

Psychology and Pastoral Ministry¹

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The relation between psychology (the science and therapeutic practice that emerges from studying people) and theology (knowledge and practice that comes through God's revelation in Christ and the Bible) has received a good deal of attention in recent years. The issue is very complex, however, and more than once I have found myself intrigued or puzzled by one aspect of it or another. The exploratory thoughts that follow represent an attempt to answer or at least clarify some of the questions I have had.

Much of the literature in this area starts with the question, 'How should Christian counsellors go about their work in light of their faith?' In this article I wish to consider a slightly different question, 'How should *pastors* go about *their* work in view of the resources made available by psychology?'

Healthy integration or unhealthy blending?

Throughout this discussion I will assume a basic 'integration' position with respect to psychology and theology: that each discipline has its own validity, that in principle the two are not in conflict, and that the results of good psychology and good theology can therefore be integrated.² This is probably the most common theoretical stance among evangelicals; it informs the work of many Christian psychologists³ and under girds many

¹ I am grateful to Anthony Yeo, Gracia Wiarda, and Dr Danny Goh for their helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

² 'Integration' here means fitting together without contradiction or competition. It does not mean psychology and theology should be merged or simply viewed as saying the same things in different languages.

³ See, e.g., Stanton L. Jones and Richard Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991).

seminary counselling programmes. The integration position finds its roots in the traditional affirmation of two domains, one of saving grace and special revelation, the other of common grace and general revelation. Each of these domains, theologians have traditionally affirmed, is God-given and plays an important role. Furthermore, there is no inherent conflict between the two. So there is a place for human scientific effort (including psychology) and its benefits; such effort does not in principle compete with the Bible or the saving work of Christ.

But if psychology and the gospel are compatible, we must still ask how they should come together—or even *whether* they should come together—in pastoral ministry. A number of factors make this question difficult. For one thing, much of the psychology on the market today proceeds from non-Christian presuppositions and therefore stands in substantial conflict with gospel-centred theology. Augmenting this tension is the fact that psychology seems to lay claim to much of the same ground as theology: human behaviour and ways of effecting positive change. A further complicating factor is that it is not always easy for pastors to delimit their own special responsibilities when confronted by the whole vast number of excellent things that Christians or the church might possibly do. The issue I particularly want to probe with respect to the challenging task of integration is whether today's pastors sometimes lack clarity about the boundaries between psychology and pastoral ministry, and therefore tend to *blend* the two in an unhealthy way.⁴ Let me make this concern more concrete by asking a series of questions.

⁴ One recent phenomenon that has contributed to my unease is the tendency of churches and schools to turn to Christians trained in psychology when looking for guidance in the area of spirituality. Is this an example of healthy integration (psychologists taking their faith seriously) or does it reflect a questionable merging of psychology and the gospel? I think it is the latter if we begin to assume that psychological resources are somehow uniquely conducive to Christian spiritual life. Michael Mangis expresses a similar concern in 'Spiritual Formation and Christian Psychology: A Response and Application of Willard's Perspective', *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28 (2000) p. 259.

While I am not sure how it relates to the above mentioned trend, it is interesting to note that 'spirituality' is the theme of the September-October 2003 issue of *Family Therapy Magazine*, a publication of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. It includes one article in which five 'religiously diverse MFTs explore the inclusion of spirituality and faith', and another which surveys spiritual resources from 'daily meditation to Qiqong', showing how they reveal 'new paths to healing and strengthening the mind, body, and soul'.

- At the level of practice do pastors sometimes blend, confuse, or equate spiritual change with emotional and relational healing?
- Do pastors sometimes blur the distinction between sin and emotional/relational pain?
- Do they ever begin to view the tools of psychology as, in effect, means of grace?
- Are they tempted to think that when a tough case (adultery, abuse, divorce) is referred to a professional Christian counsellor, the person's pastoral needs will thereby be fully met?
- Are pastors sometimes drawn away from their primary responsibilities by getting too heavily involved in ministering to people's emotional and relational needs?
- Do pastors sometimes attempt to repair damaged emotions and relationships with Bible tools that were actually designed for other purposes?

In the Arabian Desert, about 100 kilometres north west of Salalah, lies the border between Oman and Saudi Arabia. But exactly where is not clear. The lines on the maps break into a series of dashes through that region. No one doubts the existence of two distinct countries, each with its own territory and laws. There is no dispute with regard to the greater part of their respective territorial claims. But there is a region where the border is unmarked, and no one is quite sure where one country ends and the other begins. What boundary markers define the extent and limits of the pastor's distinctive, God-assigned territory? What policies should regulate travel into or importation from the realm of psychology?

Clarifying the boundaries

1. *Is clarification a good idea?* If psychology is sometimes blended with pastoral ministry, and if this is a confusing and potentially unhealthy development, then clearly distinguishing the two would seem a logical first step toward rectifying the situation. But should we really attempt such a teasing-apart process? One strong objection might be that human experience is holistic. Life cannot be compartmentalised, it might be argued, into the airtight realms of 'spiritual', 'emotional', and 'physical'. Sin, sickness, and various forms of emotional and social alienation

inextricably weave together as the condition of fallen humanity. And if human misery is holistic, so is God's salvation. Christ redeems us from sin, Satan, emotional bondage, broken relationships, communal strife, physical sickness and death, and any other human problem we can think of. Furthermore, the Church's mission is holistic; we are called to proclaim and minister the healing work of Christ in every area of life.

Though I would not want to argue with any of these things, I wonder whether they tell the whole story. Despite the holistic nature of human experience, the Bible does make various distinctions. The Bible distinguishes between sin and its results (which often include emotional and relational problems), for instance. It distinguishes between sin and temptation (which is often exacerbated by relational or emotional pressures). With respect to salvation, the Bible suggests certain orderings, both logical (the guilt of sin is the great core problem God must deal with) and temporal (the believer is immediately freed from condemnation, progressively set free from corrupted character traits, and only in the future delivered from physical death). When it comes to mission and ministry, the Church is shown to have certain priorities, and individual believers receive special callings. Scriptural distinctions such as these allow us to define differing types of human need, and to see how differing needs demand differing solutions (though all final solutions centre in Christ) administered by different members of Christ's body.

Another objection to any attempt to distinguish the realm of psychology from that of pastoral ministry is that it is simply not feasible in practice. When actually working with *people* it is extremely difficult—perhaps impossible—to draw the precise line between sin and its effects, or between spiritual change and emotional change. Even if we agree that there is something called 'sin', who can say exactly which acts, feelings, ways of relating, and states of being fall into that category, and which are better described as emotional or even physiological disability? Even if we agree that there is something called 'spiritual change', who can say where this ends and emotional or relational healing begins? Again, I would not want to argue these points. Nevertheless, it is often important to make theoretical or theological distinctions even when, on a practical level, we cannot omnisciently judge human actions and motivations. Let me try to illustrate this by giving an example from another area of ministry. A pastor cannot always distinguish genuine followers of Christ from mere pretenders. Only God can do that. But the pastor must nonetheless be

aware that such a distinction does exist. Furthermore, in deciding how to minister to a given person—determining, say, whether to speak words of assurance or of strong warning—the pastor must consider all the criteria Scripture offers for distinguishing true faith from false profession and must be guided by all the instruction Scripture gives. There are thus times when theological distinctions must guide our practice even when we cannot answer every question about the actual people we encounter.

2. *Integration without blending.* Clarifying the boundaries between psychology and pastoral ministry requires first that we gain as clear an idea as possible concerning the kind of change the gospel brings and the kind of instruction the Bible offers. We will then be in a position to distinguish gospel change from emotional and relational healing, and Bible instruction from psychology's wisdom. Based on Scripture's own testimony we can affirm several things in this regard.

- 1) There is something we may term 'spiritual change', whose chief marks are repentance and faith.
- 2) Spiritual change is the remedy for sin, which consists of disobedience and disbelief.
- 3) Spiritual change is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who brings the work of Christ to bear on a person's life.
- 4) The Spirit works spiritual change through God-given and humanly-ministered 'means of grace' (chiefly the word of God, baptism, and the Lord's Supper), all of which point to and communicate Christ.⁵
- 5) Along with the more gospel-centred aspects of his word, God also gives his people scriptural instructions and promises to guide their lives.

⁵ Though the term 'means of grace' is perhaps not so commonly used today, the concept has played an important role in Christian theology. It is certainly crucial for the analysis of psychology and pastoral ministry set forth in this essay. 'Grace' here refers to the life-changing work of the Holy Spirit. 'Means' are things God has entrusted to the church to serve as channels through which the Spirit carries out his gracious work. The key thing to see in connection with our present discussion is that these God-given instruments through which the Spirit works focus on Christ and the gospel. Through them the Spirit creates faith in Christ and brings Christ's saving work to people's lives. The Bible points to an indissoluble link between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ. The Spirit brings the blessings of Christ into human lives in tight connection with words and symbols that point to Christ.

These five positive truths are integral to evangelical theology. Familiar Scripture texts remind us of their centrality. ‘You must be born again’ (Jn 3:7). ‘Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ’ (Rom 10:17). Scripture ‘is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (2 Tim 3:16). These affirmations go a long way towards marking out a special territory: theology’s heartland, the central zone of the pastor’s responsibility.

Scripture enables us to affirm certain additional truths that highlight the *distinctive* nature of this territory. Knowing these will help us guard the pastor’s central area of responsibility from illegitimate intruders.

- 6) Spiritual change cannot be brought about apart from the Spirit’s work.
- 7) The Spirit does not work spiritual change through human techniques or wisdom disconnected from Christ and the gospel.
- 8) The instructions and promises God gives in Scripture to guide our lives stand firm against any opposing ideas that might challenge them.

These additional three points are rarely disputed among evangelical Christians, at least at a theoretical or theological level. With respect to the sixth affirmation, Scripture makes it plain that only God’s Spirit can transform human hearts (Ezk 36:26-27); we need new birth, Jesus says, because ‘flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit’ (Jn 3:6). With respect to the seventh, the New Testament always portrays the Spirit performing his transforming work in closest connection to Christ and his work. As for the eighth, even God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom (1 Cor 1:25). But while these truths are seldom denied at the level of explicit theology there can nevertheless be slippage at the level of practice and attitude. When this happens—when pastors or counsellors begin to think they *can* effect spiritual change through psychological means, or are tempted to bend Scripture to fit psychological theories and secular values—then the special territory of theology and pastoral ministry has been invaded and violated. Blending has taken the place of proper integration.

One way to decisively eliminate the threat of such invasion would be to deny the science of psychology any legitimate place at all. Though some

have adopted this strategy, I believe the Bible itself obliges us to recognise areas in which psychology can and should rightfully function. To show how this is so we will need to defend three further affirmations.

- 9) Sin is not the same thing as, nor is it always the direct cause of, physical disability or emotional and relational dysfunction.
- 10) Spiritual change is not the same thing as, nor is it always the direct cause of, physical, emotional, and relational healing.
- 11) The instructions and promises of Scripture are not designed to serve as comprehensive resources to deal with all physical, emotional, and relational problems.

Unlike the preceding eight affirmations, these last three points are often directly contested. We will have to carefully consider, then, what Scripture has to say.⁶ I think it is fairly easy to see that the Bible makes a distinction between sin and *physical* disability, and between spiritual change and *physical* healing. For instance, Jesus did not deal with sin and sickness in the same way; he healed sick people by a direct word or touch, but called sinners to make decisions. He did not equate sickness with sin (Jn 9:1-3), and some people who received physically healing showed no sign of discipleship (Lk 17:11-19). But are things so clear when it comes to differentiating sin from *emotional/relational* dysfunction, and distinguishing spiritual change from *emotional/relational* healing? Here we must admit that Scripture offers less direct evidence. But I think a distinction can nevertheless be seen.

While the Bible offers many instances of needy people receiving physical deliverance and many examples of sinners repenting and coming to faith, it is hard to find accounts that directly focus on people with presenting problems such as depression, stress, marital conflict, or disobedient children, who come and receive healing. Nor do we find much direct instruction on how to help such people. Certainly the Bible

⁶ While in this section I am especially concerned to establish distinctions, I do not mean to deny the reality of significant *connections* between spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational aspects of life. Let me stress that points 9-11 do not deny any of the following things: (1) that sin is closely connected to and in many ways does affect physical, emotional, and relational health; (2) that spiritual change does bring about significant physical, emotional, and relational healing; (3) that the Bible does say many vital things that are relevant to emotional and relational health.

describes many people with emotional and relational problems. It does give words of encouragement and command that are relevant to such people. But where are the directly portrayed case studies? Where are the specific instructions? The lack of such *direct* treatment of these issues,⁷ in contrast to the Bible's intense concentration on issues of sin and repentance, is one sign that emotional/relational healing lies at least somewhat outside the territory occupied by spiritual change.⁸

Does the Bible in other ways distinguish emotional conditions from spiritual condition? We might think of some of the psalms, where the righteous struggle to understand not only the physical and material well-being of the wicked, but also their happiness (Ps 10:2-6). This suggests that a cheerful disposition, well-adjusted personality, or happy marriage is not always a sign of righteousness and faith. By the same token, emotional imbalance and even marital conflict may not always signal spiritual rebellion.

Why is it important to spend time with these distinctions? Because when the pastor's area of responsibility (spiritual change, biblical instruction) is felt to be indistinguishable from that of the psychologist (emotional/relational healing) one of two things is likely to happen. Pastors may begin to assume that psychologists are really doing the same things they are, just using different techniques and different language. It then becomes easy to substitute psychology for the gospel, or to try to blend the two.

Alternatively, pastors may feel that the whole, undifferentiated realm of spiritual, emotional, and relational concerns is their business and theirs alone. They will then have no choice but to view psychologists as competitors who offer secular alternatives in an area where the Bible alone should hold sway. This latter approach is taken by what is often called the

⁷ When deriving teaching from Scripture it is always important to consider what the biblical authors are directly aiming at (or what *God* is aiming at through them). Where this is ignored, people begin to promote questionable teaching on any number of interesting topics: biblical dieting principles, biblical management principles, biblical principles for healthy living, biblical child-raising principles, and so on.

⁸ This is not to deny the close relationship between spiritual condition and emotional/relational well being, of course. The Bible shows that emotional/relational problems are often *caused by* sin, and offers examples of how they are often *made better by* spiritual change. The link between spiritual change and emotional/relational issues is thus tighter than that between spiritual change and physical condition.

'biblical counselling' movement. Adherents of this position explicitly reject the claim that psychology and theology can be integrated, or that theories deriving from secular psychology have any place in pastoral ministry. They hold instead that the Bible contains all the resources needed to construct a comprehensive model of personality, change, and counselling.⁹ To suggest that modern psychology can contribute anything vital in these areas (as the integration model affirms) is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture.¹⁰ The strength of the biblical counselling movement lies in its protest against the too easy appropriation of therapeutic strategies rooted in and shaped by non-Christian assumptions, and in its intensive exploration of the Bible's rich resources for pastoral care. But its advocates make too tight and direct a connection between sin and emotional/relational dysfunction. As a result they see no place for any therapy apart from the gospel and biblical instruction.¹¹

I have been trying to outline and advocate an integration-without-blending perspective on the relationship between theology and psychology. Perhaps I should here comment on a partly similar yet different model, the 'Chalcedonian' approach of Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger.¹² Taking a cue from theological descriptions of the relation between Christ's two natures, van Deusen Hunsinger proposes a three-part formula: theology and psychology must not be confused or changed;

⁹ See, e.g., David Powlison, 'Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls & Modern Psychotherapies', in Mark McMinn & Timothy Phillips (eds.), *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001) p. 32. Biblical counsellors may allow secular psychology a limited role. Powlison cites Jay Adams to the effect that psychology can illustrate biblical principles, fill in biblical generalisations, and sometimes challenge wrong interpretations of Scripture ('Frequently Asked Questions About Biblical Counselling', in John MacArthur and Wayne Mack [eds.], *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling* [Dallas: Word, 1994], p. 366).

¹⁰ John MacArthur, 'Preaching and Biblical Counseling', in MacArthur and Mack (eds.), *Introduction*, p. 323-34.

¹¹ See, e.g., the comments of Powlison, 'Questions', p. 43. One effect of this conviction that the Bible holds comprehensive resources for dealing with all emotional and relational problems is that biblical counsellors may at times be tempted to make the Bible answer questions it was not designed to address. Or they might be tempted to smuggle psychological principles into their counselling under the guise of biblical truth.

¹² *Theology & Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); 'An Interdisciplinary Map for Christian Counselors', in McMinn and Phillips, *Care for the Soul*, p. 218-40.

they must not be separated or divided; theology must be accorded logical priority. Working with this formula van Deusen Hunsinger offers a very helpful critique of the modern tendency to blend theology and psychology together or to translate one into the terms of the other. She also provides useful insight concerning the ways psychology can positively contribute to pastoral ministry. Nonetheless, I think some aspects of this model are less than satisfying. Van Deusen Hunsinger insists that we should not ‘try to integrate Christian theology with any type of psychology at the conceptual level’.¹³ If this simply means the two disciplines are not saying the same things, I would agree. But not if it expresses a conviction that theology and psychology belong to totally separate realms of truth so that there is no need to consider how the legitimate claims of one fit in with the legitimate claims of the other. This somehow recalls the unhealthy divorce between faith and history promoted by some 20th century theologians. In addition, I cannot see that the Chalcedonian pattern illuminates key issues such as the relation between sin and sickness or the relation between forgiveness and health.¹⁴ There is no Chalcedon-like mystery about these relations, or any combination of incommensurable realities, or anything like a hypostatic union. But despite these weaknesses van Deusen Hunsinger does offer a thought-provoking analysis.

3. *Defining the centre of pastoral ministry.* I have tried to define the nature of gospel change and Bible instruction, and to distinguish these from the concerns and resources of psychology. But something else remains to be done if we are to clarify the boundary between psychology and pastoral ministry. We must define ‘pastoral ministry’ and distinguish it from other tasks. I want to make two suggestions in this regard. The first is that pastoral ministry *centres in* ministering the means of grace so as to bring about spiritual change, and directing believers in the way of godliness through the instructions and promises of the Bible. The second is that pastors should view the work of fostering emotional and relational health as a secondary, context-dependent task.¹⁵

¹³ ‘Interdisciplinary Map’, p. 225.

¹⁴ See *Theology*, p. 66ff.

¹⁵ Anthony Yeo makes a helpful distinction between pastoral ministry (the whole range of a pastor’s work), pastoral care (nurturing Christian character, equipping for service, providing care, and empowering for life’s struggles), and counselling (using special skills to treat problems). See ‘Pastoral Care and Counselling: An Asian Perspective’, in James R.

Though it would be foolish to try to set limits on what kinds of work qualify as ‘pastoral ministry’ or on who qualifies for the title ‘pastor’, I think it can be useful to think in terms of a New Testament ideal. The office or role of ‘pastor’ is one God gives to certain members of the church. Their task is to serve as shepherds to the flock of God’s people. They are to feed, guide, encourage, and protect the flock. And the focus of this feeding, guidance, encouragement, and protection is ‘spiritual’. Consider Paul’s farewell address to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-38). He highlights his own work of testifying to the gospel, calling people to repentance, and proclaiming the will of God. He holds himself up as a model for the Ephesian elders; they, too, are to pursue these priorities as shepherds of the church. They are to guard the flock, not against physical attack, but against those who distort the truth of God’s word.

Does this mean that all who claim the title ‘pastor’ should be doing these things and these alone? Of course not. Pastors minister to *people*. And people come as they are, with all kinds of strengths and weaknesses, joys and needs. We cannot bracket out the emotional and relational needs of those who come to us. Furthermore, pastors come in different shapes and sizes and serve in different ministry contexts. Nevertheless, it is important to keep the New Testament centre in view. Each pastor would do well to think through his or her own God-given responsibilities in relation to this centre. It may be helpful for pastors to ask themselves questions such as these.

Among my many activities, which are essential to my calling as a pastor and which are context-dependent? In a church I was serving I once climbed a ladder to change a light bulb. The ceiling was high and the ladder was shaky. I did not like it but in that particular context changing the bulb seemed to be part of the pastor’s job. In days gone by pastors sometimes taught the members of their congregation to read; in some places they dispensed medicine. It was probably right for them to do so. But we can easily see that these good works are not essential to the pastor’s role *as pastor*. They are secondary activities that can be handed over to others when the context makes that possible. Should the kind of counselling that aims at

Farris (ed.), *International Perspectives on Pastoral Counseling* (The Haworth Press, 2002), p. 178-79. But even within that special area of ‘pastoral care’ I want to make a further distinction between central responsibilities and secondary concerns.

bringing about emotional and relational healing likewise be classed as a secondary, context-dependent activity? To the extent that emotional/relational healing can be distinguished from spiritual change and the chief concerns of Bible guidance, the answer would seem to be yes. A good shepherd is a whole person relating to whole people, of course, so pure ‘spiritual’ ministry will always be wrapped up with all kinds of other human concerns. Nevertheless, it is useful to know what lies at the core of one’s responsibility—what *must* be done always in every ministry context.

How does my pastoral role relate to the total mission of the church? Salvation involves the ultimate transformation of all areas of life and society; it is therefore the church’s mission to bring good news and healing to every area of life. But the pastor’s job is not the same thing as the church’s mission. It is sometimes a relief to know this. This means that a church might be called to a special ministry helping people with emotional and relational problems while the pastor feels free to concentrate on other things.

If I serve in a multi-staff church, can I specialise in counselling people with emotional or relational problems? There are many jobs to be done as the church fulfils its mission and God calls different members to different tasks. So of course there is a place for those with special calling and training to a counselling ministry. Some churches will want to call these specialists ‘pastors’, some may prefer to use another title. More important than title is that each one be clear about his or her calling. The specialist pastor should understand precisely how his or her particular ministry relates to the central shepherding needs of the congregation, and so should his or her co-workers on the church leadership team.

A means to the means of grace

I have been trying to clarify the boundaries between psychology and pastoral ministry. This has been an exercise in theory and theology, it is true, but one with practical consequences. Clearer boundaries call attention to the pastor’s central responsibilities. This encourages pastors to keep the gospel at the forefront of their ministry, constantly reminding people of what God has done for them through Christ. It motivates pastors to gently yet persistently point their sheep, including those

experiencing emotional or relational stress, to scriptural commands about how they should live. These are things pastors are called to do. Good pastoring is completely compatible with good psychological counselling, I believe, but the two things are not identical. When a pastor needs to choose which course to take in dealing with a particular person, having a sense of where the boundaries lie helps the pastor understand his or her priorities.

Boundary markers also protect the interests of good psychology. They remind pastors that there is a proper realm of psychology, with its own distinctive resources and techniques. Pastors who understand these distinctives will have a better sense of when to refer people to trained therapists. Or if pastors sometimes decide to make forays into the territory of psychology themselves, they will be more careful to use the right tools. So clear boundaries prepare the way for healthy integration.

Having said so much about distinctions it is time to consider more positively how psychology and pastoral ministry do come together. While specialists in the area of counselling can provide rich, full insights concerning this important topic I can only offer a few very brief reflections. These relate to a theological framework for viewing the ways in which pastors might properly bring some of the tools of psychology into their ministry or, in some instances, move out of their own home country into the neighbouring realm of psychology and therapy.

First, in connection with the central pastoral work of bringing about spiritual change, I think psychological counselling may best be seen as a *means to the means of grace*. It is not itself a means of grace. It is not the Christ-centred word of God through which the Holy Spirit effects spiritual change. But in various ways it *supports* the life-giving ministry of the means of grace. Herein lies its great positive value for pastoral ministry. How does counselling support the means of grace? First, counselling skills often *facilitate* the interpersonal communication of the word.¹⁶ An analogy here would be the training pastors receive in homiletics and Christian

¹⁶ Pastors can learn much from psychologists about how to be quick to hear and slow to speak, and about the differences between one-to-one ministry and congregational preaching. Van Deusen Hunsinger points out the value of psychotherapy's attention to process, for instance ('Interdisciplinary Map', p. 237-39), and Anthony Yeo draws lessons concerning 'pastoral conversations' from recent trends in psychotherapy ('Pastoral Care', p. 180ff). On the other hand, some things that a psychologist may wish to avoid (authoritative, theological direction) can be quite appropriate for a pastor.

education. To a large extent these disciplines depend on human and even secular skills but they nonetheless help pastors connect with people and get their God-given message across. Second, psychological insights can often *illuminate* the holistic life contexts in which people struggle to trust and obey. I can remember an instructive moment in my own experience when attempting to counsel a couple with marital conflicts. Joining me in this effort was a trained therapist. I brought pastoral authority and theological knowledge to the session, my colleague brought psychological expertise. After listening to the couple for some time I thought I knew what needed to be said, and was just about to say it when my colleague asked the couple a question. To my mind this question was totally disconnected to the issues at hand—something about the wife’s family of origin. But that question unlocked a door I had been blind to and suddenly it became clear what the couple’s issue *really* was. Third, loving counselling ministry can *create opportunities* for ministry of the word as people experience Christians caring for them in their distress. Fourth, in some cases counselling might *prepare* people to hear the word of God. Just as a meal might revive a starving person or medical care restore someone who is sick to a point where they can begin to listen to the gospel, so counselling may at times bring a measure of calm to a chaotic situation, enabling distracted people to pay attention to what a preacher is saying.

In most ministry contexts, then, pastors will want to engage in some forms of counselling, though the extent of this will vary depending on the pastor and the ministry context. Perhaps I should say that *all* pastors *need* to make use of at least some psychology-based insights, while some will want to engage in more systematic forms of counselling. So counselling courses merit an honoured place within BTh, BD, and MDiv programmes.

A second reflection concerning the positive place of psychology in pastoral ministry is that modern counselling skills and insights should not be viewed as something *absolutely* new. To suppose this were the case would raise the question of why God left them out of the pastor’s toolbox for 1900 years. Instead, psychology should be viewed as a science standing in continuity with earlier, less developed forms of wisdom and observation about human nature. When you begin to think about it, it seems obvious that the various New Testament commands relating to pastoral ministry (preach, teach, encourage, help) or family responsibility (love, bring up, be reconciled to) just *assume* those addressed have access to a tremendous amount of how-to knowledge. Where would this knowledge have come

from? The answer would have to be from human observation and folk wisdom. How does this differ from knowledge gained through modern psychological research, except in degree of sophistication?

Finally, as we look beyond the specifics of pastoral ministry to the church's wider service in the world, counselling should be seen as having intrinsic value in the zone of 'common grace'. Like education, technology, and medicine, it brings a significant measure of positive change to people's lives. God is pleased with such things and therefore we should pursue them.¹⁷

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¹⁷ See Richard Mouw's thoughtful reflections on God's empathy with human joys and pains in *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) p. 39ff.