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# LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATION TO MENTAL HEALTH

ATTEMPTS TO INTEGRATE THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

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**Evaluate this statement:** “Those who simply and repeatedly assert that “Jesus is the answer” usually are not grappling hand to hand and soul to soul with troubled lives. When they are confronted with the reality of personal, emotional, or family distress, they either encourage more trusting, praying, and Bible study (good advice but often no more useful than telling a sick person to get medicine) or they shift gears and go to the other extreme: “Your problems are not spiritual; they are mental. I cannot help you. Better get some professional help.” *Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling* by Dr. Lawrence Crabb

**Identify a few “token” Bible passages that are often used in times of distress that may prove less than helpful. Why?**

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## *Theological and Psychological Integration*

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**What is the concern with theological and psychological integration? Consider the following quotes and assess.**

“Since the Enlightenment, the church has been busily selling its spiritual birthright to the world. The church growth movement has depleted the spiritual resources of the church still further. Rather than serving as stewards of the mysteries of God, today’s spiritual gurus seem intent instead on the business of selling God to self-fixated customers, using worldly tools borrowed from the social sciences and the advertising and entertainment industries. The transforming power of God’s Holy Spirit operating through His Word and the Holy Sacraments has faded significantly in the church’s understanding of its own identity and mission. Self-improvement defined both morally and psychologically has gradually taken the place of the care of the soul in the church’s life and work.” *The Art of Spiritual Evaluation: A Framework for Understanding the Health of the Soul and Its Cure* by Harold Senkbeil

“As the field matures, its interest in more sophisticated theological approaches seems to be increasing. Unfortunately, Lutheran voices have been rather faint in these scholarly theological-psychological discussions to date.” *Introduction to Counseling and Confession* by Rick Marrs

#### LEVELS OF EXPLANATION VIEW – DAVID MYERS

The level-of-explanation view concludes that there are numerous and distinct levels of reality and each distinct level has its own value. There is, for example, a physical, chemical, biological, psychological, social and theological level. Essentially this approach puts each level of reality side by side on an equal plane but that each level or reality is distinct and do not cross over. One does not influence the other but each need to be cared for in their own way. This view would put psychology and theology on equal but distinct planes.

**How do faith and psychology relate?** Faith can be viewed subjectively (*fides qua*: the faith which believes) or objectively (*fides quae*: the faith which is believed). Myers places a heavy emphasis on subjective faith in relation to psychology. **Identify the danger of this?**

Viewing faith as a set of teachings also has its weaknesses when it relates to psychology. **What biblical teachings could prove less than helpful as it relates to mental health?**

#### INTEGRATION VIEW – STANTON JONES

“Integration of Christianity and psychology (or any area of “secular thought”) is our living out—in this particular area—of the lordship of Christ over all of existence by our giving his special revelation—God’s true Word—it’s appropriate place of authority in determining our fundamental beliefs about and practices toward all of reality and toward our academic subject matter in particular.” *Stanton L. Jones, Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*

**Identify the issue:** “Because integrationists differ among themselves in their reading of Scripture and the Christian tradition, and in their reactions toward different psychological systems, the work of integrationists will manifest diversity, though all of us are attempting to be faithful first to Christian truth.” *Stanton L. Jones, Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*

Jones offers a strong 1<sup>st</sup> Article emphasis over a 2<sup>nd</sup> Article emphasis. **Explain what this means and its ramifications.**

#### CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY VIEW – ROBERT ROBERTS AND P.J. WATSON

This view considers the value of a Christian psychology that it suggests has always existed. Drs. Robert Roberts and P.J. Watson argue for a return to historical Christianity in order to bring “traditional validity” to modern psychology. They suggest empirical studies of Christian ethics and values like sin and grace, forgiveness, repentance, and (while they did not say it explicitly) the doctrine of vocation. They suggest that there is psychological value in studying such doctrines for the benefit of human flourishing.

**Agree/Disagree with the following quote:** “If the experience of churches in the past one hundred years is any indication for the future, we can expect that in the measure that we lost touch with our own psychology and replace it with the psychologies of the establishment, we will also lose touch with the apostolic faith. Ours is a psychological age, an age in which people hunger and thirst for psychology, buy self-help books that induct them into psychological patterns of thinking about themselves that are, in many ways, alien and contrary to the faith, and become formed in the image of this advice and theory. The chief impetus behind the Christian psychology model is that we cannot, in faith, simply leave our psychological thinking to be done by non-Christians, or even to be done by Christians according to the canons and methods of the establishment psychologies.” *Robert C Roberts & P.J. Watson, Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*

**However, Stanton Jones comments,** “I continue to be concerned here with a seeming presumption that ‘Christian psychology’ is a singular entity.” AND “I remain unconvinced that Roberts and Watson have clearly articulated a concise summary of what it is that constitutes their Christian psychology.” *Stanton L. Jones, Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*

**In order to have a uniquely Christian (or more specifically Lutheran) “brand” of psychology, what is needed?**

#### BIBLICAL OR NOUTHETIC COUNSELING – JAY ADAMS AND DAVID POWLISON

Nouthetic counseling is, as its name suggests, confrontation. The name stems from the Greek word *noutheteo* which has the basic idea of admonishing. The value of this approach to counseling is that it attempts to be rooted in the Scriptures and the basic truths of law and gospel, which is at the heart of pastoral care. Adams emphasizes Scripture’s rightful place and usefulness for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). *Jay E. Adams, Competent to Counsel*

This approach to counseling tends to view sin *only* as an immoral act to which law and gospel must be applied. How might we understand sin more broadly? What are the implications for mental health counseling when sin is only viewed as an immoral act. *See John 9 and Luke 13*

#### OUTLINE

January 16 – We are created being: Applying Biblical anthropology to mental health  
January 30 – Take up your cross: Applying the theology of the cross to mental health  
February 6 – Distinguish between law and gospel: Applying the proper distinction to mental health  
February 13 – We are sinner and saint: Applying the *simul* to mental health  
February 20 – God’s Word is efficacious: Applying God’s Word to mental health