

# The Difference Christ Makes:

Facilitating Differentiation and  
Integration in Therapy with  
Christian Clients

# Two Therapeutic Callings

- Integration programs have made it possible for Christians to participate in public mental health in our day, by teaching them the ethical rules of secular psychotherapy and encouraging as much compliance as possible, without violating Christian values.
- However, it is also desirable to develop distinctly Christian models of psychotherapy and counseling *for use with Christian counselees*. So Christians must also retrieve and reinvest in the therapeutic teachings and practices of Scripture and the Christian tradition.

# Convergence of Therapeutic Goals

- Many secular models of therapy have been converging on helping clients objectify their internal-relational world, in order to modify it
  - Classic CBT: exposure therapy and learning to tolerate the distress
  - Mindfulness: non-judgmental observation of one's internal-relational world
  - ACT: accepting one's internal-relational world
  - Contemporary psychodynamic therapy: preventing automatic responses and promoting mentalization
  - Relational and attachment therapy: creating conditions for clients to safely explore their internal-relational world

# Convergence of Therapeutic Goals

- All of these models have identified a key feature of psychological healing:

In order to modify a disordered psychic element (a belief, emotion scheme, defense, or part) individuals have to recognize it and disbelieve or disidentify with it, while maintaining it in their consciousness.

- The question I want to try to answer today is *Does Christianity provide distinctive ways to promote this therapeutic process with Christian clients?*

# Two-Track Training for Christian Therapists

- The most important part of diagnosis is determining (as best we can) whether the client is a member of the City of God (or open to it) or the City of Humanity
  - Christian therapists are free to use “common grace” resources (most of them developed by secular therapists) with Christian and non-Christian clients
  - In addition, *with Christians* they can use distinctly Christian resources – due to “redemptive grace” – that are unavailable to non-Christian clients
  - However, they should avoid discourse and practices that explicitly promote an alternative faith-system
  - And they should be free to share their worldview beliefs *with anyone – just like secular therapists do every day!*

# Using Distinctly Christian Therapy Resources with Christian Clients

- Distinctive features of Christian clients
  - Because of Christ's redemption, they are reconciled with God and can have communion with him
  - United to Christ and have the indwelling Holy Spirit
  - Their old self was crucified and their new self was created
- Therefore, distinctly Christian therapy promotes
  - Communion with the Father and Jesus Christ
  - Union-with-Christ identity and reliance on Holy Spirit
  - Differentiation between one's old self and new self
  - Integration of one's whole self in Christ

# Communion with the Father and Jesus Christ

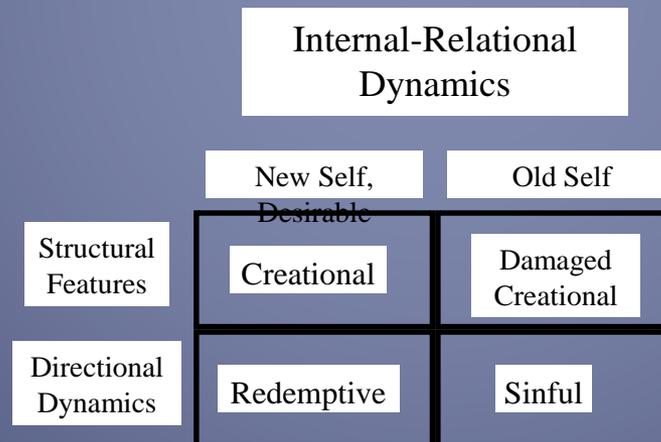
- The most notable distinctive of Christian therapy is the central role of communion with God
  - Christian therapy is fundamentally relational and exocentric, rather than individualistic and self-centric
  - Some time should be spent training Christian clients how to engage in *lectio divina*, affective prayer (e.g., lament to God), guided imagery with Christ, and meditation
  - Christian clients need ongoing experiences of God's love in Christ, within which to explore and transform their internal-relational world through collaborative coping strategies

# Union-with-Christ Identity and Reliance on the Holy Spirit

- Christians have been given two divine gifts: union with Christ— entailing perfect righteousness, holiness, and adoption — and the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers new action (Php 2:12-13)
  - Counselors can practice with such themes in session and assign homework that promote their internalization
  - This makes possible self-awareness without condemnation and with hopeful agency
  - Christian therapy communicates a non-judgmental attitude towards internal-relational dynamics — *but only on the basis of one's union with Christ*

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Christians come with a confused and chaotic internal-relational world. They have to be trained how to distinguish their new self and old self
- The old self is all that pertains to themselves that is fallen and the new self is who they are as created and in Christ



- In-session work and homework can help Christians distinguish these aspects

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Mortification: Putting to Death the Old Self
  - 1) Self-examination => recognition of sin
  - 2) Confession
    - Verbal acknowledgement of sole responsibility
    - Contrition: corresponding sorrow

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Mortification: Putting to Death the Old Self

## 3a) *Primary* repentance

- Direct rejection of the old: Stop it!
- “Pluck out the eye; cut off the hand”
- Necessary with hurtful behavior

## Limitations of Primary Repentance?

- Can lead to dissociation  
So sin only gets repressed, not genuinely undermined or resolved

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Mortification: Putting to Death the Old Self

## 3b) *Secondary* repentance

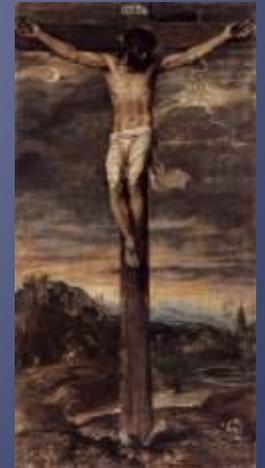
- Affective “letting go” of the old:  
Surrendering the sin to the cross
- It is an *indirect* activity
- Involves a *disidentification* with the old

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Mortification: Putting to Death the Old Self

- 4) Reception of forgiveness for the sin

- People can get stuck in conviction, when they are overwhelmed by their sin: *ruminatio*
- The cross is where forgiveness occurs through the blood of Christ



# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Vivification: Strengthening One's New Self
  - Worship, love, and enjoyment of the beauty of God; communion with God
  - Gratitude to God for one's created self and gifts; gratitude for gifts of salvation
  - Healing relationships with mature humans
  - New patterns of actions, personally and in relationships

# Redemptive Self-Differentiation

- Techniques for promoting RSD
  - Read, reflect, and meditate on relevant Scripture (e.g., Rom 6; Gal 5; Eph 2 and 4; Col 3)
  - Discriminate internal dynamics: old and new
  - Talk and journal about one's old and new selves
  - Have the two selves talk to each other, using the two-chair technique
  - Imagine fighting against one's old self and putting it to death

# Redemptive Self-Integration

- Based on communion with God and others and their perfection in Christ, Christians can gradually undermine their internal division and become more self-aware, authentic and whole, by
  - 1) accepting more thoroughly one's sinfulness, limitations, and disabilities
  - 2) incorporating the created, but damaged dynamic structures of the old self into one's new self by faith
  - 3) expanding the spread of one's union with Christ throughout one's being, including one's memories, thinking, feeling, and relational experiences

# Redemptive Self-Integration

- Techniques for promoting RSI
  - Connecting everything in our consciousness to one's union with Christ
  - Undermining sin by bringing God's truth into the desires of sin
  - Folding positive emotions associated with the resurrection into negative emotions associated with the cross
  - Reflecting on one's weaknesses and recognizing their value in the kingdom (2Co 12)

# Redemptive Self-Integration

- Techniques for promoting RSI
  - Taking creation walks with Jesus
  - Talking with others about one's faith experiences
  - Allowing shame to guide one to unintegrated features of one's self and then resolving them in Christ
  - Owning God's creational and redemptive gifts to *me*

# Redemptive Self-Integration

- Techniques for promoting RSI
  - Practicing the presence of God throughout the day
  - Incorporating dissociated aspects of one's past into one's conscious awareness in Christ
  - Imagining Christ embracing oneself, in spite of my sins, limitations, and disabilities
  - Use two-chair technique to have counselees role-play what Christ would say to them, switch chairs, and respond

# Redemptive Self-Integration

- Hypothesis: as a result of these strategies, Christian counselees will become less anxious, depressed, defensive, more open to feedback, more tolerant of their limitations, more compassionate to themselves, and more loving of others, as they come to internalize their relationship with God and union with Christ
- Such outcomes resemble those of the secular therapies we referenced earlier, but through using distinctly Christian resources

# Next step

- More research on Christian-derived therapies, like what is being proposed here



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