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## A CRITIQUE OF INTEGRATION MODELS

Stephen M. Clinton

### Abstract

The process of doing integration of psychology and theology is more complex than has been assumed. While H. Richard Niebuhr's book on *Christ and Culture* has been generally followed by most authors, it neither proposes a method for doing integration nor does it take adequate account of broader philosophical approaches to doing integration. This article will critique most of the integration efforts over the past twenty years focusing on what we can learn and use in a new approach and indicating some of the problems with what has been done. Part II, *A New Model of Integration* will present a new approach to doing integration.

### Introduction

Some years ago a Christian psychologist invited theologians to enter into the dialogue regarding the integration of psychology and theology. I have chosen to respond to this call because I agree with the expressed need, because of the immense fruit possible for the kingdom of Christ which can result from better counseling theory and practice, because theology needs to be more humane and more related to all of life, and because I believe the whole church carries responsibility for helping each other (Carter and Narramore, 1979, p. 16).

But I also respond to the call with great respect for the Christian psychologists who have been doing integration for many years. For many psychologists, their present ministry and future intellectual integrity depends on the success of this movement at comprehensive integration. Thousands of present and future counselors and millions of laymen will be influenced by their thinking and conclusions.

In a similar way, I have spent two decades studying the areas of philosophy and theology, specializing in the study of conceptual foundations. There was a time when biblical and theological studies held court as queen and king of intellectual studies (cf. Corduan, 1981). It was our theological ancestors in the nineteenth century who saw the demise of 'university' thinking and the loss of even an academic presence among the departments of the universities.

Thus, theologians are keenly aware that many who claim the name of Jesus Christ today are not orthodox by historic standards. In spite of their contributions, we feel deeply the disappointments of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, and their pervasive influence on seminaries and churches, and, through these institutions, upon the people of the world.

Theologians are also aware of the need to develop a comprehensive biblical world view, of the need for a relevant, current philosophical base for all conceptual thinking, and of the need for integration in the broadest sense across all disciplines (i.e., of the need to think biblically in all areas of life).

In order to unite the fruits of psychological and theological thinking this study will consist of two parts: a review the literature on the integration of psychology and theology, and a proposal for a new method of doing future integration. The study will focus on five issues:

1. The Nature of Integration
2. The Scope of Integration
3. The Process of Integration
4. Need for a System
5. Assumptions

This study will propose a basic system design which will enable integration efforts to proceed more effectively to build a genuine biblical model of Christian psychology, which will lead to a more effective model of Christian psychology and counseling. This article will not even attempt to construct the contents of a system. It will try to show what the contours of such a system must look like.

In 1973 Narramore wrote regarding past efforts at integration:

Nearly all of our past efforts suffer from the same four deficiencies: (1) They lack objective, scientific data, (2) they lack clearly defined theological and philosophical underpinnings, (3) they lack a general theory of behavior and (4) they lack a well thought out theory of personality. (p. 29)

Shortly after Narramore's article, Larry Crabb wrote concerning developing a model of Christian counseling, which is the outgrowth of a model of Christian psychology. "The timing is right for Christians who take God seriously to develop a biblical approach to counseling which asserts the authority of Scripture and the necessity and adequacy of Christ" (1975, p. 15). Today, a decade later, this task still remains.

## The Nature of Integration

Most of the integration literature revolves around the five styles of Christian cultural integration developed by Richard Niebuhr in 1951. Crabb (1975, 1978), Carter (1977), and others have discussed Niebuhr's set of options. But in fact I find only one of those styles being adopted on any widespread basis, namely the fifth approach--Christianity integrates psychology. This is not at all unusual, since most evangelical theologians and apologists, as well as other social scientists, find this to be the model most compatible with biblical concepts. Within this category, however, Christian psychologists have developed five definable models. These will be explored in the remainder of this section. Later, I will propose a new model not based on the Niebuhr models. I believe Niebuhr's approaches are fundamentally inadequate and that any approach based on his models cannot succeed. Niebuhr himself did not espouse any one of the five models, but called for the need for each person to choose for himself or herself which model they would follow (p. 233).

In 1975 Carter and Narramore discussed the nature of integration:

Each discipline has its data to be analyzed. Therefore, in the integration paradigm the disciplines are not fused, merged or diminished. At this level integration involves dialogical thinking about the other discipline, i.e., thinking Christianly about psychology and thinking psychologically about theology. (p. 57)

Notice that the focus is on the relating of facts or data from both fields, and that the methodology is called "dialogical thinking." They took this implied bifurcation of experience a conceptual step further. "Our task is to develop a paradigm which assists in the coming to grips with the common reality behind both psychology and theology, the reality without ontological conflicts" (p. 53). In other words, they imply that there is a unified, underlying reality (an ontological claim), but they begin with the bifurcation which Niebuhr describes.

The assumption of a reality without ontological conflicts commits the ensuing philosophic position and method to a dualistic realism (which I think is both biblical and correct). But the implications of this base have not been adequately spelled out in the literature. This lack has been at the root of many disagreements, both seeming and real. Until the coherent implications of the starting point have been clarified, the system is almost bound to be inconsistent, if not patently false at some points. This approach already goes beyond the five models proposed by Niebuhr by virtue of asserting a unified, and conceptually discoverable reality.

In 1975 DeVries responded to Carter and Narramore by saying that:

Integration aims toward unification of the facts drawn from each discipline and the achievement of an ordered, systematic representation of all our true knowledge, whether drawn from theology or psychology. (p. 60)

DeVries leaves the two disciplines separate and wants to organize our knowledge, not overcome the supposed barrier. This response, while pertinent, ignores the Carter/Narramore claim to an underlying single reality. DeVries is a step further away from ontological integration.

Carter and Narramore had already seen this problem in DeVries.

We do not share DeVries' view that these are two ontologically separate disciplines. Rather, these are two functionally separate disciplines. The whole point of our extended discussion of the unity of truth is that ontologically there is only one set of ultimate principles. (p. 51)

This same point was broadened by Evans (1975), who wrote, "One aspect of this will be the theoretical task of interrelating the theories and beliefs of theology on the one hand and the various academic disciplines on the other" (p. 4). For Evans this includes the intellectual relating of all disciplines under the mediation of theology which is bringing propositional revelation to bear on the discussion, not imposing one discipline on another.

But Evans added a whole new dimension when he went on to say, "I understand the integration of faith and learning to be a personal task which is not intellectual in character. Integrating faith and learning is one part of the general task of integrating faith with life or existence." (p. 4) Evans creates a new, and potentially far more

devastating, problem with this separation of the intellect from faith. Theologians have been explaining for centuries why it is necessary to retain faith and reason in a balance, not allowing an ontological separation of the two. Such a separation implies that faith has no essential rational content, no essential rational process.

Faith can be understood as a separate function, but not essentially without rational aspects. Understood separately, faith is a process only, without connection to the content, and human beings (along with the rest of the world) lose their wholism. This falls into a monistic existentialism. Dualism, which retains the wholistic nature of the elements, degenerates into pluralism.

This theme of personal integration apart from intellectual content has been taken further by Guy (1982) and Farnsworth (1982a). Guy said, "The task of integrating psychology and theology can be described as the search for ultimate truth concerning the nature of human existence and behavior" (p. 35). In other words, it is an all-embracing task which defines ultimate meaning in life, certainly a concern to each person. This position is tenable, except for Guy's context--the task is to be carried out separately from the intellect. Farnsworth (1982a) adds, "Integration is the conceptual relation of findings that are based on sound methodologies, and the application of these findings in one's life--embodied integration" (p. 310). This embodied integration is a fine addition if it is kept within epistemological limits (cf. Carnell, 1957).

But this approach was taken even further by Farnsworth, Alexanian and Iverson (1983). They recommend a "pre-reflective" approach in which the Holy Spirit leads us to truth via our feelings before reaching our minds. This places the basis of our reflective process in the pre-reflective feelings or sensibilities which the Holy Spirit gives us. Even if we assume that what is referred to are intuitions there is a problem. We believe that the Holy Spirit can lead us. But He does this through our reflections on the scripture and on what God is doing in our life, not by inserting new content into our minds. Farnsworth, Alexanian and Iverson recommend that on the basis of these pre-reflective feelings we are to immediately act in obedience, without reflection.

This is jumping from the frying pan into the fire! If we have a hard time integrating across disciplines and putting thinking together with feelings, is the appropriate response to cut off the intellect? I do not think so. If we cannot be led by the Holy Spirit to correct rational conclusions, what gives us cause to think He will guide us to correct emotional (feelings) conclusions about life? How could feelings constitute a basis for integration, which does use reason? This kind of intellectual solipsism was rejected by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Statement on Inerrancy, 1978) as well as by all evangelical theologians with whom this author is acquainted.

DeVries (1982) rejects both a rational approach and this more subjective approach. He is concerned that "by identifying truth with the realm of scientific facts, truth itself becomes an abstraction and integration of psychological and theological facts becomes an even greater abstraction" (p. 321). Therefore, he thinks that:

Primary integration is the process of applying the Truth, but not truth discovered through scientific analysis and verification. It is the very conduct of life itself, the life of faith--responding, acting, following the leading of Christ, the revealed Truth, in all things. (1982, p. 323)

But he rejects all intellectual content: Integration as meta-scientific reflection is not a conceptual relating of fact-contents or truths, but a form of critical dialog between psychology and theology which seeks to deconstruct the conceptual discourse of each discipline in the direction of contextualization and explication of meanings. (1982, p. 325)

On a charitable reading this attempts to move beyond the intellectual baggage of established disciplines and try to relate on a personal and experiential level the results of our various experiences. But this is no better than the Farnsworth, et. al. (1983) model. It still leaves us with a ontological dichotomy between the intellectual and experiential fields. Actually doing integration (critical dialogue, investigation, resolution) will lead to these researchers using their intellects, but having rejected the rational tests of using intellect correctly.

Logic is not an enemy; it is a tool. It is not sufficient for finding all truth, but it is sufficient for finding some truth and for examining all claimants to truth. It needs to be balanced with intuition, and personal and social experience (history); but not thrown away (cf. Collins, 1977). The deeper problem is with the metaphysical implications, not just with the epistemological methodology.

A much milder point is made by Carter and Mohline: Integration can be thought of as three things: the relationship of Christian and secular concepts, the way a Christian functions spiritually and psychologically, and a way of thinking (i.e., synthetically). (1976, p. 79) This three-fold approach calls for integration to take place as a synthetic activity across all of life. It certainly allows for a life and reality testing and emphasis in the integration process. It moves well beyond the Niebuhr model to a wholistic approach.

The comments by Collins in his review article seem most appropriate: Integration is an emerging field of study. It seeks (a) to discover and comprehend truth about God and his created universe by using scientific methods (including empirical, clinical, and field observations) and the hermeneutically valid principles of biblical interpretation, (b) to combine such findings, when possible, into systematic conclusions, (c) to search for ways of resolving apparent discrepancies between findings, and (d) to utilize the resulting conclusions in a way which enables us to more accurately understand human behavior and more effectively facilitate the changes which help individuals move towards spiritual and psychological wholeness (1983, p. 3).

Collins places integration as a widely conceived attempt to relate different levels of content to each other and to a unified view of life in a wholistic way. It does not set up artificial lines of separation, but opens the way to joint efforts at problems. It 'fits' the realistic metaphysical base implied in the scriptures and the currently developing wholistic systems of integration (Carnell, 1957; Henry, Vol V., 1982; Pannenberg, 1974; Clinton, 1985).

Thus, the nature of integration is a wholistic attempt to interrelate various elements from the one real world on the basis of truth given to us by God, through study of the Bible, human life and history. If this approach is followed it will leave Niebuhr's models behind. It respects the two functional disciplines but also begins to deal with all of life.

### The Scope of Integration

The issue of the scope of integration leads us to the relationship of psychology and theology in the integration process. Theology has been defined as "the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith" (Tillich, 1951, p. 15). It will be further identified in this article as that which has been derived specifically from the Bible.

It is harder to choose one definition for psychology. Textbooks define it as a system of understanding human behavior, or as a process of examining interpersonal experience. These are so vague that they cannot be

distinguished from phenomenology, sociology, or anthropology. The Webster's dictionary definition--a science of the human mind and behavior--seems dated.

Timpe has given a definition with a more philosophical twist. "Herein, psychology is redefined, not as a theory or system but as an ontology of human possibility" (1983, p. 24). Timpe's redefinition is an application of something like phenomenology to psychology. It can be helpful or very dangerous to mix these two conceptual fields (cf. Collins, 1967; Gruenler, 1983; MacGregor, 1973). It may be fine in a carefully worked out philosophy, but it is unclear where Timpe wants to go with it at present. An ontology or metaphysical description of human possibility does not seem to either necessarily include actual human experience nor to focus on it, ie. perceived reality. It is also hard to understand how to have an ontology without having a theory or system.

Crabb defines psychology quite differently:

There is a body of revealed truth in propositional form to which all true evangelicals are committed as the inerrant word of God. There is another vast literature consisting of the diverse, sometimes contradictory, theories and observations which we can simply call secular psychology. (1978, p. 414)

There is merit in both Timpe's and Crabb's definitions. Timpe may well be on the right track philosophically, especially after a Christian examination has been done and a proper world view constructed as a foundation (cf. J. Collins, 1967 and Clinton, 1987b) and Crabb properly sees the contradictions of some of the secular systems.

For the purposes of comparison, in this article psychology shall be taken to be a set of proposed theories about human nature and human behavior. Thus, in parallel with the definition given above of theology, psychology is the study of the interpreted contents of human nature and behavior.

The primary difference between theology and psychology is that theology begins with God's self-revelation in scripture, nature and history; whereas psychology usually begins with human behavior as observed by other people. This difference sets the two disciplines apart in both method and starting point. Both disciplines proceed on the basis of common human methods of investigation. Thus the interpreted contents, the results, of both disciplines are on the same footing. But the starting point is very different. Theology can have priority only because of its starting point. If Christian psychologists begin with the Bible and then add the theoretically compatible results of psychological investigations, they are on much the same ground as the theologian.

Guy widened the base for theology and historicized it: "careful theological formulations and the historic creeds of the church provide a solid basis for Christian understanding and for efforts to integrate Christian doctrine with psychology" (1982, p. 38). Guy's focuses on theology as a historical process and as the reflections of human beings, without including the starting point of God's self-revelation. It would necessitate a view of theology and psychology as equally the result of human behavior. In fact, this position has been taken by Farnsworth: "What I am saying is that theology, as a human discipline, does not necessarily have functional authority over any other human discipline" (1982a, p. 311).

As an evangelical theologian I must protest against these shifts. Guy's shift, or something like it, to the historic creeds or to a specific theological system moves the base of the discussion from the propositions of scripture (and their individual and systematic implications as the words of God) to the propositions of non-inspired people.

Once this shift has been made Farnsworth's critique carries some weight. But the initial shift must be rejected. While any specific theological formulation is indeed the word of a person, the Bible (the theoretical and practical base of theological reflection) is more than that, it is the words of God.

If theologians do not agree in detail about a system, they do agree on many points, including a natural method of interpretation of words (including scriptural propositions) and a broadly understood theistic realism founded on the deity of Christ and a literal resurrection. Thus, the propositions of the Bible have meaning and that meaning is tied to states of affairs in the real world (Clinton, 1985). Scripture has meaning, which is the basis of all evangelical theological discourse, and is true. This meaning is discoverable through a grammatical, historical hermeneutic, and is intelligible to all people.

### The Process of Integration

Various proposals have been presented regarding the process of integration. Carter and Narramore (1979, p. 111) proposed that the common content and principles of the two disciplines constitute the scope.

Timpe took this further by limiting the scope of theology: "Similarly, the behavior of the individual which does not speak to ultimate concerns is outside the defined boundaries of theology" (1983, p. 26). Timpe indicates that there is overlap between psychology and theology only so far as the individual's behavior is a part of the ultimate concern. But the idea of ultimate concern, borrowed from Paul Tillich, says that every meaningful assertion speaks to, or reflects, an ultimate concern. Timpe is using the term differently, and loses the meaning.

If what is meant is that psychology and theology overlap only so far as both are religious, then the area of overlap would still be very large. People tend to behave in many areas of life based on their religious convictions. On the other hand, people's feelings and perceptions, regarding themselves and others, often influence how they see God and how they interpret their own life experience (Sitz im Leben).

Fleck and Carter (1981) took a different approach: "A second and corollary assumption for integration as a model is that psychology and Christianity are equally emphasized" (p. 19). In response to this, Guy concurred, "Rather than an abstract hierarchy of special over general revelation, or theology over psychology, it might be more useful to conceptualize them in a dynamic, interacting relationship" (1982, p. 38). This model looks good on the analogy with theology and psychology as human disciplines. But it still fails to account for the value of a starting point in the Bible as God's direct revelation. More could be done to build adequate modifications of Guy's model.

DeVries and Farnsworth present an entirely different position. DeVries writes,

The `applied' dimension of the integration process ought not to be an afterthought to scientifically verified facts from psychology and theology. It is not the last step, but the first step in the integration process. I would suggest that `application' be considered as the initial response to revelation in whatever form. (1982, p. 321)

It is difficult to see how application can literally be the first response to any revelation. Understanding the content would have to come first and that introduces all the hermeneutical questions. Also, to which revelation would DeVries make this response? He seems to assume that Christian (i.e., biblical) special and natural revelation are under consideration. But there are many claimants to truth: the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Bible, etc.

Which one shall we choose? In fact, it would be impossible to discriminate between choices if the initial response is to be action. The reader would have to read a passage and act upon it before asking if it makes sense or is moral or is of God. This is an impossible position intellectually.

Unfortunately Farnsworth takes this position even further. He rejects any rational, analytic process:

Therefore, we can avoid a kind of idolatry (i.e., bibliolatry) which would have us reading the Bible as our primary source of truth because of some prior rational proof or theory that it is safe and dependable to read, rather than because of the truths we encounter in the pages of the bible that point, not to the Bible itself, but (through commitment and obedience) to the living God. (1982a, p. 311)

This focus on life experience and application as the first step is very dangerous. Not only does Farnsworth draw on positivistic philosophy (which DeVries points out; 1982, p. 322), but he makes personal experience both the goal and the test of truth. This would fall into the trap of completely relativizing both theology and psychology. It is similar to the position in theology called existential neo-orthodoxy, which sees truth as coming in the personal encounter with God, but not in any objective, historical event or in verbal propositions. This position has long been rejected by evangelicals since it leads to relativising truth to individual experience and feelings.

Collins made the point that biblical revelation is superior to natural revelation (1977, p. 130). This superiority exists because the Bible is God's inerrant direct revelation and conveys precise meaning, whereas natural revelation conveys an impression about God to us through indirect means. Crabb asserts that the Bible must have the role of final arbiter in all integrative issues and must have an authoritative role in formulating psychological theory (1978, p. 305).

Thus, the foundation of theology and psychology should be the inspired words of God communicated to us in the scriptures (cf. the Statement on Inerrancy of the Chicago Council on Biblical Inerrancy). In this way, the words of scripture are treated as a data base which can be investigated and from which conclusions can be drawn and thus form the only solid foundation for either theoretical reflection or application-oriented interpretation.

Virkler has argued that the Bible as a data base has priority over human experience. He says:

I should like to argue that the Bible as a data base should have priority over phenomenology (human perception of experience) as a data base, priority both in terms of validity and functional authority. Our perceptual experiences are affected by both our sinfulness and our finitude; God's Word is not. (1982, p. 330)

God could have given us a systematic theology volume (or two) but He chose not to do so. I think we are much richer with the Bible. It is given in a literary form which is meaningful to every person, not just to the theologian or the psychologist.

But it is precisely that it is meaningful that is the issue. If indeed it is meaningful to us, then the derivation of that meaning, with all due care about the process of interpretation (which should always be aimed at application), should result in a set of theoretical understandings which is a close approximation of what is actually true about God and human beings, whether this is carried out by theologians or psychologists. In any case it should be

closer to truth than a system based on natural revelation alone.

Because the scripture, as a data base, is more authoritative than natural revelation or human experience alone, theology has a more adequate starting point than philosophy or psychology (unless the philosopher or psychologist also begins with the Bible). If a process of integration is wholistic and includes the Bible along with psychology and other disciplines it has a good chance of synthesising all truth without systematic bifurcation. The human investigators are alike in their pursuit of truth, the fields are only functionally diverse.

Carter and Mohline take a position similar to Collins, Crabb and Virkler:

Since scripture is metaphysical and revelational in character, it makes theology more comprehensive than psychology in locus of explanation, level of explanation and epistemology. Therefore, psychology is integrative into theology to the extent that psychology remains methodological rather than metaphysical. (1976, p. 100)

This places the emphasis for the process correctly but retains the ontological separation. These authors would do well to jettison the Niebuhr models of integration and to rethink whether or not even psychology as a separate discipline does not have some metaphysical commitments in its data base (although the interpretations may get it wrong). Niebuhr assumed that the Christian and secular world views were opposed and therefore held different metaphysical commitments. Thus, any integration would have to give priority to one or the other world view. In reality, psychology and theology need not be perceived as having different metaphysical foundations.

Evans agrees that theology is the broader discipline. "Christian theology affects psychological theory by providing a context for theorizing" (1975, p. 4). In Evans' model theology is not only the base, but is also an existing context for theorizing. This is an excellent approach to getting away from the Niebuhr model. However, Evans does not follow his own point to its conclusion.

## Summary

All attempts at integration of theology and psychology either follow the Niebuhr model, which assumes that conflict occurs at the level of reality and focuses on interpretation of the data bases of human experience, or follow a more existential model of seeking application without proper interpretation. I believe a better way can be found to pursue integration.

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