Prominent Themes in Evangelical Integration Literature

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The diversity of the integration literature is both a help and a hindrance in the task of integrating psychology and theology. While the range in approach and application reflects the creativity of the integrationists, this diversity can also lead to confusion and a lack of direction. In order to assess the state of integration, and to provide a focus for discussion, this article isolates prominent themes in the existing integration literature. The themes or assertions highlighted are (a) modeling and imitation are effective ways to learn; (b) there is no one form of Christian counseling; (c) imagery is an effective tool for counseling; (d) people can be mentally ill without being demon possessed or sinful; (e) homosexuality is not normal, healthy, behavior; (f) the scientific method is here to stay and it is not un-Christian; and (g) all truth is God’s truth. The implications of these themes are discussed along with additional themes which may be less prominent but still notable.

In 1983 Gary Collins published “Moving Through the Jungle: A Decade of Integration.” In this article Collins reviewed the first decade of publication of the Journal of Psychology and Theology and commented that “the articles that have appeared are so diverse that they almost defy classification” (p. 3). In fact, the articles are so varied that Collins abandoned an attempt to classify them. He also observed that the diversity is such that it appears we are using almost a “shotgun approach” to integration. Indeed, a look through the more than 15 years of JPT publications confirms that there is a bewildering variety.

Perhaps because of this enormous variety there have been few attempts to sift through this body of literature to look for common denominators. Goldsmith (1983) did a partial survey by focusing on the research articles. Foster, Horn, and Watson (1988) surveyed the articles published during a 6-year period but classified the articles on the basis of integration style and not on the basis of the content of the article. Both of these reviews were further limited in that they examined only the Journal of Psychology and Theology.

The growing body of integration literature, both articles and books, remains an untapped resource. This literature has not been properly reviewed, sifted, sorted, and categorized. If we are to make progress in integration we need to periodically assess where we are. By identifying common assumptions and accepted beliefs, we can identify fruitful paths and eliminate dead ends. But to do this we need a sense of what is commonly accepted by Christian psychologists. This article begins this process by looking for common threads in the integration literature. While our review focuses primarily on publications in JPT, other sources are utilized where appropriate. In identifying these themes there is inevitable built-in bias since our perceptions are dictated by our experiences and our world view. Nevertheless, such a list may help establish a foundation that will at best help us move forward and at worst spark debate which could move us in the same direction.
Modeling and Imitation are Effective Ways to Learn

This first theme helps illustrate what is often overlooked in the discussion of conflict between Christianity and psychology. What is overlooked is that there is probably more agreement than disagreement between psychology and theology. However, books and articles that focus on disagreements are more interesting and marketable than books that simply list areas of agreement. The field of psychology is like an iceberg with only its tip visible to the critics and supporters. The visible part is primarily clinical psychology and most of the controversy and discussion among Christians involves this part of psychology. However, below the surface is the largest part of the iceberg, the undiscussed bulk of the field. The research on modeling and imitation is a good example of this unseen, undiscussed bulk.

In his 1980 article, Michael Marvin provided the following constructs on which both psychology and theology agree: (a) people do imitate and model after others, (b) live models are extremely effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of others, (c) symbolic models are effective in influencing the attitudes and behavior of others, (d) different model characteristics effect the degree to which some people influence others, and (e) covert modeling procedures are effective in changing one's own behavior.

Marvin (1980), in reviewing social modeling, established its historical and scientific foundation. For example, he began with Morgan (1896), who regarded the modeling phenomenon as an innate propensity and that each individual had an inherent tendency to model or imitate other persons. Marvin also cited Freud (1923/1965), who explained the modeling phenomenon in terms of identification, Piaget (1952), who considered temporal contiguity and juxtapositional pairing of the model and imitator as sufficient for imitation, Skinner (1953), who equated modeling phenomenon with the principles of instrumental conditioning, and Mowrer (1960), who referred to modeling in terms of his proprioceptive feedback theory.

The experimental research on modeling and imitation is extensive and characterized by diversity. This literature includes Bandura's well-known studies involving children and aggressive models (e.g., Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963a, 1963b). In addition, research on modeling and imitation includes the use of imitation/modeling as intervention for learning disabled students (Gerber, 1986), self-reward (Mischel & Liebert, 1966), and deviant and/or aggressive behavior (McHan, 1985; Walters & Parke, 1964). It has been applied to the problem of teen suicide (Phillips & Carstensen, 1986), improving study strategies (Nist & Kirby, 1986), and treatment of autistic-like children (Tyron & Keane, 1986). The diversity in the literature suggests a robust concept with a multitude of applications.

The consensus of the secular research literature is that models, live or otherwise, do have potential for effective positive changes or destructive negative changes in the lives of others. There seems to be no Christian disagreement with this. In fact, Marvin (1980) commented that

the Apostle Paul realized the importance of social modeling and gave explicit directives as to who should be emulated [Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:11... Christ, himself, through his life and teachings, served as the ultimate model for emulation. He called us to show his example and to do as he did [John 13:13-15]. (p. 216)

There is No One Form of Christian Counseling

Christianizing secular influences has been a common practice since the church felt the need to Christianize the Aristotelian influence that had permeated its body (Hergenhahn, 1986). This practice, equally prominent among contemporary Christian psychology, fuels the desire for a standard form of Christian psychological counseling. This search for a "Christian counseling technique" has led to a proliferation of books and articles seeking to define Christian psychology in general and specific terms.

Collins (1977) proposed that "psychology should be recast 'in a vertical direction'— looking upward toward God" (p. 118). Collins
redefined psychology from a Christian perspective in the hopes of resolving problems he perceived in current secular psychology. Collins' basic model stems from an understanding that God exists and is the source of all truth, while likewise humanity exists and is able to know truth. According to Collins man gains this ability through interpretation of the Bible (God's specific revelation), nature (general revelation), science and theology. Similarly, Strong (1980) summarized Christian counseling as "an application of the power of the gospel to heal and transform God's people within a counseling setting" (p. 286).

While authors like Collins and Strong have redefined counseling theory, much of the integration literature has focused on developing specific techniques. In so doing many of the secular methods of counseling have been found acceptable to Christians and effective in Christian counseling. For example, McLemore (1976) and Boghosian (1983) have presented a biblical basis for pastoral counseling and given practical advice for making it more effective. McAllister (1983) found the common psychological practices of relaxation and meditation to be equally effective and ethical from a Christian perspective. Another technique, assertiveness training, has been found by some authors to have scriptural support and is therefore an important method of Christian counseling (Moy, 1980; Sanders & Malony, 1982). Other techniques such as imagery (Propst, 1980), systematic desensitization (Strong, 1980), and cognitive therapy (Carter, 1986) have all been found to be theologically compatible and useful in Christian counseling.

Finally, elements of Christian life-styles have been found to be useful in the counseling environment. Lange (1983) cited research that claims prayer with clients is a common and effective practice among Christian therapists. McAllister (1983) proposed biblical teaching and the use of Scripture in and outside of the counseling session as a beneficial method of helping the client. In discussing the role of faith in the counseling environment, Strong (1980), suggested that counseling is ultimately helping Christian clients use their faith "to cope with problems in living" (p. 283).

It seems apparent from the variety of "Christian counseling" techniques, and Christianized versions of secular counseling, that there is no one form of Christian counseling. It also seems likely that counseling techniques cannot be easily divided into either Christian or non-Christian categories. Rather, a judgment on how "Christian" a technique is will depend on the way it is used. While discussion will continue on the roles of prayer, biblical study, and other Christian disciplines in the therapeutic relationship, it is unlikely that these will replace counseling. It also seems unlikely that one therapeutic technique will emerge as more Christian than others.

The plethora of books and articles describing biblical forms of counseling (e.g., Bobgan & Bobgan, 1979) and Christianized versions of secular techniques suggests a possible subdivision of this theme. In addition to "There Is No One Form of Christian Counseling" we could add "People Benefit From Counseling." While there are enough secular and Christian critics who still question this to prevent it from making our list, it would seem unlikely that there would be so many Christians employed as psychologists if counseling was ineffective or harmful.

Finally, the search for a Christian form of counseling could be considered an admission that psychology does have a unique contribution to make. The psychotherapeutic techniques being Christianized today did not develop out of theology nor were they prescribed by Scripture. Properly used, however, they certainly can alleviate the suffering of Christians and non-Christians and therefore serve the body of Christ.

**Imagery is an Effective Tool for Counseling**

Imagery and its role in counseling and in other areas has attracted widespread attention in recent years, which has resulted in a proliferation of articles. For example, the 1986 *Psychological Abstracts* listed 118 articles dealing with imagery in one form or another. This list included articles on visual
imagery (Farah, 1985; McKelvie, 1984), interactive and noninteractive imagery (Barrett, 1985; Biron & McKelvie, 1984), and mental imagery (Achterberg, 1984; Finke, 1985; LaBaron & Zeltzer, 1985). Interest in mental imagery has become so widespread that there is now a journal that specializes in this area (the *Journal of Mental Imagery*).

Imagery has been applied to helping child-bearing women achieve and maintain positive attitudes towards childbirth (Bates & Turner, 1985), to helping with terminally ill and cancer patients (LaBaron & Zeltzer, 1985; Metze, 1985), in relieving depression (Mosak, 1985), and in helping teachers build better self-concepts which directly enhance the effectiveness of their lectures (Weaver & Cotrell, 1985).

While the volume of integrative literature on imagery is smaller than that of secular literature, these articles also acclaim its effectiveness. Propst (1980), for example, argued the effectiveness of imagery in Christian psychotherapy and cognitive therapy, and also noted the "similarities of the imagery process in the charismatic inner healing movement and the cognitive therapy movement" (1980, p. 113). Bixler (1985) provided another example of effective Christian imagery, finding it to have been helpful in the treatment of a 23-year-old female victim of child molestation. Richard Foster (1978), a widely read Christian author, sees visual imagery as meeting God in one's mind, and of imagining a place in time, such as the resurrection. Concerning the effectiveness of imagery and meditation, he concluded, "Take heart; your task is of immense worth" (p. 29).

While there is considerable secular and Christian support for imagery as an effective tool, imagery also has its critics. However, even the critics admit to its effectiveness. For example, Hunt and McMahon (1987) strongly opposed the use of imagery and viewed it as the tool of occultism and satanism. While they were quick to point out the dangers of imagery for the Christian, they were equally quick to admit that the dangers are so prevalent because of the power of imagery. Undoubtedly Hunt and McMahon overestimate both the power and danger of imagery, but it is clear that even the critics concede its effectiveness.

In conclusion, both critics and supporters of imagery conclude that it is effective. Its diverse usages, and its apparent effectiveness in research and counseling settings, strongly attest to the overall effectiveness of imagery in counseling. The debate is not over its effectiveness, but rather over whether it is an appropriate technique for Christian counselors.

**People Can Be Mentally Ill Without Being Possessed or Sinful**

While the theological argument concerning Christians and demonic influence continues, a review of the integrative literature suggests that we can be confident that mental illness is, or can be, separate from demonic influence. Indeed, a strong distinction is made at least 17 times throughout Scripture between demonic influence and mental illness (Virkler & Virkler, 1977). Bach (1979), advocating many causes for mental illness, including genetic predispositions and interpersonal relationship difficulties, stated that "demon possession and psychopathology are two separate phenomena with similar symptomology but variant etiologies" (p. 25). Virkler and Virkler (1977) claimed that scriptural precedence "argues forcefully for the fact that all illness is not of demonic causation" (p. 101).

This existence of mental illness apart from sin and demon possession is not only supported in the current literature but also gains support from the omission of the problem of sin and demons from many articles concerning counseling cures. Problems as varied as learned helplessness (McMinn & McMinn, 1983), pastoral burnout (Warner & Carter, 1984), eating disorders (Sabom, 1985; Thomas, 1984), fear (Carr, 1975) and even sexual dysfunction (David & Dudah, 1977) have all been addressed, and potential methods of cure highlighted, without specific mention of the influence of sin and demon possession. Even Crabb (1975), who believes that psychological counseling should be filtered through theology, failed to mention demonic involvement as a major cause of
mental disturbance. Instead, Crabb identified "resentment, guilt, and anxiety" as the "three central underlying disorders in all personal problems" (p. 81). Furthermore, the cause of these problems stems not from sin, according to Crabb, but from "incorrect thought" (p. 81). Crabb may indeed accept demonic possession as a source of mental illness, but he also seems to accept the fact that mental illness exists apart from it.

If we accept the idea that people can be mentally ill without being sinful, then we can justify training Christians in counseling techniques. These techniques are needed because people coming to Christian counselors don't necessarily need to be "saved," rather they may be the "saved" who are now in need of a different kind of Christian help.

### Homosexuality is Not Normal Healthy Behavior

In what many people consider to be a poor example of how to resolve scientific debates, the membership of the American Psychiatric Association "voted" to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders. The APA argued that although persons with homosexual orientations might experience psychological problems, and their sexual orientation might be part of their problem, homosexuality in and of itself is not abnormal.

The integration literature on homosexuality suggests that evangelicals have not accepted the position that homosexuality is normal and healthy. Generally, the literature claims biblical support (e.g., Lev. 18:22; I Kings 14:24; Rom. 1:24, 26-27) for the basic belief that homosexuality is outside of God's plan for humankind and is therefore an unacceptable life-style (Cameron & Ross, 1981; Evans, 1975; Martin & Martin, 1981; Powell, 1974; Strong, 1980). Specifically, Evans (1975) stated that "engaging in homosexual activity is outside of God's created ideal for man, and therefore, such a practice is in rebellion to God" (p. 94).

Based on the biblical support, Christian psychologists have advocated the necessity for homosexuals to change their life-styles (Cameron & Ross, 1981; Evans, 1975; Powell, 1974; Strong, 1980). While many of the articles use a biblical base for their opposition to the concept of homosexuality as normal and healthy, Cameron and Ross used empirical results to make the same case. The concluded that, overall, male homosexuals were found to frequently suffer from psychosomatic illness, scored lower on self-esteem scales and reported more loneliness, worry, depression, tension and paranoia. Lesbians claimed less life satisfaction, lower self-acceptance and more frequent tension. They concluded their remarks by stating, "It appears reasonable to regard the homosexual community as probably exhibiting lower overall mental health than that exhibited by heterosexuals" (p. 56). While Christian psychologists may differ from many of their secular counterparts, it appears that homosexuality has not been accepted as normal and healthy.

### The Scientific Method is Here to Stay and is Not Un-Christian

Psychology has been criticized by Christians because of its reliance on scientific methodology. Critics like Van Leeuwen (1982), Vande Kemp (1987), Farnsworth (1982), Kilpatrick (1983) and others have attacked psychology as using an unproductive methodology that prevents psychologists from getting a true picture of what it means to be human. This type of criticism of psychology is not limited to Christian critics—there are a number of secular critics as well (e.g., Giorgi, 1970; Howard, 1986). However, despite criticism from its conception, psychology's reliance on scientific methodology has been an integral part of its growth and secular psychology shows no signs of abandoning it. Scientific psychology has significantly impacted education, business and industry, the military, and health care and it appears that it will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

Similarly, there seems to be no decline in the use of scientific method on the part of Christian psychologists. While such things are hard to judge, there may be indications of an increase in the number of Christians interested in using the scientific method for integrative purposes. Goldsmith (1983)
reviewed the articles published in the first 10 years of JPT, finding that there was a 15-20% rate of research articles. Foster, Horn, and Watson (1988) reported in their review of JPT from 1980-1985 that the percentage of research articles increased during that period from 12% in 1980 to 43% in 1985. While this increase in percentage of research articles could be explained in a number of ways, there seems to be no organized opposition to the scientific movement and no widespread rejection of it.

The criticism of psychology's use of the scientific method seems to be primarily that it is too limiting and that use of the method prevents psychology from reaching its full potential. No one, secular or Christian, views the scientific method as inherently evil. But, at times, there seems to be confusion between methodological issues and application concerns. However, when method is distinguished from application there appears to be no Christian concern. For example, it is a legitimate Christian concern whether or not Christian psychologists should help homosexuals adjust to their homosexuality, but it is not a Christian concern when homosexuality is studied using experimental methods. It is a legitimate concern to Christian and non-Christian psychologists when subjects are led to believe they have delivered high levels of shock to another person, but whether the study used proper statistical analysis is not a Christian concern. The reliability and validity of intelligence tests is not normally a Christian concern but may become so if the tests are used to discriminate against minorities.

Psychology is still traveling down the path of science and appears likely to continue along that path for the foreseeable future. Christians seem willing to follow that path for now, and to work within the limits of the scientific method.

All Truth is God's Truth

According to Farnsworth (1982), "All truth is God's truth" (p. 311). Similarly, Marvin (1980) wrote, "God is the author of all truth" (p. 211). Crabb (1977) also said "all truth is certainly God's truth" (p. 36). This has been said so often and in so many ways that we may have lost sight of its implications. Often we use "all truth is God's truth" defensively when we run into conflict between Christianity and psychology or triumphantly when we see no conflict between Christianity and psychology. But if we truly believe this, and most integrationists state something to this effect, then we agree that psychology and theology should conflict less and less as both approach truth. For example, Ronald Kotesky (1980) wrote, "As Christians we need not fear truth discovered by anyone because all truth should dovetail. Too often we reject truth discovered by the non-Christian because we believe that it is not the whole truth or that there are non-Christian elements in the system" (p. 14). If we truly believe in the unity of truth then we should be tolerant of differences between psychology and theology and allow the two fields to reconcile their differences.

While it is easy to believe that "all truth is God's truth" when psychology and theology do not contradict, it is more difficult to maintain this belief when they do. If all truth is God's truth then how are Christians to respond when there appear to be two different truths? Two basic approaches to dealing with conflict between theology and psychology have been suggested: (a) to reject psychology or (b) to examine both psychology and theology for the source of the conflict. One could, of course, reject theology in response to conflict but in practice this does not appear to be a widely used approach to dealing with such conflicts among integrationists (see Foster, Horn, & Watson, 1988).

Rejection of psychology in response to conflict varies in its severity. Bobgan and Bobgan (1979) took one extreme by beginning with the total rejection of psychotherapeutic practices because they are "based on ideologies which contradict Scripture" (p. 11). Collins (1977) represented a milder form of the same approach when he suggested that "Christianity and science are harmonized ... by testing science against the Bible" (pp. 131-132). Narramore (1973) took a similar stance in arguing that "when our human views (contaminated by our limited perceptions) come into conflict with the Bible we
must place our allegiance in the Scripture” (p. 16). Apparently Narramore does not believe that our human views of Scripture can be “contaminated by our limited perceptions.” Farnsworth (1982) does, however, and argued that psychology should not be rejected automatically but rather than when the two sets of interpretations conflict then we need to reexamine both data bases for the source of the conflict. Psychologists need to look once more at their data base, which is human behavior, and theologians need to look once more at their data base, which is Scripture.

The problem of conflict between Christian beliefs and psychology has somehow become the starting point for every conversation about psychology and Christianity. By focusing on conflict, however, we have lost sight of the fact that “all truth is God’s truth” and the fact that for the most part psychology and Christianity do not conflict. Critics tend to point out that psychology and theology conflict in their basic assumptions and reason that as a result all of psychology is tainted. For example, theologians believe the world was created by God but psychologists assume the earth and life on it was created by chance. The argument here seems to be that since the basic assumption is incorrect then the field as a whole is invalid and needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. There is a clear double standard here, however, since this same standard is not applied to other sciences (with the possible exception of biology) which are also founded on atheistic assumptions. Also, psychology’s atheistic foundation has not stopped it from exploring the human mind and human behavior. Just as the “big bang” theory has not stopped physics from advancing, the theory of evolution and use of experimental methods have not stopped psychology from advancing. Gary Collins (1977) wrote:

Thanks largely to the theory of behaviorism, psychology has developed a number of objective and reliable experimental methods. Much has been learned about the behavior of animals, and some solid conclusions have been reached at least about such narrow aspects of human behavior as learning or perception. Psychological research has clarified and solved practical “human engineering” problems in industry and the military, and we have discovered some valuable principles of group dynamics. (p. 20)

Many Christians seem unwilling to accept an imperfect psychology and yet are willing to accept other sciences with their imperfections.

Almost all of the talk of conflict, such as it is, centers around the practice of psychotherapy and this artificially limits psychology. Psychology is a vast, diverse field and the conflicts normally identified by critics become overshadowed by the lack of conflict in the rest of psychology. For example, Christian psychologists can spend a lifetime in the study of learning and memory and never find a conflict with their faith. Developmental psychologists can explore the intricacies of human cognitive development, physical development, social development, and personality development, and touch conflict only when it comes to moral development. While it could be argued that the existing conflicts in basic assumptions are fundamental and need to be resolved, discussion of these conflicts is destined to be limited to Christian psychologists and to not include secular psychology. While such discussions are necessary and proper, there is a danger that Christian psychologists will become bogged down in these debates and be left behind by mainstream secular psychology.

If we accept the statement that all truth is God’s truth then it seems reasonable that it is unnecessary and artificial to establish a “Christian psychology.” The term “Christian psychology” suggests there is a special field of knowledge that has identified Christian principles of psychology. In reality, what we have is Christian perspectives on secular concepts, or Christian adaptations of secular concepts. Just as we argued that there is no such thing as “Christian counseling,” one could also argue more broadly that there is no such thing as “Christian psychology.”

Myers and Jeeves’ (1987) new supplemental text for psychology classes is titled Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith. Seeing psychology from a Christian world view can give us a unique and potentially fruitful way to approach the science of the mind and behavior. We must be careful, however, not
to artificially separate ourselves from mainstream psychology by claiming that secular discoveries that have been validated by Christians are somehow better than the original discoveries themselves. Trying to create a "Christian psychology" may temporarily gain psychology wider acceptance by the Christian community but ultimately we must recognize that all truth is God's truth and that there is only one psychology.

Conclusion

Convinced that Collins' (1983) attempt to classify and organize the growing quantity of integration articles is indeed a necessary and worthy task, this article continued this arduous process by identifying what we believe to be "accepted truths" in the literature. That is, basic ideas that seem widely accepted by Christians who are psychologists. While not everyone will agree that all of the themes on our list should be there, and many would add themes that were omitted, it is our hope that this short initial list would shift the focus of integrationists and critics from areas of conflict to areas of agreement. These seven themes should be merely the beginning of a much longer list of things Christian psychologists know for sure.

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