” Total justice, not self-actualization, “was Skinner’s implicit ethic, and the selecting, reinforcing, and controlling powers of the environment should be enlisted to bring such a justice into reality.” His position is further validated as he outlines how Jung introduces a metaphor of *archetypes*, a kind of “sacred egoism” which “will lead to a deeper harmony because of the final complementarity between each person’s archetypal possibilities and the structure of the world.”

Final fortification of Browning’s position is provided by Erikson and Kohut, as Browning shows how these psychologists introduce a metaphor of *generative care* into the culture -- an ethic and culture of *care* built around a model that sees health as the capacity for generative care for succeeding generations,” where the “self-actualization motif of the humanistic psychologies” is not only maintained, but is also transformed “by seeing the generative care of others as also an avenue for the actualization of each human’s own deepest inclinations” (p. 30-31).

Collectively, the introduction of metaphors by modern psychology, especially the metaphors of *joy*, *ultimacy in the form of total justice*, *archetypes*, and *generative care*, help shore up Browning’s conclusion that the modern psychologies, with “their ideas and wider horizons, seriously as an independent source of culture” deserve “appreciative and critical evaluation from another source of culture—traditional anthropologies shaped by elements of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions” (p. 31). Browning recognizes that “no psychology, and especially

no clinical or psychotherapeutic psychology, can ever completely eliminate its implicit metaphors of ultimacy and moral images.” It can, however, “attempt to be aware of them and name them for what they are without invoking for them the authority of science.” Furthermore, psychology “can then submit these moral and metaphysical horizons to philosophical testing insofar as they appear necessary to orient psychology to the world of praxis” (p. 60).

In summary, Browning’s careful scrutiny of several modern psychotherapies has led him to conclude that “whatever the differences between these new psychologies and the Judeo-Christian tradition it cannot be that the psychologies are without metaphors of ultimacy and principles of obligation.” In fact what we have witnessed is “a subtle process of psychology gradually becoming both religion and ethics” (p. 89). Indeed modern psychologies can be treated “more as systems of practical moral philosophy than as simply scientific or clinical psychologies.” Conceding that modern psychologies do make “genuinely valid scientific statements and clinical values,” none-the-less, “they are not only or strictly scientific in either the clinical or experimental sense of the term.” Instead, they consistently reflect “moral and metaphorical overtones” as they focus on the question of cure and healing (p. 238). Furthermore, the metaphors of modern psychologies have become “deeply embedded in the social forces of modern life” becoming an “ideological expression of and tool for these social contextual patterns,” becoming “responses to the forces of modern capitalist societies of a religio-ethical kind.” And in many ways their religio-ethical responses are “on the same logical level as the inherited Judeo-Christian responses.” Therefore, Browning argues, “they are entirely respectable candidates for the exercise in a critical theology of culture” (p.p. 238-242). Also, being normative in their definitions, modern psychologies “must do their research in close association with the normative disciplines of ethics, political science, and ...theology.” Browning explains:

“Hence, our psychologies (as well as our other social sciences) must be critical psychologies.” Our psychologies “should be disciplines that self-consciously mix descriptive and experimental work with normative work about the nature of the good person and the good society and their dialectical relation” (p. 242-243). Modern psychologies therefore, are “not so much wrong in principle as unreflective, naïve, and philosophically and ethically immature if not downright dangerous.” Therefore, psychologies “should not rid themselves of deep metaphors,” but instead, should strive to base their psychologies “on better and more critically grounded dimensions of practical thought ... from the perspective of their metaphysical as well as their moral adequacy.” Psychologies should understand that such “critically grounded dimensions” can be provided by religion and theology (p. 244).

Thurneysen (1962, p.p. 200-220) contends that pastoral counseling “needs psychology as an auxiliary science which serves to examine man’s inner being,” but the pastoral counselor must be careful to dissociate oneself “from the essential alien philosophical presuppositions inherent in psychology,” assumptions which could impair one’s “understanding of man derived from Holy scripture.” Thurneysen emphasizes that the true task of pastoral care involves the “inner life of man as the soil where the guiding Word takes root,” none the less, pastoral care “needs psychology as its outstanding auxiliary.” But Thurneysen points out that “pastoral care is a discipline of its own, interchangeably distinct and different from psychology and psychotherapy.” Thurneysen explains:

Pastoral care is and remains proclamation of the Word to the individual and neither can nor should ever be anything else. But – and here begins the relationship between pastoral care and psychology – in order to deliver the Word of forgiveness to man, we must avail ourselves of a knowledge of his inner life in as exact, methodical, and comprehensive a way as is possible. Without such a knowledge, our talk with him cannot possibly lead to deliverance, its goal.

Thurneysen concludes therefore, that although “we assert the primacy of Holy scripture over psychology and its knowledge of human nature,” understanding that the Word of God is “the basis of all knowledge even in the matter of understanding man,” this in no way “belittles psychology and its research.” Because, for the pastoral counselor, “our use of psychological findings only serves to elucidate the understanding of man given us in the Word of God.”

Collins (1988, p.p. 128-130) raises the question as to whether psychology can be trusted. Is psychology anti-Christian? Does it dabble in the demonic? Should non-Christian counselors be avoided? Does psychology really work? For at the core of Collins’ questions is whether or not secular psychology and Christianity can be integrated. He concludes that:

Scholarly work to date has shown, however, that Christians and psychologists can learn from each other, without weakening or watering down the enduring truths of God’s word. Certainly this can be done without weakening the spiritual commitment of the searcher who accepts God’s word and learns from the study of God’s creation. It is too early to answer decisively if psychology and Christianity can be integrated. But for too many sincere believers, the future of this endeavor looks promising.

Collins therefore, seems committed to the intellectual challenge of integrating the two disciplines, but cautions that some parts of psychology cannot be integrated, especially when the psychological propositions proposed clearly violate scripture. But, he clarifies that sometimes integration is unavoidable. Arguing that life is never simple, Collins points out, that dichotomizing counseling into psychological versus the biblical approach overlooks reality. For example, both approaches require “listening, talking, confessing, accepting, thinking and understanding” and both confront such concepts as “love, hope, compassion, forgiveness, caring and kindness.”

Narramore (1997, p.p. 6-10) asserts that when attempting to integrate psychology with theology one needs to be “aware of and sophisticated about the philosophical presuppositions (e.g. naturalism, positivism, relativism, individuality, and secularity) under girding most of the

work in the discipline of psychology and the implications of those presuppositions for integrative theorizing.” In addition such integration must take place “within a well-defined biblical-Christian world view.” Moreover, such integration requires “exploring new content areas in their efforts to integrate psychology with Christian beliefs and practice,” while delving “into various secular theoretical perspectives in order to carry out both a more thorough critique and to seek more sophisticated levels of understanding within which to apply their integrative work.” This will enable Christian psychologists “to relate careful integrative theorizing to the clinical work of psychotherapists and counselors.”

Johnson (1997, p.p. 11-27) emphasizes the importance of remembering that the “lordship of Christ over all of a Christian’s life” must be our starting assumption in any attempt to integrate psychology with Christian theology. Recognizing how problematic this will be, “because of the pervasive naturalism and neo-positivism of modern psychology,” and the influence on psychology “by unbelieving individuals ... and their underlying anti-spiritual agenda,” he reminds us that we are still “called to work towards the expression of Christ’s lordship in psychology.”

Johnson’s exploration of how the Lordship of Christ relates to psychology leads him to conclude that psychology “is not an independent activity that operates apart from God.” Instead, it is “dependant upon God’s mercy to illuminate human understanding and reveal things about human nature through human reflection, research, and creative insight.” Johnson emphasizes that “empirical methods can reveal the consequences of certain conditions or behaviors,” but these methods “cannot clearly tell people how to evaluate those consequences.” Nor can psychology “provide trans-cultural criteria for human maturity and mental health.” Although psychology “inevitably assume some normative goals regarding human nature,” because “God’s

mind includes what people should be, science and therapy should be informed by God's understanding of the human *telos*, and not simply human nature as it is."

Therefore, for Johnson, deciding whether to integrate psychological concepts into Christian counseling involves at least five steps. The psychological concept must first be evaluated within the context of "one's Christian evaluative framework," thereby avoiding "a ghetto in one's minds," that would provide "no evaluative influence on the secular material one reads." Secondly, an attempt must be made "to understand the finding or concept that is the focus of integration. Next, the finding or concept "should be assessed in terms of its compatibility with the Scriptures as well as whether it meets other validity criteria, including theoretic support, statistical procedures, research design, sampling, empirical evidence, and so forth." If the concept passes this standard, then the "degree of theoretical complexity and, correspondingly, the level of integration that is involved will need to be assessed." Finally, assuming that a concept passed the prior tests, "the task of Christian translation or reconceptualization follows. This step entails making a sense of the original finding or concept according to a Christian evaluative framework and grammar."

Johnson concludes his discourse by reemphasizing "two of the most important issues in human life: who shall be Lord and how shall one change into his likeness? Conceding that. "all perspectives on human nature are important," Johnson argues that "some are more important than others ... especially the religious dimensions." He explains: "Biological and behavioral findings need to be interpreted within a larger person-centered framework that recognizes human choice and responsibility, and this framework, in turn, should be interpreted within a Theocentric framework in which all humans are understood before god." Involving a Theocentric framework within the counseling process may uncover the client's difficulties as "a function of

the pathology of their values.” Therefore in such cases, “the best thing the kingdom-minded counselor could do would be to help them to find better values: the values of the kingdom” (p.25).

Monroe (1997, p.p. 28-37) identifies four tension areas between psychology and theology: “the role of the Bible in creating a comprehensive anthropology and theory of human behavior, sin and human behavior, the spiritual nature of life, and the purpose of counseling.” Monroe contends that the integration of psychology and theology will necessitate fully exploring “how the biblical data impact and fill out our understanding of human motivation and behavior.” It will also require “a discussion of sin and its relation to human behavior.” For example:

What are the varying effects of being both sinner and sinned against? Are victims of sinful behavior also responsible for their response to that sin? If so, how do we appropriately describe it? Does our understanding of sin encompass not only willful sin but that of lifestyle, or blind, idolatrous, sin? How does our conception of sin affect our understanding of mental well-being? Are psychologists prepared to accurately identify sinful thinking, feeling, and doing and handle it appropriately?

The discussion must also encompass “the spiritual nature of life ... as it relates to the issue of spiritual versus psychological problems.” For example:

Does every mental health problem have a spiritual component? Is it just a component or does it permeate every aspect of mental health? Is there a difference between idolatry and addiction? What are the effects of treating a psychological problem (e.g., panic) without dealing openly with spiritual problems? How does our understanding that every thought, behavior, or feeling has a Godward referent affect our understanding of psychological problems?

The discussion must also embrace “the ultimate purpose of counseling.” Should counseling ultimately focus on the “eternal perspective of the relationship between people and God” or simply be content in “helping to remove barriers” that would keep one from an emotionally satisfying life. Should the counselor’s focus be limited to “the problems of everyday life,” or should the focus attempt to define one’s “dysfunctional relationship with God?” Moreover,

“How does the ultimate meaning of human problems affect how we deal with them on a temporal level? Is the purpose of counseling merely horizontal (dealing with human relationships) or vertical (dealing with our relationship with God)? Is it both? Is one purpose more primary than another?”

Clouse (1997, p.p. 38-48) explores the question as to whether psychology and theology can be linked. Clouse explains, for example, that “the concept of sin in Christian theology resembles the psychoanalytic view of irrational passions and instincts insofar as sin is wanting one’s way and caring for self more than for others,” but a Christian understanding of “sin goes well beyond the psychoanalytic understanding of depravity.” For the Christian, “the purpose of life is more than an ego coping with a real world,” for it involves “a meaningful relationship with the Creator and Redeemer.” For the Christian, life is more than “unconscious processes, psychic determinism, mechanistic forces, and instinctual drives,” but instead, the Christian life embraces “the conscious or rational component of one’s being, free will and self-determination, goals and purposes, and religious or moral forces.” For “well-being in Christianity is more than a regrouping of forces already present within the personality.” It involves God’s grace and becoming “a new creation in Christ Jesus.” Whereas the Christian life embraces “a divine “Creator and Redeemer,” for Freud and psychoanalysis “there is no salvation apart from what the person can do to free the self from an irrational id and an over-demanding superego. Apart from temporary relief from neurotic tension, Freud’s views lacks the hope and promise offered by “an all-powerful and all-loving god,” who “has chosen to free people from the bondage of sin.”

Clouse asks: “Can learning psychology and Christianity walk together?” Clouse concludes: “The technology of learning psychology becomes an informative source to help people understand themselves and others; and by being knowledgeable of the methods and

applying them appropriately, people can enhance God’s plan in the lives of those entrusted to their care,” but much of the philosophy of learning psychology “is incompatible with Christian belief.”

Clouse asks: “Can cognitive psychology and Christianity walk together? Are the two compatible?” Clouse does find some links between cognitive psychology and the Scriptures, especially centering on the notions of rationality, justice, and joy. Furthermore, he reports that for the most part, those attempting to integrate cognitive principles into clinical practice find their underlying assumptions neither “endearing or offensive.”

Clouse asks: ‘Can humanistic psychology and Christianity walk together?’ He concludes yes, if humanistic psychology refers to “what Packer and Howard (1985) called *sacred humanism*.” Contending that humanism belongs to Christianity in the first place, Clouse (p. 54) explains:

*Sacred humanism* sees Jesus Christ as the standard of humanness; secular humanism has “no Creator to worship, no Redeemer to love...no heavenly glory to inherit” (p. 13). In another source, Packer (1978) stated, “I am a humanist. In truth, I believe it is only a thoroughgoing Christian who can ever have a right to that name...It is part of the glory of the gospel to be the one genuine humanism that the world has seen” (p. 11). MacKay (1979) echoed this sentiment by writing, “Christian humanism affirms that the only true fulfillment is to be found in working out our destiny in line with the will of our Creator” (p. 109). Brown (1970) put it this way, “Christianity at its best does not oppose humanism: rather, Christianity is humanism plus.

But *secular humanism*, in contrast, is diametrically opposed to *sacred humanism*. ‘This life is all we have,’ argues the secular humanist. Thought and action therefore, are purposeful to the extent that they enhance “earthly human interests on behalf of the greater happiness and glory of man,” never experiencing self-denial, “but rather an enhancement and affirmation of one’s identity ... to be self-actualized.” Denouncing a need for God, humanity itself assumes godlike qualities.

In summarizing, Clouse concludes that the compatibility between psychology and theology is “both harmonic and discordant, sometimes agreeing and sometimes not” with “each of the major theories in psychology: psychoanalysis, learning psychology (behaviorism), cognitive psychology, and humanism” finding “support from Scripture.” Likewise, “each has elements that are in opposition to what the Bible teaches.” However, he emphasizes, that whereas the Christian counselor “may have to reject the philosophical assumptions of a psychology,” the Christian counselor may still use “the methodology to further the work of Christian ministry.”

Brokaw (1997, p.p. 81-85) cites several references that have attempted to outline “the difference between psychologically constructive versus defensive use of prayer, Scripture, or religious dialogue in therapy, by clients or therapists.” She also reports that the examination of the “impact of internalized relationships on one’s relationship with God is increasingly being explored. Important therapeutic issues “such as shame, guilt, and forgiveness, are being further considered in relation to various types of pathology and character structures.” In addition, she reports “a renewed interest in the practice of spiritual disciplines, including contemplative prayer, solitude, and biblical meditation.”

Hall and Hall (1997, p.p. 86-101) provide an overview of attempts that have been made to incorporate religious values and beliefs into traditional psychological frameworks and the spectrum of this integration. They conclude that there is ample evidence supporting a need for clinical integration, that there is a spectrum of thought existing about the nature of such integration, and that any such integration raises some ethical issues. Hall and Hall cite evidence that suggests incorporating religious content more systematically into psychotherapy will contribute “to one’s understanding of human nature by acknowledging that there is a spiritual

reality and that spiritual experiences make a difference in human behavior.” This, they explain, will enable the therapist to help the counselee explore the “laws and principles” that guide their spiritual system. Furthermore, “a spiritual perspective helps the therapist and the counselee “anchor values in universal terms,” thereby fostering “the goals of treatment, the selection of techniques, and the evaluation of outcomes.” Introduction of a spiritual perspective also enables the therapist to incorporate into the counseling process a broader “range of techniques, including intrapsychic methods such as prayer, rituals, and Scripture study, as well as community resources such as communal spiritual experiences.”

Hall and Hall report that integration is justified because “a significant proportion of the population seem to prefer religiously-sensitive psychotherapy, and religious material may be unavoidable in therapy.” They explain: “The persistence and pervasiveness of religious concerns and moral values is an indication that this is an important area for most people. In addition, psychotherapy and religion overlap in their scope of concern with regard to the meaning of life and moral values.” They also explain that the ethical considerations surrounding multiculturalism demand the incorporation of religious content. They emphasize that “religion is not only “an important variable in human diversity,” but religious beliefs and values “are an important motivational force in many religiously-committed clients.” Not to consider religious content, they conclude, places the therapist “in danger of acting unethically by imposing his or her values without the client’s consent” and “shows a lack of respect both for the client’s value system and for the social system represented by the value system.” Furthermore, excluding religious content may exclude more effective approaches than traditional psychotherapy can provide.

McMinn and McRay (1997, p.p. 102-110) stress the importance of spiritual practices as an important factor in the integration of psychology and Christianity. However, they note that “there has been little discussion of the relationship of psychology with spiritual practices (such as the Christian disciplines of prayer, meditation, fasting, solitude, service, confession, and worship).” But they are quick to point out that the “Christian understanding of health” often significantly clash with psychological notion of mental health, especially since “Christian discipline has historically been rooted in the authority of Scripture and faith practices whereas the epistemological roots of contemporary professional psychology are predominantly based on science and personality theory.” Subsequently, “differing epistemological foundations have led to distinct, and sometimes conflicting, ways of understanding health and healing.” They explain:

In this evangelical Christian world view, an awareness of personal need and brokenness is a prerequisite to healing. From this perspective, “sickness” is not so much a set of symptoms as a part of human nature. The central human problem is much more pervasive than a psychiatric diagnosis can capture, and extends to those who have no psychiatric diagnosis. To enter into health and hope, one must acknowledge that inner peace can never come through personal efforts alone, but only by yielding control of one’s life to God. At the heart of Christian spirituality is a healing relationship with God. In the context of this Christian world view, the spiritual disciplines enable one to move beyond myths of self-sufficiency and experience God’s redemptive presence.

Adopting this viewpoint shifts the ultimate goal for therapy to the promotion of Christian character. “Faith and the existential questions associated with it” form the fabric of health. Faith becomes a “psychological and spiritual dynamic which encompasses the totality of being in the Christian life” being “at the very heart of the human epistemological crisis, causing people to be utterly dependent upon God who sustains all that is real.”

Bufford (1997, p.p. 115-118) argues that Christian and non-Christian approaches share several factors in common. For one, both usually address similar types of problems: “depression, anxiety, relationship conflicts, addictions, and so on.” Both also show an interest in

spirituality. Furthermore, many theories of Christian counseling have “been adopted or adapted from existing counseling theories” or bear striking resemblances to them. In addition, “intervention strategies and techniques are largely common among Christian and non-Christian approaches.” Bufford concludes, that “while goals such as discipleship and spiritual maturity clearly are distinctive” the “more immediate goals, such as alleviation of depressive symptoms, reduction of anxiety, management of anger, self-discipline, or control over addictions, are common in both Christian and non-Christian approaches despite the underlying differences in world view and values.”

Bridger and Atkinson (1998, p.p. 41-52) outline four (4) positions <sup>2</sup> often expounded when answering the question: “Are theology and psychology to be regarded as friends or enemies?” Citing Kirwan (1984), they explain that one school of thought, the **unchristian view**, claims that “theology has nothing to contribute to therapy ... the two disciplines have nothing to say to each other.” At best, theology is “an irrelevance ... it might even be a factor in producing a patients neurosis.” Freud and material reductionists such as Albert Ellis and B. F. Skinner, would argue such a view.

Another position often asserted, the **spiritualized view**, emphatically denies “that psychology has any value in comparison with religion. Theology is all that is needed. Psychology is rendered unnecessary by grace: the Holy Spirit is the great psychiatrist.” Adams (1970), Bobgan and Bobgan (1979), and Powlison (1992) would be representative of this point of view.

Yet another viewpoint, the **parallel view**, contend “that psychology and theology are equally valid within their respective spheres but their authority is confined to those spheres.”

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<sup>2</sup> Note, as do Carter and Narramore (1979), the similarities to Richard Niebuhr’s (1951) attempt to explicate the relationship between Christian theology and culture in his noted work, *Christ and Culture*.

“Each function sovereignly but independently” being incapable of deriding the other, “since both are dealing with separate realities.” Hunsinger (1995) would most likely come close to advocating this position.

Still others argue for the **integrated view**. This position claims “that there is no sphere of sovereignty in the psychological-theological relationship.” When “each is rightly understood, there is no inherent conflict ... representing functionally cooperative positions.” Collins (1988), Oden (1966), and Lake (1966) would be representative examples of this position.

Bridger and Atkinson make clear that there is a “continuum of responses” to the questions of compatibility between psychology and theology ranging from “outright hostility between theology through compartmentalized co-existence to complementarity and final assimilation.” Bridger and Atkinson quickly reject any attempts to “reduce either psychology or theology to each other,” and instead embrace Farnsworth’s (1985) notion of **critical perspectivalism** – “that any phenomena can be described at different levels or from different perspectives according to the discipline that is asking the questions.” Defending their conclusion, they maintain that this “is the only approach which respects the integrity both of individual disciplines and truth as a whole.” Furthermore, it asserts the belief “that although our perspectives on truth may be limited, partial, and provisional, all truth is nevertheless God’s truth and that integration between theology and psychology is concerned with precisely that.

Farnsworth and Regier (1997, p.p. 155-163) address a practical question when they ask: “How much psychology and how much theology should one incorporate into Christian counseling? They conclude:

Our recommendation is that Christian counselors adopt the practical and helpful distinction made by Browning (1987) that (a) theology’s domain is ultimate meaning and moral obligation, and (b) psychology’s domain is personal needs and developmental tendencies. We would revise that to read theology’s primary domain and psychology’s only domain.

What we have then is a distinction that says psychology operates at the level of description, analysis, and treatment of human needs and tendencies—the problems that bring hurting people to counseling and their strengths and weaknesses that must be incorporated into treatment.

They point out that theology “functions most appropriately at the level of providing prescriptions for the spiritually meaningful and morally organized expression of our needs and tendencies.”

For example, psychology provides us with many details regarding human sexuality, but it is “our biblical theology of obligation and ultimacy that directs its expression as moral and meaningful.”

They conclude therefore, that the clinician should only draw on psychology “for the description, analysis, and treatment of human needs and tendencies, and utilize biblical theology primarily for directing one’s actions in ways that are spiritually meaningful and moral.”

Jones (1996, p.p. 113-147) examines the commonalities and distinctions between religion and science. He concludes that each discipline “grapples with real aspects of human experience.” But, whereas science is more likely “to deal with the more sensory, objective, public, quantifiable, and repeatable aspects of experience,” religion is more apt “to deal with the more internal, subjective, qualitative, and un-measurable aspects of human experience ... with the nature of the transcendent through revelation, reason, and human experience.”

Jones emphasizes, however, that there “is a certain degree of uncertainty and interpretation involved in all human knowing. “Certainly,” he argues, “scientists grapple with the abstract, private, ephemeral, and subjective, especially in psychology.” Furthermore, each area of inquiry “should and do each exhibit a certain epistemic humility and hold themselves open to correction and development, at the same time aiming toward verisimilitude – truth-likeness.”

Jones also concludes that religion and science both attempt to make sense out of a very complex existence. Jones explains:

Scientific explanations are distinguished by their emphasis on the development of what are commonly called universal mathematical-quantitative relationships between naturalistic entities, with the specified relationship being assumed to hold universally whenever comparable conditions apply. Religious explanations typically resort to more poetic, dogmatic, metaphorical, or rationalistic explanatory mechanisms than do scientific explanations. Despite their distinctive styles of explanation, both attempt to foster human understanding: Religion does claim to be in some sense true as well as useful. Beliefs about the nature of reality are presupposed in all the other varied uses of religious language.

Jones also points out that both disciplines make use of analogical models “rooted in paradigms or world views to explain experience.” In addition, Jones argues both religion and science are human enterprises, “both are human communal and cultural enterprises subject to the same sorts of human influences that affect all of our activities.” Consequently, these “finely nuanced activities” are not “readily reducible to a set of methodological rules or conceptual dogmas.” Caution therefore should be exercised by both disciplines so as to not embrace extreme conclusions reducing “the determinants of science to social-cultural forces alone” or in understanding religion in terms of “the reductionistic renderings of religion promulgated by Freud, Skinner, and others.”

Jones concludes his comparison by accentuating the fact that both disciplines generate passionate devotion. He explains:

... science can in fact elicit and inspire the same type of passionate devotion as religion can. Human beings seem to be drawn with religious reverence to some ultimate reality, and certainly science occupies that place in the life of many scientists. The scientific enterprise is sustained by the emotional commitment of its practitioners to both the grand aims of the pursuit of truth and the improvement of the human race, as well as by the more pedestrian dreams of personal advancement, prestige, and prosperity.

Jones makes it clear in his discussions that it is “inevitable that psychotherapy will be a moral enterprise with substantial interrelationship with broad religious understandings ... that what many regard to be religious presuppositions are intrinsic to the nature of psychotherapeutic and personality theory.” He notes the “intractable presence of metaphysical presuppositions in

all clinical theory,” because psychotherapeutic theories “embody value assumptions in that each includes explicit or implicit judgments about the nature of the human life that is “good” (healthy, whole, adaptive, realistic, rational, etc.) and “bad” (abnormal, pathological, immature, stunted, self-deceived, etc.).” Therefore, Jones concludes that if “psychological research and practice are going to be maximally effective in understanding and improving the human condition, psychologists would be well advised to explicitly explore the connections of their work with the deepest levels of our human commitments.”

Pargament (1997, p.p. 3-13) examines the relationship between psychology and religion within the context of coping. He explains: “Hardship, suffering, and conflict have been centers of concern for the major religions of the world.” Pargament elaborates when he writes:

Within Buddhism, it is believed that existence is first experienced *as* suffering (*Dukkha*), a term that embodies physical pain and mental anguish, negative changes, and a lack of freedom (Gard, 1962). Within Judaism, suffering in the world is explicitly recognized through the commemoration of slavery and oppression and the celebration of freedom. Christianity presents a model of suffering in the world through the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, religions of the world, “have a deep appreciation for the often painful nature of the human condition ... every religion offers a way to come to terms with tragedy, suffering, and the most significant issues in life.” Religions of the world have been concerned “about suffering and its amelioration for thousands of years.” Pargament points out, however, that as a form of practice to help people better cope, psychology is a twentieth century phenomena.

Pargament explains that psychology in the twentieth century has become a rival to religion within Western cultures. Religious phenomena “have been redefined as naturalistic” with religion losing “some of its authority as a source of absolute indisputable meaning.” “Subjective personal concern” has been embraced by psychology as it offers a different perspective “of the ‘good life’ and its own mechanisms for solving problems.” Confession

becomes psychotherapy. Conversion becomes personal growth. Sins and virtues become ethics. Because psychology has developed parallels to religion “in its rituals, rites of passage, traditions, use of symbols, and charismatic leaders,” psychology’s theories and practices have come to function like a religion. But he points out, where religion has stressed the necessity of letting go as a primary coping strategy, recognizing our powerlessness and limitations and seeking help beyond ourselves, psychology in contrast, has stressed a theme of personal empowerment, tapping our inner resources to better cope with the demands at hand. At issue for Pargament is the compatibility of these seemingly opposing viewpoints.

Pargament concludes that religion can be enriched through the study of psychology and psychology can be enriched through the study of religion. Although science and religion approach the world differently, “their methods may augment rather than detract from each other.” He explains:

There is much to be gained from bridging the world views and practices embedded in psychological and religious perspectives. Human capacities and human limitations *complement* rather than *contradict* each other. In times of crisis and coping both the possible and the impossible become visible. ... The psychology of religion and coping can weave a respect for the possible together with an appreciation for the futile. It bridges a deep psychological tradition of helping people take control of what they can in times of stress with a rich religious tradition of helping people accept their limitations and look beyond themselves for assistance in troubling times.

Psychology can assist religion in punching holes into such myths that “religion is simply a form of denial” as evidence can be garnered showing that religion adds “a unique dimension to the coping process,” that “it has the potential to help people through their hardest times and it also has the potential to make bad matters worse.” Likewise, religion can assist psychology in “stretching itself as science” by better preparing science to examine the most “inscrutable, deeply enigmatic aspects of life.” For “the religious world is too large, too diverse, and too complex” Pargament explains, “to be approached by any single scientific method.” Science

requires a perspective “from the inside and the outside, a willingness to study religion in its social and situational context, and an appreciation for the variety of ways religion can express itself.”

### Summary

In this chapter, a review of the literature examining the compatibility of psychology with theology and spirituality has been presented. Implications for the counseling process have also been inferred if not outright stated. It can be concluded therefore that, whereas there is an analogous relationship between psychology and theology and spirituality, the latter is ultimate. When psychology moves beyond the penultimate, wrapping itself in metaphorical garb and varnishing itself with quasi-spiritual solutions that focus on the meaning of existence and present prescriptions of obligation, it runs the danger of becoming a quasi-theology dripping with spiritual overtones. What results is a watered down scientific discipline that conveys blurred meaning of the phenomena it purports to describe. Furthermore, the ensuing conclusions it draws are often discordant with theological and spiritual perspectives. Also, the underlying assumptions of modern psychology with regards to the nature of humanity and its ultimate concerns, often differ significantly from traditional Christian understandings of the plight of humanity.

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