

**STRUCTURE AND DIRECTION**  
*recounting the presence of God in the therapeutic relation*

**ABSTRACT**

This paper contrasts two ways of honouring the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship. The integration paradigm views this problem as the problem of integrating Christianity and psychotherapy. This paradigm is analyzed and found wanting. It erroneously places psychotherapeutic expertise over against religious conviction. The result is that biblically based counseling is placed beyond the pale of scientific scrutiny while it is pronounced superior to psychologically based counseling. The structure and direction paradigm is offered as an alternative to the integration paradigm. Structure is described as the norm giving activity of God in therapy and direction is described as the human response to that structure. It is argued that we need insight into the structure for therapy to be able to judge whether or not a given approach to therapy represents an obedient response to the Divine presence in the therapeutic relationship.

*These all look to You... When You hide your face, they are terrified Psalm 104: 25a, 29a*

*What may be known about God is plain....since the creation God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. Romans 1: 19a, 20.*

*[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.....all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. Collosians 1: 15a, 16b, 17.*

*...although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him....They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator. Romans 1: 21a, 25.*

## I. OUR DEPENDENCE ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD

If anything is clear from the Scriptures, it is that created existence, including the existence of humankind, is dependent on God. To borrow a phrase from Carl Rogers, God is the "necessary and sufficient condition" (1957) for the existence of every creature, and of human beings in particular. Human beings live, and move, and have their being in God. Dependency on God is of the essence of human life, so say the Scriptures.

Equally, evident from Scripture is the fact of God's Revelation, i.e. the fact of the Presence of God in our lives and our dependence on it. All of human life is lived *coram Deo*, i.e. it is lived *before the face of God*. For every aspect of our life, we, and every living creature with us, also depend on the *Presence* of God. When God turns his face toward us, when He is present in our lives, we live and experience shalom. When he turns his face from us, we live in terror and we die. (Ps. 104: 25a, 29a).

As I read the Scriptures, from the beginning of creation until this day God made his presence empirically observable (Romans 1: 19, 20a) and, as if to make his presence unmistakable, He has made himself known to us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15a,16b,17).

Yet, right before the face of this Creator God, under his nose so to speak, we, human beings time and again, and in many different ways, turn away from him in a futile effort to declare our independence from him, so say the Scriptures further. And in doing so, we exchange the very truth of our dependent existence into a lie and end up worshipping and becoming enslaved by God's creatures instead (Romans 1:21a, 25).

Even so, this is hardly the end of the biblical story. What follows this human debacle is the amazingly good news of God's restraining, restoring and inspiring grace. Our waywardness notwithstanding, God has not given up on us or on his creation. He has not turned away from his creatures. Human life continues, and the unfolding of all of creation continues, because of God's continued presence. The presence of God that called creation into being and guarantees its becoming, remains intact.

God's presence in our lives is an ontological fact, not just an epistemological fact. He is present in our lives whether or not we are aware of Him, or whether or not we acknowledge Him. He is not just present our minds, he is not the product of our thinking, but his presence is given with the structure of creation (Ps. 139). And even after the Fall he daily makes his presence felt.

For these reasons it is extremely important that we contemplate the meaning of the presence of God in human relationships in general and in the therapeutic relation in particular. What place does the Divine presence have in the relationship between a therapist and the person who comes to her or him for help? In my view, the question of the presence of God in therapy translates into the question what makes the therapeutic relationship therapeutic. In this paper I want to defend the following conviction:

*God has a central place in any therapeutic relationship, regardless whether or not the parties in this relationship are aware of, or acknowledge his presence. Whether a relationship between two or more people is therapeutic or not is essentially determined by the manner in which the parties in the relationship respond to God.*

## **II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD VIEWED FROM THE INTEGRATION PARADIGM**

Most Christian psychotherapists view the problem of the presence of God in psychotherapy as an integration problem, usually as the problem of integrating psychotherapy and Christianity.

### **critique: conceptual confusion**

In an insightful review of the integration literature, Steve Bouma-Prediger (1990) has listed the many ways in which the term integration is used. And he asks what exactly is meant by 'integration'.

Does one integrate psychology with faith, or the bible, or revelation, or theology, or a Christian world view, or Christian belief, or Christianity, or religion? Does one integrate theology (or faith, Christianity, etc.) with psychology, or science, or therapy, or counseling? Does one integrate theory with practice, or faith with practice, or faith with learning or faith with vocation, or religious experience with therapy? In other words, what precisely are the relations in the integrative relationship?

And furthermore, what exactly does the term "integrate" mean? Does it mean merely to relate, or does it mean, more specifically, to combine, to harmonize, to unify, ....what integrates with what and what is the precise character of that integrative relationship? (1990:23)

Clearly, many different meanings are given to the term integration and in a confusing fashion these meanings are used interchangeably.

[F]or example, the integration of psychology and theology is viewed as the equivalent with the integration of psychology and Christianity, or psychology and religion. (1990:23)

But surely, the integration of theology and psychology, as two scholarly disciplines must not be identified with the integration of psychology and Christianity, or with the integration between a scholarly discipline and a way of life? And surely, religion is ontologically of a different order than the scientific study of psychology? Too often in the literature, integrationists commit a category mistake, i.e. they attempt to "combine, to harmonize, to unify" the equivalent of apples and oranges into one homogeneous category. The result is that the important discussion about the place of the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship, and by implication, the discussion concerning what makes therapy therapeutic, disappears in a conceptual fog.

For this reason Bouma-Prediger makes a substantial positive contribution to the discussion when he distinguishes between four distinct kinds of integration.

*Interdisciplinary integration* is integration between different disciplines. In this type, foundational issues are examined with the aim of achieving some degree of unity between two disciplines. *Intradisciplinary integration* is integration of theory and practice within a given discipline or profession. Here an effort is made to direct a specific practice according to a particular theoretical perspective. *Faith-practice integration* is integration with way of life. In this case, life practice is guided by religious commitment and world view. Finally, *experiential integration* is integration within the self and between the self and God. Here healing occurs as a result of a religious encounter- for the Christian, an experience of grace. (italics added, Bouma, 1990: 29,30)

These clarifications notwithstanding, describing the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship in terms of integration, is, in my judgment, inherently problematic. For one thing, it assumes that there are two entities, such as faith, Christianity, theology, or spirituality on the one hand, and psychology, psychotherapy, or secular counseling on the other, which independent entities can be related to each other, or combined or harmonized with each other, only with the greatest difficulty. De Graaf is correct in stating that

the word *integration* has misleading implications, namely,... that there is an inherent duality, opposition, or tension between two dimensions of our experience, between our faith and our feelings, between findings of theology and those of psychology, between our view of the person and that of therapy.(1987: 34)

### **psychological reductionism**

Some psychotherapists view the relation between the 'spiritual' and the 'psychological', or between 'religion' and 'psychotherapy', for lack of better terms, as one of opposition. Benner calls these 'spiritual reductionists' and 'psychological reductionists' (1988: 43, 47). That is, they tend to reduce one of the relata to the other. Freud, as an example of a well-known psychological reductionist, was clearly down on religion. He called it an illusion

and explained a person's longing for God as a lack of psychological maturity (1927). Jung, although he had a more positive attitude toward religion, also reduced it to a matter of psychology (Rieff, 1966:97; Benner, 1988:58).

The question we may ask of Freud is, of course, why his view that religion is an illusion is not itself an illusion (Smart, 1983:15). For countless millions of human beings the *experience* of God, refers to the *reality* of God, outside their experience. Thus, psychological reductionists deny a significant portion of human experience.

### **spiritual reductionism**

So-called spiritual reductionists fare no better. People like Adams (1970), Bobgan and Bobgan (1979), Hunt, (1985, 1987) and others view psychologically based psychotherapy as nothing more than bad religion and therefore as inherently unChristian (Beck & Banks, 1992). They reject the findings of psychology and claim to base themselves exclusively in their counseling on insights obtained from the Bible. They claim superiority for their biblical approach to counseling because the Bible is the inerrant and infallible revelation of God. Psychological counseling, in contrast, is viewed as being based on merely human insights which are prone to error. (Benner, 1988: 43-47; Collins, 1988: 126-130; Welch & Powlison, 1997)

### **some problems with spiritual reductionism**

The problems I have with this antithetical formulation of the presence of God in therapy are several. First, spiritual reductionists seem to make no distinction between the infallibility of the Bible and their fallible interpretation of the Bible. As a result their views take on an aura of holiness they don't deserve.

Second, They seem to restrict the revelation of God to what has been written in the Bible. They seem to ignore God's self revelation in creation. This view of revelation runs counter to the testimony of the Scriptures themselves (Ps. 19).

Third, in my view, their approach represents a misuse of the Bible. They do not use the Bible to scrutinize the empirical world of psychotherapy for insight. (John Calvin suggested many centuries ago, that the Scriptures are "the glasses of God"). Instead they seem to restrict themselves to studying the Bible only and seem to derive from it an exclusive set of rules for doing psychotherapy.

Fourth, their approach to counseling, which Jay Adams in 1970 articulated as *Nouthetic Counseling*, tends to use only one technique of counseling, that of confrontation, which may not be appropriate for every psychological problem. It ignores other tried and true techniques such as free association, empathy, focusing, listening, concreteness, etc. That this focus on confrontation is central to this approach to counseling even to this day is evident from an article by Welch and Powlison written as late as 1997.

Finally, because spiritual reductionists focus exclusively on what they perceive to be the ultimate concerns in counseling, such as sin, repentance and forgiveness, they seem to be unwilling to follow the often tortuous road of the therapeutic process and move much too quickly beyond the ambiguity that characterizes most of therapy toward the resolution stage of therapy. They try to obtain the product of therapy without following the process of therapy (Ellens, 1987:27). There seems to be no desire in this form of counseling to attempt to understand *why* the person who comes for counseling came to adopt a life style from which he or she presumably needs to repent.

For these reasons I consider spiritual reductionism of limited value in discerning the place of the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship. In my view it fails to give an adequate answer to the question what makes therapy therapeutic.

### **Christian counseling as superior to psychological counseling**

A more common way in which psychologically based secular counseling is related to biblically based Christian counseling is in terms of inferior versus superior counseling. According to this view psychologically based counseling is of limited value because it only deals with psychological problems, whereas biblically based counseling deals with spiritual problems.

Psychological counseling is valid as far as it goes, but biblical counseling digs deeper, reaches higher, focuses on ultimate religious questions. Psychological counseling provides counselees with emotional relief, but biblical counseling applies the unifying power of religion to the life problems with which the counselees struggle so that as a result of counseling their lives become more unified, integrated, and whole. In short, the relation between these two kinds of counseling is one of *levels* of healing (Ellens, 1987:26; Collins, 1988: 50-59;71;80).

This view of integration holds that to be really effective what must be added to secular, psychological counseling are some elements of Christian counseling, such as prayer, Bible reading, calls to repentance, etc. (Barshinger and La Rowe, 1987: 169-173, Collins, 1988:71). The discussion in this paradigm usually centres around the question when and in which way these Christian elements are to be added to secular counseling. The consensus seems to be that these Christian elements should be slipped in as sensitively as possible, usually during the resolution phase of counseling. In this context Barshinger and La Rowe speak of "pacing" Christian elements into the counseling process (1987: 172-173).

Furthermore, Christian counselors who adhere to the inferior-superior paradigm frequently have a tendency to interpret the psychological problems which the counselees bring to therapy as spiritual problems. Thus, at some point in therapy they will suggest to their counselees that their problems are really spiritual problems from which they need to repent and for which they need forgiveness from God.

## **critique**

What is overlooked in this form of counseling is, as Pfeifer has shown (1996: 46), that Christians frequently express their *psychological* problems in *religious* terms. One would think that when doing therapy with Christians it would be more conducive to healing to reverse this interpretive tendency. Therapists might better question whether Christian counselees are not using a spiritual formulation of their problems to avoid facing the psychological problems they have.

It may very well be true in some cases that a person's psychological problems have a spiritual problem as their root cause. The issue is, however, how one determines that this is the case. Moreover, even if we grant the adherents of the inferior-superior paradigm their assumption that *every* psychological problem has a spiritual cause, we still need to demonstrate how spiritual problems (i.e. problems of one kind) can cause psychological problems (i.e. problems of another kind). Concretely, *how* does the fact that a person does not believe in God make him subject to panic attacks? At a minimum, I would suggest, one would have to translate his spiritual problem into psychological terms before it could function as the cause of his psychological problem.

Furthermore, how do we determine that interpreting psychological problems as spiritual problems and informing a counselee of our interpretation is therapeutic for the counselee? What is the therapeutic value of this approach to therapy?

An example of how, in my opinion, this approach lead to a misdiagnosis of a psychological problem and a breakdown in therapy is found in Benner, 1987 (260 ff.) In this passage Berry gives a case analysis of a marital conflict between a wife and her husband which reads like a theological dissertation and which misses the *psychological* point that the wife in this case felt *emotionally* abandoned by her homosexual husband. In my opinion, Berry's clients were not well served by his description of their marital problems in spiritual terms. Small wonder, therefore, that his clients terminated therapy prematurely.

In a similar vein we may question the therapeutic value of introducing "Christian" elements, such as Bible reading, prayer, confession and other techniques, into therapy. To say that these elements have intrinsic value for therapy because they are taken directly from the Bible seems somehow less than adequate to me.

## **psychological and spiritual counseling are of equal value**

There is one more way, which I will mention briefly, in which Christian therapists have attempted to integrate psychologically based counseling and biblically based counseling.

Some Christian therapists view psychological and Christian counseling as equally valid approaches to counseling. They, therefore, advocate a dialogue between the two. Noteworthy is Ellens (1987:26) who suggests that the helping professions should search for a method of doing [Christian]theology from a psychological perspective and doing psychology from a [Christian] theological perspective.

Presumably, the exercise is aimed at demonstrating the influence of psychology on Christianity and the influence of Christianity on psychology. This attempt at integration appears to have some value because it has the potential of opening up a dialogue between Christians and non-Christians about the nature of psychotherapy and the nature of religion. However, close reading of the description of this approach reveals that the dialogue these integrationist advocate proceeds in only one direction, with the authors focusing on how Christianity can, and should influence psychology, but not on how psychology can or should influence Christianity. In practice, therefore, this view does not represent a genuine dialogue and differs little from the other attempts at integration.

### **summary critique of the Integration paradigm**

What is most evident in all these attempts at integration is that they make the Bible the ultimate criterion for what should, and what should not be included in psychotherapy. It appears that for these integrationists anything is permissible in therapy as long as it is mentioned in the Bible (Crab, 1987: 95).

The problem with placing Christian, biblically based counseling in opposition to secular, psychologically based counseling, or of placing Christian counseling on a higher plane than psychological counseling is that it puts Christian counseling theories beyond the pale of criticism. It implies that Christian counseling *must* be good (or superior) simply because it is biblically based and that secular counseling *must* be bad (or inferior) because it is psychologically based.

In the mean time, it is a matter of historical record that most of the ingenious insights into counseling and psychotherapy to date have not come from Bible believing Christians but from secular theorists. Comparatively little has been written by Christian theorists(Collins 61 ff).

Integrationist theory seems to play religious conviction off against professional expertise, with deleterious results. If one were to argue that Christians should get their cars fixed by a Christian mechanic because his work is biblically based and therefore far superior to that of a secular mechanic who bases his work on the training he has received as a mechanic, he would be laughed out of court. Yet, much of the integration literature uses this, in my opinion, fallacious argument. Thus, it seems to me that for these, and other reasons we need to utilize a different paradigm in recounting the place of the presence of God in the psychotherapeutic relationship, and in our attempts to answer the question what makes therapy therapeutic.

### **III. THE ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM OF STRUCTURE AND DIRECTION**

In recounting the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship I would like to suggest the paradigm of structure and direction as an alternative to the integration paradigm.

#### **central focus: what makes therapy therapeutic?**

There is a clear difference between the integration paradigm and the structure and direction paradigm when dealing with the Divine presence in the therapeutic relationship. The integration paradigm deals with the presence of God in therapy by distinguishing between the insights of two kinds of human beings, between the insights of Christians and the insights of non-Christians, or by distinguishing between the insights derived from psychotherapy and the insights derived from the Bible. The structure and direction paradigm deals with the presence of God in therapy by honouring both kinds of insights, but in addition it wants to distinguish between the truth of God and the fallible insights into that truth by human beings. It wants to have some criterion to determine which of our human insights are in accordance with the truth of God and which are not.

Perhaps the most important thing this paradigm does is focus our attention on the need for a structural, therapeutic criterion for doing therapy. It asks the question: What makes therapy therapeutic regardless by whom it is done, and regardless whether this therapy is biblically based or psychologically based? This is an important question, for only by means of this structural, therapeutic criterion can we determine whether a given theory of, or approach to therapy, or technique in therapy honours the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship.

Furthermore, the structure and direction paradigm asserts that the truth of God for therapy can only be discerned by living and not just by reading a book, even if that book is the Bible. The truth of God for therapy is discerned by engaging oneself in therapy and not by looking for some rules for therapy in the Bible.

#### **honouring the fullness of the presence of God in human life**

If there is one thing I object to in the integration paradigm it is that it thinks too little of the presence of God in our lives and, by implication, too little of the presence of God in the therapeutic relation. It offers us a reductionistic view of life and of therapy.

My main motivation for choosing the paradigm of structure and direction is that above all I want to honour the depth and the breadth of the presence of God in human life. For me, the presence of God is not a formula but an everyday existential reality. He is there for me in every aspect of my life and He is intimately related to every detail of my life.

## **structure as God's presence**

He comes to me in the fullness of my life and tells me what to do, and shows me how to live. He shows me how to raise my children, how to relate to my wife, how to teach my students, how to take care of my health and how to live every other aspect of my life. He speaks directly to my mind, and to my emotions and to my body. He tells me what to think, how to feel, what to do. He speaks to me in the creation that surrounds me, in the tasks I have to complete, in the people I encounter and even in the way I relate to myself. Even after the fall He has not left me to my own devices. Even while I sin He does not allow me to flounder in my ignorance. He is always there where and when I need him most. It is this concrete reality of his presence in my life that I wish to designate as His 'structure' for my life.

## **direction as our response to structure**

Unfortunately for me, however, I do not always hear his voice, I am not always willing to listen, I cannot always discern his will. That too is a reality in my life. When he points me in one direction I often go the other way. Time and again I act like a fool in the biblical sense of that word. The fact that I sometimes go his way, and other times not, in response to His presence is the 'direction' of my life.

## **structure and direction in therapy**

God is also present in that part of my life that comprises my profession as a psychotherapist. He tells me how to do therapy. He shows me how to be an effective therapist through the education and training I have received, through the insights into therapy provided by my colleagues, through the struggles and the triumphs of the people I encounter during the therapy hour, and through the experience as a therapist I have gained over the years. Through all these ways and by all these means the presence of God opens up avenues of service for me as a psychotherapist. This is what I mean by the 'structure' for psychotherapy.

Yet as a therapist too, I do not always heed his wisdom. I go one way when He wants me to go another and insofar as I wander away from his presence, I flounder as a therapist. That is what I mean by the direction of my therapy.

I hope I have made it clear that the paradigm of structure and direction is not just a formula but an existential reality that it seeks to concretely honour the presence of God in human life. Insofar as the integrationists also want to honour the presence of God in human life, we share the same goal. But insofar as they reduce the all-encompassing presence of God in human life to some narrow 'spiritual' dimension, as I think they do, they and I part company.

## **the doctrine of creation and Structure and Direction**

I am not the first to describe the paradigm of 'structure and direction'. Earlier Wolters already discussed this paradigm at length in his book *Creation Regained* (1985: 9, 49-52, 72-73, 96). He, in turn, like myself, learned about structure and direction from H. Evan Runner, now Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, Grand Rapids MI, U.S.A. and the essence of this notion can be found in the *Isagooge Philosophiae* (1967) by D.Th. Vollenhoven, who was one of the founding fathers of the Dutch Christian philosophy movement called, *The Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea*.

So, the paradigm is not new and actually finds its origin in the Bible. A common way of understanding the content of the Bible is to say that it contains the story of the creation of the world, of the fall of mankind into sin, of the redemption by Jesus Christ and of the ultimate restoration of all things. The notion of structure and direction builds on the doctrine of creation found in Scripture. It asserts that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, including humankind by his creation Word and that this Word not only initiated creation, but has also since then proceeded to uphold, and to unfold creation.

The term 'structure' in the notion of structure and direction refers to the structure for creation. It is identical to God's continued faithfulness to his creation, the fall of mankind notwithstanding. It denotes the constancy of God's grace.

In this paradigm 'structure' refers to (the actions of) God and 'direction' to (the actions of) human beings. The *Presence* of God denotes in this context that this structure as the actions of God, is revealed, is *evident* in our lives, that it impinges upon us and demands a response on our part. The 'direction' part of the paradigm signifies that people respond to that structure in different ways, and thus in ways that either approximate or deviate from that structure.

Furthermore, the term 'structure' in the distinction between structure and direction denotes the supporting and norm giving activity of God who calls creation to respond to Him. Thus, it is better to talk about the structure *for* creation than about the structure *of* creation.

To apply this notion to therapy, the phrase 'the structure for therapy' denotes the quality which makes therapy therapeutic. The 'direction' of therapy, by way of contrast, is that which in a given theory of, or approach to therapy deviates from, or approximates whatever it is that makes therapy therapeutic. It is in terms of the structure for therapy that theories of, and approaches to therapy stand judged, regardless of whether they are psychologically based or biblically based.

The structure of a therapeutic relationship can best be understood as its created structure. The created structure for a therapeutic relationship can be said to define a therapeutic relationship as a healing (or wholing) and as liberating (or opening up) relationship, both in an enabling and in a normative sense. More concretely, the created structure of a

therapeutic relationship means that God makes it possible for us to be healing and liberating and also points us to the way we should go about doing that.

### **evidence of structure in our lives**

As no doubt you have already noticed, I have just defined the structure of psychotherapy as a healing and liberating activity. That may sound as if I have an inside track to what that structure is, but I do not. My (rather loose) description is already a response to that structure and not identical to that structure itself. What I am asserting at this point is *that* this structure exists, that it enables us to do therapy, and that it demands a certain therapeutic response from us if we want to be effective therapists. *What* this structure consists of remains for now a wide open question.

However, I would like to argue that this structure for creation is a reality in people's lives. Human beings are constantly busy attempting to discern and to describe what it means to have a family, what it means to be married, how one should go about making money, baking bread, planting a garden, doing therapy, etc. The fact that we make these descriptions and, more importantly, *that we expect these descriptions to have validity*, suggests to me that human beings have some sense of structure and normativity in their lives, and that they appeal to this normative structure in defense of their assertions. In other words, the structure for creation is *evident* in our lives and this fact may point us to the presence of God in our lives.

### **God's presence is real but not easily discerned**

I guess that in reaction to the thoroughgoing relativism of post modernism, where truth seems to be just another point of view, I want to emphasize that there is something to be studied, that there is something to be known and that there is something we can come to agree on as a result of our ongoing dialogue together. I want to stress that God, and his will, and his faithfulness to creation is present in our lives.

So, I am arguing that structure is evident. It, or its operation is discernible, observable. As the will of God it is not hidden but revealed. However, this is not to say that the creation structure is *easily* discernible. Discerning the structure of creation often takes painstaking, plodding scholarly research and the structure which holds, for example, for a therapeutic relation often only becomes somewhat clear to one person after extensive dialogue with other knowledgeable people in the field of counseling. I also do not believe that Christians, via their reading of the bible, have an inside track to this structure for creation. At best, when Christians use the Bible correctly in the service of studying creation, they may be kept from stagnating into unfruitful conceptual dead ends. But none of this, from my perspective, represents a shortcut to the hard work of research.

## **the Bible opens our vision rather than limits our sight**

The Bible is a rich book. Its writings are fully in tune with all the nuances of concrete human existence. The bible is filled with insights into life as a whole, and also with insights that are valuable for our understanding of therapy. But, precisely because the written Word of God is such a rich source of insight it is not intended to restrict our understanding of human life in general and of psychotherapy in particular, but to enrich it. Perhaps the authority of Scripture is not so much legislative as enabling. Perhaps, the Bible does not limit our vision, but opens up our sight. Perhaps it allows us to see more and to see better.

Earlier I have said that my main objection to the integration paradigm is that it thinks too little of the presence of God in our lives and, by implication, too little of the presence of God in the therapeutic relation. It offers us a reductionistic view of life and therapy. By making the Bible legislative for what is to happen in therapy, or, perhaps I should say, by making a certain reduced *reading* of the Bible legislative for the practice of therapy, it commits itself to a one-sided view of therapy. Permit me to work this out in more detail with reference to some common views of therapy found in the clinical literature.

In my opinion there is an unfortunate tendency among integration theorists to identify their biblically based Christian therapy *apriori* with the structure for therapy. I think this is a mistake because it leads them to a certain one-sidedness in their conception and practice of psychotherapy and baptizes that view with the authority of scripture.

## **the goal of therapy as (inter) personal wholeness**

Many of the integrationists tend to view personal and relational integration as the goal of therapy. Psychological problems are described by them in terms of disintegration, fragmentation, brokenness, disharmony, disconnectedness, isolation and separation. Mental health is described by them as personal integration, personal and interpersonal wholeness, inner and outer harmony, connectedness, etc. They view therapy as a healing, i.e. as a 'whole-making' process (Benner 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b; Malony, 1988a:307; Oltuis 1989, 1994a, 1994b).

There is much to be said for this point of view. Those who view the goal of therapy as (inter)personal wholeness, have a great deal of the clinical literature on their side. In particular, Ego Psychology, Object Relations Theory, Analytical Therapy and some forms of Humanistic and Cognitive Therapy can be said to have personal and interpersonal integration as their aim. For this reason most of the Christian integrationists tend to show a penchant for these approaches to therapy.

Historically it is also understandable that Christian clinicians should choose personal and interpersonal wholeness as the goal of therapy, since this criterion of integration allows them to give religion a place in psychotherapy. Famous psychologists like James, Jung, Erikson, Allport and others all have stressed the personally integrative power of religion.

Finally, the Bible talks a great deal about sin as causing us to live broken lives and salvation as making our lives whole again. It speaks of "uniting our hearts in the fear of the Lord", it tells us that "in Christ all things hold together", and that "in the Lord" we can be "of one mind".

Thus there is no lack of support either in the clinical literature or in the bible for the integrationist's point of view.

The point of view which identifies integration as the goal of therapy stresses the importance of gaining cognitive control in mental health. It tends to define human beings as responsible agents who have their life at their disposal and who can therefore be expected to gather the dimensions of their lives into a unified, wholehearted pursuit of lofty goals. It tends to advocate therapy that enables people to gain an intellectual grip on their emotions in order for them to be able to act in a responsible fashion. It tends to stress the regulative, executive functions of the ego.

### **the goal of therapy as opening up our emotional life**

While there is no question that personal control is an *aspect* of emotional maturity, this point of view is nevertheless one-sided. There is an equally sizable body of clinical literature that views psychotherapy as a process of *liberation*. Classical Psychoanalysis in particular, with its notion of *repression* views psychological disorders as resulting from an excess of cognitive control. It focuses on the importance of affect and passion in the economy of human existence. It tends to foster a receptive attitude toward the emotional substratum of our lives so that our lives may be opened up to the rich variety of human experience. It tends to stress the dynamic, energizing function of the id. Similarly, Person-Centered Therapy advocates that we "listen to our experiential organism" which, it says "is wiser than our self(concept)" (Van Belle, 1980) and in that way promotes a non-regulative, receptive attitude to our experience.

Christian integrationist tend to ignore schools of therapy which emphasize the liberating function of psychotherapy. Perhaps this is because these schools have traditionally been critical of organized religion. These approaches to therapy claim that religion has been largely restrictive of human emotions, and they can make this claim with some measure of justification.

Historically speaking, traditional Christendom in Western Civilization, under the influence of Neo-Platonism, has generally treated human passions as problematic aspects of our existence to be controlled by human beings in the pursuit of Christian virtues.

However, it is doubtful that this traditional bias against passions can be justified on biblical grounds. Thus, there is no biblical reason why Christian therapists should restrict themselves to (inter)personal wholeness as the goal of therapy. The gospel of Jesus Christ is quite clearly a gospel of liberation. Jesus Christ is not portrayed in the Bible as

the one who shrinks human lives, but rather as one who liberates our existence. *Sin* is identified as shrinking our lives. *It* results in bondage. *It* makes our hearts hard and closes off our experience to the rich and colourful variety of God's creation and to the needs of our neighbours. But the Bible clearly points to salvation in Jesus Christ as the way to open up our lives again.

This point is especially emphasized in Phil.2:1. This passage lists a number of the gifts we receive by being united with Christ. According to this verse these are: encouragement, comfort, fellowship and compassion. In addition speaks of one more gift. Tucked right in the middle of this list is a gift described by the Greek word, *splagchna*, which literally means 'bowels', but which the English translates as 'passion'. The word is listed right before the gift of *compassion*, and is meant to contrast with it as its prerequisite. One has to have passion in order to have compassion.

Elaborating further, the word means 'emotional openness or sensitivity to our experience of the world'. The implication is that sin closes our hearts, our bodies, our lives to the pleasures and pain of the world which we inhabit. Sin robs us from being able to experience the wonderful variety of God's good creation and it also makes our hearts insensitive to the needs and the hurts of others. The result of this process is that we become rigid, hard, legalistic and inflexible. By contrast, the fruits of the Spirit given to us by means of salvation, open us up again and soften our hearts so that we can live fuller lives and become able and willing to show compassion toward our neighbour.

### **the integration paradigm has a one-sided vision of therapy**

What I have just attempted were two descriptions of the structure for therapy. The one views the therapeutic process as an integrative process. The other sees therapy as a liberating process. Each of these is backed up by legitimate points of view in the clinical literature and each of them has a genuine claim to being biblically based. But by viewing the bible as legislative for the practice of therapy integrationists have closed off their vision to only one approach to the therapeutic process. By contrast, the structure and direction paradigm is able to embrace both approaches and possibly other approaches as well.

### **using the insights of non Christian colleagues**

Whoever practices the art of psychotherapy is faced with the undeniable reality that one is dependent on the insights of others if one wants to be effective as a therapist. Equally undeniable is the reality that some of the most sensitive insights into the structure of psychotherapy have been discovered by non-Christians. Christian integrationists constantly face the question whether it is legitimate to use the insights and expertise of their non-Christian colleagues in their psychotherapeutic practice. By denying the validity of these insights or by considering them inferior to therapeutic insights gleaned from the Bible they may be depriving their clients from the therapeutic services they need to heal. This represents another way in which the integration paradigm keeps Christian therapist from being as effective as they could be.

That this is not just a theoretical problem becomes clear when we consider a situation in which a Christian therapist is faced with a fellow Christian who has a specific problem, like an eating disorder, and the Christian therapist is not trained in treating eating disorders. Should this therapist attempt to deal with the problem as best she can or should she refer her client to a non-Christian therapist who is skilled in dealing with eating disorders? To decide this issue in a responsible manner the Christian therapist must be able to account for the fact that apparently non-Christian therapists are able to respond obediently to the presence of God in therapy. The structure and direction paradigm has a way of doing that.

One way to account for this fact from the side of the structure for creation is to say that God's faithfulness to creation, which restrains, restores and inspires, impinges indiscriminately on Christians and non-Christians alike, akin to the rain that falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. Traditionally this explanation has been referred to as 'common grace'.

However, this explanation still leaves unexplained the fact that apparently God's grace favors non Christian therapists more, since the preponderance of insights into the structure for therapy come from non Christians. So something must, therefore, also be said from the side of the response. From the side of the response to the structure for therapy, Christians may have to acknowledge the fact that non Christians may have been willing to open themselves to the presence of God in therapy and may have been more diligent in searching out God's will for therapy than Christians.

It is hard for us to acknowledge this fact if we believe that only Bible believing Christians can know the will of God. But, perhaps we Christians find it hard to acknowledge the insights of unbelievers because this fact pronounces judgment on our own unwillingness to fully open our hearts to the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship. Perhaps, when we feel this way we should ponder the text from Matthew 7: 21 which states: "

Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven but only those who do the will of my father who is in heaven."

Another applicable passage may be Matthew 21:28 about the son who first declined to work in the vineyard when he was told, but changed his mind later, and the son who readily agreed to work in the vineyard, but did not go.

In any case, it is imperative that we do not reject the insights of non Christians out of hand because it seems to be in the nature of therapy that it represents the application of *collective* insights to the hurts and pains of individual people. Some form of dependence on the insights and expertise of others in therapy, therefore, seems justified. One *ought* to pay attention to the insights of one's colleagues. Spiritual or psychological reductionism is not in accordance with the structure for therapy.

## **giving religion its proper place in therapy**

Another problem with which Christian therapists struggle concerns the role which the religion of the therapist and of the person who comes to him or her for help should play in the therapeutic relationship. From the integrationist point of view, religion, specifically the Christian religion, should play a dominant role in psychotherapy. Two quotes from Collins (1988) are instructive of what this point of view entails:

Christian counseling involves more than secular counseling. Christian counseling points people to the teachings of Scripture and encourages counselees to live in accordance with the word of God (71)

Good counseling, therefore, could be a form of pre-evangelism (76)

From this perspective, the ultimate goal of Christian counseling is to convert counselees to Christianity.

The structure and direction paradigm acknowledges the fact that religion does play a role in psychotherapy, even a central role. But, in addition, it insists that *how* religion plays a role in psychotherapy should be decided on therapeutic grounds rather than religious grounds. In that connection an experience I have had years ago was instructive for me. A woman came to see me with the following story:

She said she was a Christian suffering from depression, and had seen a secular psychiatrist for some time. He was, she said, a very good therapist who had helped her a great deal. However, recently he had insisted that the reason she was depressed was because she 'had religion' and that if she would get rid of her religion she would be cured. Sadly she felt that she could no longer see this therapist, because  
" he does not understand that my faith in God is the only thing I still have to hang on to. And now he is asking me to give that up too!?"

It was clear to me from the emotional turmoil that this woman expressed that this therapist not only threatened her faith but also her emotional health. By insisting that this woman give up her faith this therapist violated the first rule for therapists, which is to be sensitive to the subjective experience of the client. He demonstrated a gross lack of clinical sensitivity at least on this issue. He let his own religious bias get in the way of his therapeutic effectiveness, to the detriment of this woman's emotional well being.

This story illustrates for me the importance of recognizing that religion structurally has a central place in psychotherapy. For me life is religion. Faith, rather than reason, is of the essence of human life. Religion is constitutive for human life because it deals with ultimate questions of where we lay ourselves to rest. Religion represents that *out of* which and *unto* which people live their lives. To withhold respect for the religion of a person is to negate her humanity.

With this sentiment most Christian therapists would readily agree. But would they also agree with me that if they were faced with an adherent to the Muslim religion they would have to show the same respect for that person's Muslim religion? Or would they somehow feel constrained to convert this person to Christianity? From the perspective of structure and direction this would be a violation of the empathic structure for psychotherapy. It is because religion is of the essence of life that we must fundamentally respect for the religion of the person who comes to us for help.

However, within this attitude of fundamental respect it may be appropriate at times to raise directional questions. It can be legitimate to ask a client to consider whether his religion (or ideology) is helping or hindering him in his attempt to resolve his psychological problems. The child psychologist Uri Bronfenbrenner has taught me that this is a legitimate question. His research shows that some commonly held ideologies like Individualism or Communism put children "at risk" (1979)

Implied in his research is the suggestion that all religions or ideologies are not equally beneficial. Some may even be life threatening. The relative value of different religions or ideologies for human life is, therefore, open for discussion. But raising this issue in therapy for consideration when the process of therapy calls for it is a far cry from imposing one's own religion on the person who comes to you for help.

In any case, the structure and direction paradigm relieves Christian therapists from *having* to convert their clients to their own religion. Psychotherapy is *not* evangelism. At the same time, it acknowledges that religion has a central role to play in therapy because it has a central place in human life as a whole. Finally, it recognizes the fact that not all the religions in the world, as responses to the presence of God in human life, are equally beneficial for human life. Thus it is legitimate in therapy to discuss the relative merits of a client's religion for his life and emotional well being.

### **assesing the usefulness of religiously based techniques**

This issue leads us to the next problem of whether it is permissible to use therapeutic techniques that are clearly derived from some kind of religion in the therapeutic relation. A whole raft of techniques, such as yoga exercises, transcendental meditation and channeling, derived from the religions of the Far East have been introduced into therapy during the last several decades. To these we may add the traditionally Christian techniques of prayer, bible reading, exorcism, healing of the memories, laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil. How do we determine the admissibility of any of these techniques for therapy?

Integrationists would readily allow for the introduction of Christian techniques into psychotherapy, but not for techniques derived from some other religion. It seems to me that there should be one structural criterion for admissibility of all of these techniques, including the ones found in the Bible. They cannot be judged on the basis of which

religion they derive from, but rather on whether these techniques are obedient responses to the structure for psychotherapy. Whether any of these are valid techniques should be decided exclusively by the extent to which they help a person resolve his or her psychological problems.

### **inner tranquility fosters therapeutic sensitivity**

Psychotherapy is not just the application of proven therapeutic techniques to psychological problems. It is also an experiential process. How does the experience of the presence of God help therapists in doing therapy? When we discuss this question I believe that we have come to the heart of what makes therapy therapeutic.

Here I want to speak from personal experience first of all. From my own clinical experience over the last 35 years I have come to appreciate the fact that therapy is an exceedingly complex process. It is full of ambiguities and loaded with surprising twists and turns. There is nothing straightforward about being in a therapeutic relationship. The process of therapy is often unpredictable.

One reason why this is so, is that therapy is a relationship between people and "people", as my mentor, Prof. Dr. H.R. Wijngaarden used to say, "are the worst material to work with". It is my long term clinical experience that I cannot get other people to do anything. I can only get their cooperation. My experience has taught me that therapy is an eminently *cooperative* affair. Perhaps this is the meaning of honouring the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship. In therapy we can only do that *together*. How does the text go: "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I will be in their midst" (Matt. 18:20)? Therapy is a cooperative affair, where the therapist is dependent on the client for the success of therapy. That fact makes psychotherapy an exiting, but also often a frustrating occupation, in which it is easy to come to doubt one's competency.

Therapy has its own pace and movement and the most effective ingredient in therapy is not the wealth of advice one is able to pass on to the client but one's ability to be sensitively attentive to the movement of the therapeutic process. For this to happen one has to be quiet inside. One has to be free from anxiety about one's own effectiveness as a therapist. I think this is a structural norm for therapy. The first hurdle one has to overcome in becoming a therapist is countertransference.

There are moments in therapy when I do not know what to do next. At such moments I become anxious about my ability as a therapist and to combat this anxiety I try to take on a receptive attitude. I open myself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I do this because I believe that therapeutic insight is not an achievement on my part, but rather a gift from the Spirit of God. By opening myself to the Spirit's leading I act on my conviction and by this very act of surrender I obtain the inner tranquillity I need to refocus my attention to the therapeutic task at hand, and then, often I know what to do again.

This is my personal experience tied directly to my religious convictions. But I would think that other therapists go through a similar movement in order to achieve the requisite inner peace about their therapeutic effectiveness. Only, their experience in this regard is tied to their religious/ideological convictions as my experience is tied to my Christian convictions. For example, I think that this movement to combat anxiety is what the Humanist Carl Rogers refers to when he talks about "listening" to his "organism" (Van Belle, 1980; 1985; 1990).

I am arguing that a structural condition for therapeutic effectiveness is empathic attentiveness to the movement of the therapeutic process. Furthermore, I believe that to achieve this empathic ability, every therapist must somehow experience inner tranquillity, and finally, that this inner peace is obtained by taking on a receptive attitude toward whatever, or Whomever one believes to be the source of therapeutic insight. In this manner I am attempting to conceptualize what I think is a central moment in the structure for therapy, while at the same time honouring the different directional responses to this norm.

### **is transgression really the cause of all psychological problems?**

The last issue I wish to discuss in relation to the difference between the integration paradigm and the structure and direction paradigm concerns the manner in which we generally diagnose psychological problems.

This issue especially concerns the question what constitutes the cause of a psychological problem. The question is this: Is transgression (always) the cause of psychological problems? Is there a sin behind every psychological problem? Does someone have to have transgressed some moral, legal, or religious law for psychological problems to occur?

We can put this question in biblical language: Will there be psychological problems in the new heaven and the new earth? Do we need counselors and therapists in heaven? Did Adam and Eve have psychological problems before they sinned?

We can also put this question in Humanistic language: If we were to respect everyone's human rights, and eliminate poverty, and eradicate violence would people then be free from psychological problems?

The problem with reducing the cause of psychological problems to sin or to the violation of human rights is that what in reality is a nuanced, complex matter is reduced to a mere matter of yes or no. The assertion that sin or transgression is the root of all emotional problems gives a simplistic answer to a complex question. It substitutes (pre-)judgement for understanding.

Maybe having psychological problems is normal. What I have in mind here is analogous to the distinction Glas (1991) makes between anxiety and anxiety *disorders*. Maybe

psychological problems are simply the result of the complexity of living before *or* after the fall, before *or* after Christ's return. Maybe it is normal that people who struggle with such problems seek out the help of fellow human beings, go into retreat or take some chemicals to ease their problems. Maybe what is pathologizing is that in our world that kind of help is not always available, with the result that normal psychological problems become psychological disorders.

In any case, people are complex creatures and there are probably a wide variety of reasons why they become emotionally disturbed. There are probably also many different ways in which their disturbances can be alleviated. But to learn about this complexity requires the patient scholarly research of many dedicated people. Those who come to therapists for help are ill served when, in the therapeutic relation, they are subjected to simplistic solutions to their problems, even if these solutions are couched in biblical language and presented by Christian therapists. That is not the way to respect the presence of God in the therapeutic relationship.

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