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# Psychology and Theology: A Return to Dialog

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There is a close relationship between Christian theology and contemporary psychology. The Lutheran theological tradition is especially founded in an experiential matrix which gives it a common ground with psychological thought.<sup>1</sup> However, this relationship between theology and psychology has not always been a clear or comfortable one. What, for example, is the relationship between Christianity's traditional concern for salvation and psychology's therapeutic healing? The relationship between theology and psychology needs to be reexplored and reex-

amined. Our purpose is to lay out the basis for a constructive approach to relating theology and psychology and to demonstrate that the Lutheran theological tradition provides unique resources for this task.

This will be done by examining the currently popular therapeutic technique of Transactional Analysis, its origin in Freudian theory, and its relationship to theology. For comparison, the approaches of David Belgum and Christopher Allison in relating theology and this Freudian model will be examined. In conclusion the groundwork of a constructive approach to relating theology and psychology will be offered. An underlying purpose is to demonstrate the necessity of doing anthropological prolegomena<sup>2</sup> to explore and test the adequacy of that understanding of man to which the Gospel is addressed. It is here that questions are raised about the nature and needs of man. How, where, and in what way will the Gospel be operative in man? Does it, for example, bring about an ontological or psychological change? What dynamics of personality (such as guilt, fear, or identity) are involved?

But is there really a need to do this? It could be claimed that this has been done already. Have not most seminaries added departments of "functional theology," and are not all pastors trained in pastoral psychology and counseling techniques? This may well be; but David Belgum argues that

<sup>1</sup> This experiential foundation was central to the Reformation. Luther found comfort not in the external authority of popes or councils, but in the experience of the Gospel. Wenzel Lohff, "Rechtfertigung und Anthropologie," *Kerygma und Dogma*, IV (October-December 1971), p. 227, refers to the importance of experience in the Reformation concept of justification and its relationship to anthropology: "Kennzeichnend für das Gemeinte ist vor allem der Satz in CA XX, 17: *tota haec doctrina ad illud certamen perterrefactae conscientiae referenda est, nec sine illo certamine intelligi potest* (BSLK, 75). Die entscheidende Leistung der theologischen Lehre besteht darin, dass, der Glaubende das Evangelium hört, des Heils gewiss wird und seine Identität erfährt." Lohff also speaks of the need to recover the experiential matrix of the Gospel: ". . . kann die Aufgabe christlicher Verkündigung und ihrer Theologie nur so gelöst werden, dass eine Vermittlung geleistet wird, die diese Polarisierung [between anthropology and justification] produktiv überwindet (T. Rendtorff), damit das, was die Reformation als Evangelium bezeugte, in der Lebenswirklichkeit heute gehört werden kann."

The article is in English translation; see "Justification and Anthropology," *CTM*, XLIV, 1 (January 1973), pp. 31-47. The sentences quoted are translated on page 33.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "the word about man before the word."



what is going on is monolog rather than dialog.

The clergy, especially those who are leaders in pastoral theology and pastoral care, have attempted a dialogue with the behavioral sciences, but the "dialogue" has been one-sided, with the clergy listening gullibly to the current solution according to psychiatry, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The clergy will not have met the challenge of the dialogue successfully until it is as natural for psychotherapists and clinical psychologists to learn from and converse with a theological faculty, as it now is for the pastoral theologians to do the reverse.<sup>3</sup>

The great frustration among many seminarians and pastors arises when they try to function as psychologists after one or two required courses in pastoral psychology have been hastily tacked on to the theological curriculum. Is more training the answer, or does the problem lie elsewhere? Does saying a prayer at the end of a Rogerian therapy session make it "Christian" counseling? What is the fate of *Seelsorge* in an age weaned on Freud? Should not pastors turn their shepherd's crooks over to the neighborhood psychiatrists who are after all better trained than they could ever hope to be?

In this context David Belgum talks of his own disillusionment with what has happened:

For the past sixteen years this writer has had the mistaken notion that if he could do good, competent, secular psychotherapy in a church building or while wearing a clerical collar, somehow it would come out as pastoral care. He sensed that this notion is as unsatisfactory for many of his colleagues as it is for himself.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> David Belgum, *Guilt: Where Psychology and Religion Meet* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps there has not been as much dialog as we had assumed. One of the tragedies of the departmentalized approach to seminary education is that even within a seminary faculty there has rarely been ongoing dialog between systematic theology and the "practical" department. As a result the seminarian is left with a compartmentalized education and a feeling of uncertainty about what it really means to be a pastor to people. There is therefore an urgent need for the kind of prolegomena in the areas of anthropology and psychology that has been and is being done in systematic theology.<sup>5</sup> It is especially incumbent on Lutherans to be engaged in this task since anthropology is an integral part of the Reformation theological tradition.<sup>6</sup> Many critiques of religion have been done from the viewpoint of psychology, but little has been done to test the adequacy of psychological theories and therapeutic techniques in the light of theology.

We need to question what kind of an understanding of man the Gospel speaks to and what use we can make of the various current theories. Where are the inadequacies? What will not stand up in the light of the Gospel? Transactional Analysis can serve as an example for such an analysis. It is both a current model for understanding man and also forms the basis for a counseling technique. Transactional Analysis was popularized and gained widespread influence through the

<sup>5</sup> See Langdon Gilkey's prolegomenon, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), based on an analysis of secular man's self-understanding, the ontological prolegomenon of Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), and Werner Elert's nomological prolegomenon, *Der Christliche Glaube*, 3d edition (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1956), pp. 59-109.

<sup>6</sup> Lohff, op. cit., ". . . kann als Beispiel für solches Verfahren auf die grundlegenden Bekenntnisse der lutherischen Reformation verwiesen werden."



work of Eric Berne<sup>7</sup> and Thomas Harris.<sup>8</sup> It is being taught and used in hundreds of centers all over the country with great enthusiasm. Many pastors have adopted Transactional Analysis for individual and group counseling, and it is being taught in many Lutheran seminaries. Thomas Oden's caustic comments about the "encounter culture" are also applicable to the growth and spread of Transactional Analysis.

Its apostolic tradition is handed down from the 'saints' [Berne, Harris], fervently believed by those who are susceptible to belief, and enthusiastically propagated by missionaries committed to the evangelization of the world in this generation.<sup>9</sup>

Our question must be whether Transactional Analysis has an understanding of man that is capable of providing an adequate anthropological basis for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Transactional Analysis uses individual responses, called transactions, as its unit of analysis.<sup>10</sup> People respond to each other in any of three ways corresponding to three states that exist in all people. These are a Parent, an Adult, and a Child, (P-A-C).<sup>11</sup> The Parent (P) is made up of attitudes received as a child primarily of a

controlling, manipulative nature. Recent brain research has shown that all of a person's experiences from birth, and possibly before birth, are recorded in the brain much as a tape recording. The Parental tape records thousands of "don'ts" as well as all other experiences. Along with the experience, the emotions felt at the time are also recorded. The Adult (A) is a mature, responsible response pattern concerned with present decision-making and future planning. The Child (C) is a dependent, immature response which is self-centered and self-seeking.

Transactional analysts use diagrams to illustrate the transaction which is taking place. For example an Adult-to-Adult transaction would be diagrammed as in A-A below (Fig. 1). A Parent-Child transaction would be as in P-C (Fig. 2). Complementary transactions are P-P, A-A, and C-C. P-C transactions can also be complementary if both persons want to remain in their respective states. This occurs in some marriages where the wife is in the Parental role, the husband in the Child's, and both are willing to retain these states. Crossed transactions are disruptive. If in a P-C transaction the person in the Child's role wishes to engage in an A-A transaction, the lines cross and the situation is disruptive. (Fig. 3)

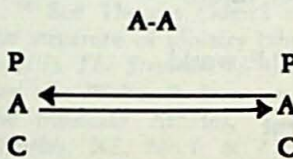


Fig. 1

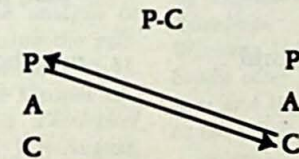


Fig. 2

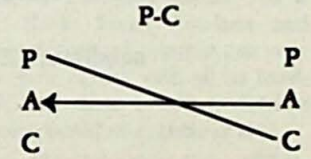


Fig. 3

<sup>7</sup> Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Harris, *I'm OK—You're OK; a Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Intensive Group Experience* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press,

1972), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> The following is a summary of material found in Harris, pp. 1-96 and Berne, 1-34.

<sup>11</sup> Parent, Adult, and Child are capitalized in Transactional Analysis to show the special usage and meaning given these terms.



The goal of Transactional Analysis is to sensitize people into an awareness of which state they are expressing and the position into which it puts others. By moving from disruptive to complementary transactions a person can develop more satisfying interpersonal relationships. The ideal transaction is the Adult-Adult transaction. Here the mature, rational Adult is in control, and one is in the realm of open and satisfying exchange.

What place is there for Transactional Analysis in pastoral counseling? Should it be used exclusively, in a supplementary manner, or not at all? First of all, it must be clear that while the goals of Transactional Analysis and the Christian faith are not inimical, they are also not identical. Christianity asserts that the human situation is the result of a broken relationship with God. Man's alienation from God is reflected in his broken relationships with himself and his fellows. Thus sin spreads like ripples around a rock thrown into still water to infect all the dimensions of life. Thomas Oden, in *The Structure of Awareness*,<sup>12</sup> details how sin is dysfunctional awareness in each of the seven possible relationships a man has: God, self, neighbor, world, past, present, and future. (Fig. 4)

GOD

past, present, future

neighbor, SELF, world

Fig. 4

Where does Transactional Analysis fit into this scheme? If one makes a somewhat artificial distinction for illustrative purposes between vertical healing (God and man) and horizontal healing (man and man), one could say that Transactional Analysis is concerned with the man-to-man relationship. Or, using more classical terminology, Transactional Analysis would come under sanctification rather than justification. Thus it does not deal with what Christianity feels is the "gut issue," the theological issue. For Christianity sees the First Commandment as the basic one.<sup>13</sup> Transgressing the First Commandment means transgression of all; or, more properly, transgressing the others is an expression of the transgression of the First. So Oden puts the relationship to God and the sin of idolatry as the basic relationship which when ruptured ruptures the rest.<sup>14</sup> Transactional Analysis deals only with the bottom six relationships, cutting off the top (Fig. 5). It deals with religion only tangentially and not as the basic issue of human life. It views Christianity largely as one source for values rather than the questioner of values.

Transactional Analysis states that the basic posture of man is the not-OK feeling. This is a statement based on

GOD

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past, present, future

neighbor, SELF, world

Parent

Adult

Child

Fig. 5

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Structure of Awareness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 13-20.

<sup>13</sup> See Martin Luther, commentary on the First Commandment, *Large Catechism*, part 1, <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol44/iss1/19>

edited by Theodore Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 365-71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369, sec. 31; p. 371, sec. 47, 48.



empirical analysis of the nature of birth and childhood. A person feels not-OK in his relationships, initially with his parents, then with others (man to man). Christianity asserts that there is also a cosmic or ultimate dimension of not-OKness. Not only do others tell me I'm not-OK, but the whole of the reality of my being in the world ending in death confers and confirms on me an unconditional not-OKness, an unconditional threat which is in itself an experience of God (man to God).<sup>15</sup>

Christianity is not in competition at this point with the conclusions of psychology and sociology. Its concern is with how a man responds to the threat of not-OKness. If the not-OK posture is man's original, that is, universal state, then this is compatible with Christianity's understanding of original sin as man's universal compulsion to justify, to vindicate, to affirm and OK himself, and thus to get out from under the threat of the not-OK state.<sup>16</sup> Here, however, Christianity takes issue with Transactional Analysis. Transactional Analysis says that healing comes when one realizes that the not-OK posture is an illusion. It is only the result of one's outdated

Parental "tapes." Salvation occurs when the Adult can update the tapes. Christianity does not say that the not-OK state is illusory, but that our responses to it are illusions. The not-OK state has reality. Salvation comes not in denying its validity (that is, making myself OK through an act of will by the Adult, which is really self-absolution) but in accepting its validity, giving up my illusory existence<sup>17</sup> by which I live as if I were OK,<sup>18</sup> and receiving the transcendent, unconditional OK verdict offered in Jesus of Nazareth. Grace is thus the reality of our being OKed by God's affirmation even when we do not feel or cannot make ourselves OK.

It is here that Transactional Analysis shares the same flaw as traditional psychiatry. Psychiatry says that a man should not feel guilty. He must recognize that he is not responsible. All of his behavior can be accounted for on the basis of childhood conditioning (Parent or superego) or sexual impulses (Child or id).<sup>19</sup> Christianity deals with guilt. Traditional psychiatry

<sup>15</sup> Gilkey, op. cit., Part II, chs. 3 and 4, has an extensive analysis of the secular experience of God as threat. See also Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 105ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Oden's concise analysis of the structure of idolatry (absolutizing the relative) in *The Structure of Awareness*, pp. 235-41. See also Walter R. Bouman, "The Gospel and the Smalcald Articles," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XL, No. 6 & 7 (June, July-August, 1969), pp. 415ff.; Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace: A Psychological Study* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), pp. 80-88, who sees self-justification as the universal problem, both social and religious, of mankind; Augsburg Confession, Art. II, Tappert ed., p. 29: "Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent."

<sup>17</sup> The illusions men live by and by which they defend themselves are poetically described by C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1946), where men build houses that don't protect them, defenses that don't really defend, securities that don't make secure, and in the midst of their illusions are in hell, out of touch with reality. Another powerful statement of the human predicament is portrayed by Hannah Green in *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), in which a psychiatrist can only finally offer his patient reality with all its hardness and brutality, but which is still preferable to the illusory dream world of mental illness.

<sup>18</sup> Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 158, 159, and *Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 16-25, does a theological analysis of "as if" existence whereby men seek to avoid the threat by denying the truth about themselves.

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most radical recent statement of behavioristic determinism is B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971).



says "you're not guilty; believe that!" Christianity says that a man must accept his guilt, take responsibility, and receive God's acceptance not in lieu of, but in spite of judgment and guilt.<sup>20</sup> Transactional Analysis, in saying that a man is not really not-OK, has a fundamentally different perception of reality from Christianity. A man in his totality is a responsible being. He cannot play off his accountability in a deterministic manner against his Parent (conditioning) or Child (instinct). Parent, Adult, and Child, the whole man stands before God either in illusion or truth, faith or unfaith, acknowledging the reality about himself or denying it.<sup>21</sup> This is Christianity's real point of conflict with Transactional Analysis. This is not the false dichotomy posed when Christianity is confused with morality. Then Transactional Analysis becomes a threat. The threatened moralist wonders what role remains for Christianity if Transactional Analysis can deal as effectively with the problems of mankind. But morality is not Christianity, and the moral man is not necessarily the Christian man.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> "In spite of" (*trozt*) is a recurrent theme in Luther seen most centrally in the Law-Gospel motif of the Gospel as the experience of the love of God in spite of all evidence to the contrary (Law). See Elert, *Law and Gospel*, and Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate; An Interpretation of its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), pp. 150-234.

<sup>21</sup> There is a parallel to this in recent Biblical theology. The recovery of the Biblical understanding of man as a wholistic being with a unitary understanding of body and soul will not allow the Platonic playing off of a bad body against a good soul. One cannot, for example, speak of the "fleshly lusts of the body" as though the body were separate from mind and personality. See Thieliicke, *Death and Life*, pp. 18ff. and 110ff.

<sup>22</sup> Moralism is still an ever-present threat to the Gospel. For moralism short circuits the Gospel by approaching Scripture not to find how it says the Gospel, but to derive applications from it for life. The Bible then becomes a

For the man of unfaith Transactional Analysis can become just another way of establishing superiority, of OKing himself at the expense of others, of exploiting and manipulating. Harris speaks approvingly of a businessman who learned to close many deals by using his understanding of Transactional Analysis to appeal to the Parent or Child in the other man.<sup>23</sup> While the Parent is the unabashed self-justifier who achieves his secure superiority by imposing rules and injunctions to establish an unassailable, impregnable position of OKness—and while the Child achieves security as the center of all, seeking to be served—the Adult, too, can be a self-justifier, albeit a more subtle one. To be sure, there is more hope for the Adult, because this is where the "evaluative I"<sup>24</sup> (the reasoning self-critic) and the Gospel are operative. But the Adult is still confronted by the struggle between faith and unfaith. Moving from Parent or Child to Adult does not automat-

compendium of moral teaching and Jesus the great moral teacher. Believing the Gospel becomes "following the teachings of Jesus," not entrusting ourselves to Him. The Gospel, of course, is not without moral implications, but they come only out of believing the Gospel and then asking how one as a believer of the Gospel relates himself to the world and other men. An example of moralizing would be to use the word of Jesus to the rich young man (to give everything away and follow Him) to mean that we ought not to have too much money and goods. Or we shouldn't be so materialistic. But Jesus is here asking the man to give up an idolatrous concern for money, that is, to get one's security not from wealth, but from Jesus as the Gospel. This is a word for the man whose god, that is, whose ultimate trust, is in wealth. And properly to use this text is to expose and examine our own idolatries through which we entrust ourselves to something other than Jesus as Gospel. In short, to moralize a text is to miss the point, to negate the Gospel. In fact, it is the death of the Gospel in that it invites a man to put his trust in correct actions rather than in Jesus, the Christ.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, pp. 93, 94.

<sup>24</sup> See Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 140ff.



ically guarantee complete and honest openness to one's fellows, nor removal of Parental (conditional not-OKness) and transcendent (unconditional not-OKness) guilt.

Harris acknowledges this possibility for manipulation by the Adult and even affirms it in a "how to win friends and influence people" approach,<sup>25</sup> although he does caution not to allow Transactional Analysis to be reduced to just another party game. Harris falls into the trap of equating Christianity with morality,<sup>26</sup> that is, it is helpful for providing data for the Adult's value choices and provides a satisfying philosophical system within which to see one's life. He thus places Christianity at the periphery as one possible source of input for the Adult's reasoning process. Despite his many quotes from Paul Tillich, religion is not at the core of man's problem; rather religion is one more illustration of Transactional Analysis.<sup>27</sup>

Transactional Analysis cannot be extended beyond its own inherent validity, as Harris does when he claims that Transactional Analysis is *the* solution to the problems of mankind, from the family to international politics.<sup>28</sup> For the Adult state is just as capable of sin as the Parent or Child. Christians can stand with Luther at this point in feeling that reason can never substitute for OK affirmation as a gift of God.<sup>29</sup> Transactional Analysis offers

an extremely useful and helpful tool to increase one's self-understanding and to gain a fuller understanding of the nature of personal interaction. But for pastoral use one must incorporate P-A-C into a larger framework of counseling which includes sensitizing people to the ways they defend and justify themselves at the expense of others. This is really to "do the Law," exposing sin, bad faith, misplaced trust, and false gospels, and to offer people Jesus of Nazareth as the Gospel to which to entrust themselves. This movement takes us from counseling to individual confession and absolution and into the heart of what pastoral care is all about.<sup>30</sup> Here Christianity and its Gospel stand above and beyond whatever counseling technique one may use.

It is necessary to explore the origin of Transactional Analysis in order to understand it more fully. Thomas Harris states in the preface to *I'm OK—You're OK* that the underlying goal behind Transactional Analysis was to find a simplified vocabulary for traditional psychoanalytic formulae that could be readily understood and easily used by his patients. This relationship can be seen in the following diagram.

*Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>30</sup> Good material on confession and absolution is difficult to find, especially if one desires something from a Lutheran or Protestant perspective. Theodore Jungkuntz's article, "Private Confession: A 20th-Century Issue Seen from a 16th-Century Perspective," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXIX, 2 (Feb., 1968), pp. 106-15, is written from an historical perspective; Walter R. Bouman, "The True Treasure of the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXVIII, 9 (October 1967), pp. 565-79, from a systematic theology perspective; David Belgum, *Guilt: Where Psychology and Religion Meet*, from a Biblical and psychological perspective; and Alvin Rogness, *Forgiveness & Confession: The Keys to Renewal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), intended for laymen. All have proved helpful to this writer.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, p. 96, point 3.

<sup>26</sup> Harris, p. 96, point 6: "Work out a system of values. You can't make decisions without an ethical framework."

<sup>27</sup> Harris, p. 223: "What happens in a religious experience? It is my opinion that religious experience may be a unique combination of Child . . . and Adult . . . with the total exclusion of the Parent."

<sup>28</sup> Harris, pp. 245-68

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of Luther and reason see Brain Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the*



FREUDIAN MODEL

## SUPEREGO

conscience  
inhibitor

## EGO

identity

## ID

animal instinct

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

## PARENT

"don'ts"  
outdated tapes

## ADULT

decision maker

## CHILD

spontaneous emotion

Fig. 6

The P-A-C model can be clearly seen to have been based on the Freudian analytical model. One difference is that the Freudian model uses a more definitive approach in defining what the three states *are* (although there was never a definitive description of the nature of the ego), while Transactional Analysis takes a more functional approach and is more concerned with what they *do*.<sup>31</sup> These differing emphases reflect the movement in Transactional Analysis from the theoretical to the practical level.

There is also a similarity in method and goal between Freudian psychotherapy and Transactional Analysis. Christopher Allison states that the assumption of Freudian analysis was:

that the patient's awareness of the content of the unconscious and its operative forces could give sounder guidance than the irrational forces of the id or the frequently irrational attempts of the superego to deal with the patient's situation.<sup>32</sup>

Freud's desire to strengthen the ego through awareness of past and present attacks on it from both the superego and the id is, of course, similar to Transactional Analysis. But while

Freudian analysts spend time-consuming sessions seeking to get at the past origin of problems, Transactional Analysis can use present expressions of Parent and Child evident in current transactions to quickly raise the level of the patient's awareness of the problem and his ability to deal with it. Transactional Analysis is less concerned with removing "hang-ups" than with learning how to live creatively with them. The goal of course is the same: strengthen the ego, strengthen the Adult.

Assuming the validity of this model for understanding the nature of man, which Freud theorized and which Berne and Harris claim is a demonstrable, phenomenological reality, we will first compare two treatments of it in theological dialog and then conclude with a third alternative for dialog with this model. A primary goal in any attempt at dialog is to find a common ground, a mutual point of departure, a shared insight from which to gain further common insight. David Belgum chooses the phenomenon of guilt as his common ground from which to engage in dialog with psychology. His title, *Guilt: Where Psychology and Religion Meet*, already makes this clear. This, however, is an unfortunate choice. For as we saw in the critique of Transactional Analysis, at the point of guilt theology and psychology have two different perceptions of both the nature and extent of guilt and its healing. They have in fact two fundamentally different

<sup>31</sup> E. Berne, *Transactional Analysis and Psychotherapy* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 24, states that "Parent, Adult, and Child are not concepts like Superego, Ego, and Id . . . but phenomenological realities."

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Allison, *Guilt, Anger and God: The Patterns of Our Discontents* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), pp. 21, 22.



perceptions of reality. All one can do in using guilt as the point of contact is to pose these two perceptions in an antithetical relationship to each other, making one superior to the other. Harris puts Transactional Analysis above religion and perhaps correctly criticizes churches for being "Parental" (authoritarian). He also seeks to understand religion in terms of Transactional Analysis, thus reducing religious (for example, Christian) perceptions of reality to a dynamic of his own. Harris makes values the point of contact with religion. This is inadequate, for, as we have seen, it mislocates the real concerns of Christianity.

David Belgium does the same thing by formulating the Christian perception as antithetical to the psychological. His argument thus becomes acceptable only to those who are predisposed to acknowledge the superiority of the Christian faith. Belgium uses the Biblical theme of hypocrisy as his theological point of departure. He concludes from his analysis that hypocrisy is false, illusory existence. It denies the truth about oneself and alienates from God and community. With this understanding Belgium devastates secular psychotherapy, seemingly overreacting to what he feels has been uncritical acceptance of it by pastoral counselors. The dilemma of the psychotherapist, according to Belgium, is that he seeks to operate out of an inadequate philosophy of man and the world. His naturalism lacks any cosmic dimension. The result, therefore, is determinism and materialism in which persons, too, can become things. The practical consequences of these philosophies, which Belgium feels are actually heresies, are moral relativism, an individualism set over against commitment and community, and a self-centered hedonism without ethical obligations. The result of this dilemma is meaninglessness, irresponsibility,

and ultimately both mental and physical illness. Belgium also feels that secular psychotherapy lacks an adequate basis for a solution to this dilemma. Its scientific objectivity is really inadequate detachment. It works from a permissive stance in which there is no judgment or confession of responsibility. Finally, the goal of catharsis is inadequate because it lacks concern for the neighbor and can lead to antisocial and hostile behavior.

Belgium has thus done in reverse what he accuses psychologists of doing. He so subordinates psychology to theology that no constructive dialog is possible, and we are left with no idea of how to use the valid insights of psychology positively in our pastoral counseling. Where does one go after this type of conclusion?

The dilemma of the secular psychotherapist is that he tries to accomplish an enormous task of personal reconciliation with an inadequate and incomplete theory of the nature of the universe, of society, and of the individual person. His approach to the moral problem is neither comprehensive, radical or throughgoing enough; it is palliative and ameliorative when it must be reconstructive and transformative.<sup>33</sup>

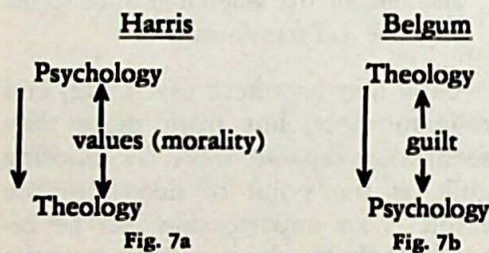
Guilt may be where psychology and religion meet, but from there they seem to go separate ways. By choosing guilt as the point of departure the result is an impasse that can be resolved only by choosing one over the other. Without determining the validity or invalidity of Belgium's critique, it remains unsatisfying as a tool for dialog since it provides no positive direction in which to proceed. His analysis of the Biblical theme of hypocrisy is a helpful insight, but he has not made clear in what way Jesus is an alternative to hypocrisy. Belgium concludes with a call for a functional



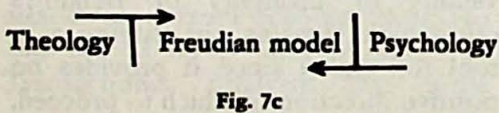
confessional.<sup>34</sup> This has already been mentioned as an important direction for the church and its pastors as they seek a uniquely Christian quality for pastoral counseling. His conclusion deserves to be widely heard:

Jesus said that if someone asks you for bread it would be unthinkable to give him a stone. When persons suffering from the many painful and debilitating consequences of guilt come to the church for healing they must be taken seriously and treated effectively. If the church cannot minister effectively at this point, there is little point in a big "turn-out" Sunday morning for casual worship.<sup>35</sup>

A second approach is that of Christopher Allison. The perspective from which he seeks to relate theology and psychology is the Freudian model for understanding the nature of the self. As we shall see, this point of departure offers a positive approach which does justice to both theology and psychology and which leads us significantly beyond the limitations of previously described options. The following diagram will summarize these options.



Allison



he does seek to relate psychology to theology in terms of his system.

Allison describes the contemporary situation as man caught up in the web of four patterns: anger, disesteem and self-hatred, guilt, and death. Using the Freudian analytical model of superego, ego, and id, he describes this predicament as the result of the ego being caught in tension between the competing demands on the self of superego and id.

Characteristic of the civilized person is disesteem. . . . Civilization must not only restrain, it must give ideals, aims, values, goals, and models by which we are to be measured, stretched, and judged. And the higher the ideals, the greater the judgment. . . . Under such arduous demands, I look in the mirror and do not like what I see—a walking lie, a hypocrite. If I try to escape this bind by lowering my standards and ideals . . . then I look in the mirror and see a person with low standards, low ideals, and of course, low esteem.<sup>36</sup>

The triple dynamic of the individual self also exists on the larger scale of the group or society:

Freud himself used civilization as synonymous with cultural superego. Nature is here used . . . as referring to biological and existential nature.<sup>37</sup>

In a similar manner Thomas Harris refers to the concept of the "national Parent."<sup>38</sup> These dynamics of the individual and group can be diagrammed as follows:<sup>39</sup>

- SUPEREGO (conscience)
- EGO or SELF (identity)
- ID (nature)

Individual

Fig. 8

Thomas Harris is included because even though he does not consciously seek to engage in dialog with theology,

<sup>36</sup> Allison, p. 9.  
<sup>37</sup> Allison, p. 19.  
<sup>38</sup> Harris, pp. 245-47.  
<sup>39</sup> Allison, pp. 21-32.

<sup>34</sup> Belgum, pp. 118-41.

<sup>35</sup> Belgum, p. 118.



**SUPEREGO** (civilization)  
**EGO** (society)  
**ID** (nature)

Group

Fig. 9

How is this conflict to be resolved? Most solutions offer a choice: either opt for civilization or nature. Allison lines up the influential advocates in each camp:

<u>Civilization</u>	<u>Nature</u>
Freud	D. H. Lawrence
Jung	Wilhelm Reich
Marx	Norman Brown
Marcuse	

Fig. 10

Although there are many differences of emphasis among those in each category, Allison feels they all opt for either civilization or nature as the resolution of the guilt-disesteem-anger-death matrix.

It would seem apparent from our survey of the models, that all the contemporary hopes for solution to the human problem continue to follow, in general direction, the pattern of Freud or Lawrence—toward greater or lesser structures of civilization, or toward nature in the direction either of anarchy or nihilism of a mystical nature that resolves the conflicts by fleeing them. Thus disesteem and guilt are resolved by sacrificing man's humanity. Anger and death are overcome by succumbing to them. Man still finds himself caught in the web of his discontents.<sup>40</sup>

How does Christianity face this option? Is Christianity forced to make the same choice? Allison feels that when Christianity is seen as a "Gospel of moralism"<sup>41</sup> it is then viewed wrongly by Freud and others as super-

ego material. But Christianity does not choose either the option of civilization or nature; it offers a third choice—redemption.

Neither Freud nor Lawrence, Marx nor Reich, Marcuse nor Brown, neither superego nor id, will avail—but a new creature. This rebirth must be in the ego, the self's center, and not merely a recovering of his instinctual nature nor merely control by his rational powers. . . . Civilization is to Christianity as the Law is to the Gospel. . . . The Law is holy, just, and good, but it is the strength of sin. Similarly, civilization is just such a good thing, but it also gives power to neuroses, self-damage, ill-health, and tends to repress the human spirit.<sup>42</sup>

Allison defines sin primarily as disesteem or self-hatred. The Gospel restores self-esteem allowing one to respond to demands and yet retain wholeness. Self-righteousness will not heal disesteem. One cannot trust in civilization. Neither can one flee to nature. Christianity offers cosmic approval beyond this forced choice.

To anyone who finds in himself the abrasive and frustrating effects of repression, of shoulds and oughts, idealism and control, yet lacks hope of banishing from consciousness such conscious-shaping material by a head-long flight into nature, this is good news indeed.<sup>43</sup>

Allison has demonstrated a constructive way to relate Christianity to psychology using the Freudian analytical model. He has done so in a way that makes Christianity both intelligible (understandable in psychological categories) and disjunctive (offering another alternative). It is clear that the Gospel offers us a third option beyond either law or license, in theological categories, and beyond civilization (superego) or nature (id), in psy-

<sup>40</sup> Allison, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Allison, pp. 37, 38.

<sup>42</sup> Allison, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Allison, p. 50.



chological categories.

The use of the Freudian analytical model of the self as the point of contact between theology and psychology offers a unique insight and the possibility for genuine dialog. Allison's definition of sin in terms of the self, however, is somewhat inadequate. The weight of Biblical and theological evidence defines sin as a relational term. Responding to the threat of not-OKness by self-OKing or self-justification which results in broken relationships in all dimensions of life is sin. Disesteem or self-hatred is more properly seen as a result or consequence of sin rather than as a definition or description of sin. Similarly restoration of self-esteem is not the Gospel but rather a result or correlate of the Gospel. The Gospel, the transcendent affirmation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, offers a new form of justification—God's—in place of self-justification. A man does not OK himself but the "you're OK" verdict is conferred on him as a gift of God in Jesus.

Allison sees disesteem as a consequence of being caught between the superego and the id, the demands of civilization and nature. This puts man in a passive role, being acted upon by forces within which he is caught. If we see the primal experience of man as threat, as both Harris' analysis and Christianity's theological analysis do, then man is thrust into an active role in which he responds to threat in the dynamics of ego, superego, and id. First, threat to the ego results in despair and the experience of fate.

One feels it is both inevitable and unavoidable to be not-OK. Secondly, threat in the superego results in pride. Here a man feels he can make himself OK by finding security in codes, rules, laws, and dictums by which he establishes an OK position for himself. This is the pride of self-righteousness. This is the area in which the dynamics of conscience operate. This is not conscience as a guide for life but conscience as a dynamic of self-justification by which a man defends, vindicates, and rights himself even if this means illusory self-rationalizations. This is the danger of Phariseism against which St. Paul warned. The problem of the keeper of the Law is not that he doesn't keep it well enough, but that he thinks he is justified by his keeping of it. Thus St. Paul can speak of the Law increasing sin.<sup>44</sup> The Law increases sin because the more a man keeps it, the more he will think he is justified or OKed thereby. The correlate to the pride of self-righteousness is guilt which results when one falls short of the internally or externally imposed norms by which he seeks to justify himself.

The third response to the threat of not-OKness is a dynamic of the id. This is rebellion against the threat by which one seeks to get out from under the "oughtness" that hangs over his existence by denying its validity. The result is that one lowers his standards or throws away all standards. The following diagram illustrates the dynamics of responses to the experience of threat in the superego, ego, and id:

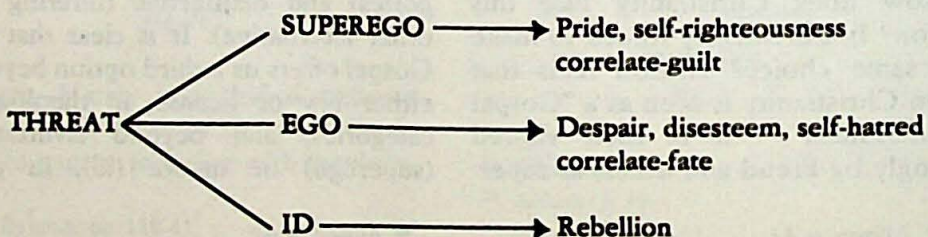


Fig. 11



Pride acknowledges the threat of not-OKness and seeks to make the self OK in self-OKing, but illusory, self-righteousness. Despair acknowledges the absolute inevitability and inescapability of threat. It takes threat with absolute seriousness and if unresolved can result in suicide. Rebellion denies the validity of threat and the possibility of being questioned. It moves out of the questioned stances of pride and despair and becomes the questioner before whom rules, others, and even God must vindicate themselves.<sup>45</sup> Its results are destructive of self and society.

These are the dynamics within the nature of man under both relative and absolute threat. The Gospel is the ultimate, unconditional affirmation of God which one believes in the act of trusting Jesus of Nazareth as Gospel instead of and in spite of threat. The Gospel does not remove threat nor destroy the identity of the ego (old Adam), but rather confers a new identity (new Adam or new man) which exists in tension with the old (*simul justus et peccator*) and is operative in the ego. It calls for a new locus of trust, namely trust in affirmation

instead of trust in threat and in the idolatrous responses to threat. It calls for denial of self (inappropriate responses to threat in pride, despair, and rebellion operative in the superego, ego, and id) and trust in Jesus as Gospel, as the affirmation of God.

What are the dynamics of the nature of the self under the Gospel? A similar analysis in terms of superego, ego, and id can also be done here. If the Gospel is operative in the superego it again becomes Law and the self-justification cycle begins anew. Only this time one is not justified by correct behavior but by correct believing. The Gospel becomes information about either what to believe or what to do.<sup>46</sup> If the Gospel is received by the id it becomes justification for license. Since God is forgiving it doesn't matter what is done. If it is man's nature to sin (seen largely in moral categories) and God's nature to overlook it, then the world is seemingly well arranged. It becomes clear that for the Gospel to remain Gospel it must be operative in the ego where it confers a new identity on the total self. The dynamics of the self under the Gospel can be diagrammed in a manner similar to Figure 11.

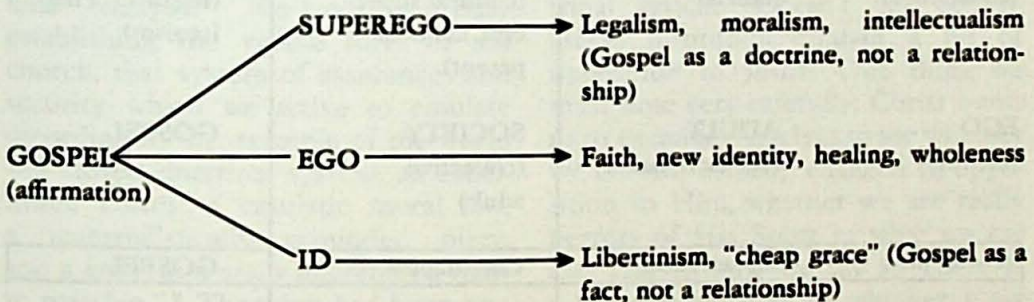


Fig. 12

<sup>44</sup> Rom. 5:20.

<sup>45</sup> Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube*, pp. 59-63, describes this as *Mittelpunktsdasein*, seeing oneself as the center of all things. This is id, the Child.

<sup>46</sup> The proper use of the Law for the Christian has long been a subject of great controversy. The role of the Law and the so-called "third use of the law" forms the basis for a classic debate between Elert and Karl Barth. See Elert, *Law and Gospel*, especially pp. 38-43, and Forde, pp. 137-99.



By using the Freudian model and Allison's insight into a manner for constructive use of it in relation to theology, it has been possible to sketch briefly the groundwork for an integrative approach to the problem of dialog between theology and psychology. It gives us the possibility for insight into the internal dynamics of the self and the Christian reality. It also provides a basis for understanding many of the problems (such as moralism and legalism) which have plagued Christianity throughout its history and continue in current debate. The precariousness of the Gospel also becomes evident. For only if the Gospel is operative in the ego in spite of threat will it be perceived by the self as Gospel.

The following diagram can summarize and illustrate this integrational model. Theology in the diagram is placed beside psychology and sociology. It should more properly be placed above them in a three-dimen-

sional manner. The Gospel confers a new identity on the ego, and in the decision-making process of the Adult, it enables servanthood through the shifting of values. The corporate nature of the Gospel in society is Christianity which offers a mediating force between civilization and nature. It is the true humanizing force in the world as it evaluates and transforms the values of society, deabsolutizing the relative and ameliorating alienation.

In the dialog between Christianity and psychology (or any other discipline), the nature of the Gospel does not allow us to claim a superiority which is self-justifying. The role of the servant is the role of one who seeks to relate. If theology is no longer the "queen of the disciplines," perhaps it can be the servant of the disciplines. Its role is to help them ask the right questions. This continuing task of Christian theology is to be sure that our questions are worthy of the answer.

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<u>PSYCHOLOGY</u>		<u>SOCIOLOGY</u>	<u>THEOLOGY</u>
SUPEREGO (conscience)	PARENT (don'ts)	CIVILIZATION (cultural super- ego, national parent)	LAW (legalism, Phar- iseeism)
EGO (identity)	ADULT (decision maker)	SOCIETY (collective adult)	GOSPEL
new identity	servanthood	Christianity	GOSPEL
ID (animal instinct)	CHILD (spontaneous emotion)	NATURE (anarchy)	LIBERTINISM (antinomianism)

Fig. 13