

# INTEGRATION: *WITH WHAT AND WITH WHOM?*

“Christian integrators will take personal responsibility to thoroughly engage their particular faith traditions and practices in holistic ways that bring about theological and psychological formation.”

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PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY





# INTEGRATION: WITH WHAT AND WITH WHOM?

Brad D. Strawn

In 1953 psychologist Fritz Kunkel first used the term “integration” as a description of the interdisciplinary activity between theology and psychology.<sup>1</sup> Kunkel was a major pioneer in the integration movement in the 1940s and 1950s, establishing a Christian counseling center in Los Angeles as well as the Foundation for the Advancement of Religious Psychology. Integration historian Hendrika Vande Kemp notes that the term *integration* was picked up by the editors of the journal *Pastoral Psychology* and was applied to both Kunkel and later to famous American psychologist Gordon Allport.

Since the '50s the term *integration* has been used in diverse ways, including (but not limited to) the integration of psychology and Christianity, psychology and religion, psychology and theology (faith and practice, belief and life), psychology and Christian faith, psychology and spirituality, psychotherapy and theology, and even psychotherapy and spirituality.

While the term *integration* is relatively young, the scientific study of the “psychology of religion” has been around for some time.<sup>2</sup> The psychology of religion uses the science of psychology to study religion and religious experience. While some have worried that this approach may reduce religion to “nothing-but” psychology, it has produced fascinating and helpful findings on everything from the development of cults, the experience of spiritual transcendence, and religion and health to brain science and religious phenomena. For these reasons, the psychology of religion continues to be an important avenue of study.

The field of integration, however, is a more superordinate concept. While it may include the psychology of religion, it may also include the *religion of psychology*. Here religion, theology, or spirituality might be used in an attempt to explain/critique some branch of psychology (e.g., humanistic clinical psychology) or psychological experience (e.g., struggle with sin). From the perspective of the religion of psychology, it has been argued that integration has been going on in theological circles for a long time.<sup>3</sup>

Integration may also include the application of psychological findings to areas that have import for Christian theology and life such as virtue acquisition, forgiveness and reconciliation, spiritual formation, life and health of

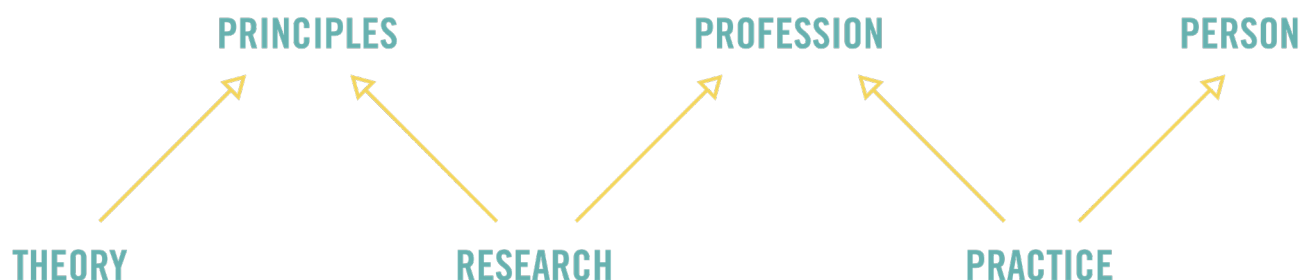
the church and its ministers and missionaries, Christian marriage and families, health issues, overall sanctification, and growth in holiness—just to name a few. Integration in counseling and therapy has also grown as scholars study Christian therapists working with Christian clients, develop unique Christian counseling approaches, and explore ways to understand God’s activity in the counseling moment.

It is safe to say that the field of integration has exploded since the early 1950s with the development of masters- and doctoral-level training programs specifically aimed at integration training, and with the development of professional journals, professional organizations, and international conferences specifically focused on integration. Even secular organizations such as the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association are now recognizing the importance of religion and spirituality in mental health, and their publishing houses produce books and journals every year on integrative topics. It could be argued that integration is a subdiscipline in the larger field of psychology.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the long history and work in integration, the task has not been without its detractors and critics. Some have simply argued that Christianity, faith, and theology should have nothing to do with psychology. They have seen psychology as a secular enterprise whose agenda was usually incompatible with Christianity and at worst was in the business of the eradication of religion.<sup>5</sup> Practitioners from this school of thought, such as the “biblical counseling”<sup>6</sup> proponents, argue that they find everything needed for mental health in the pages of the Bible and subsequently reject theories and findings emerging from secular psychology.

It should also be noted that there are some in the field committed to relating psychology and theology that don’t care for the term *integration*. They worry that *integration* sounds like making one discipline out of two, perhaps forcing one on the other while doing violence to both. Or they may question the primary integrative assumption that we are dealing with two separate disciplines to begin with.

## NEWT MALONY'S MODEL OF INTEGRATION



Still others, while not rejecting the project outright, have recognized a persistent and unanswered question. The question boils down to which, if either, of the two disciplines is privileged, and what are the implications of such privileging?<sup>7</sup> On one end of the continuum, psychology explains away theology/Christian faith and trumps any conflict between the two by relying on the power of science while never acknowledging science's limitations. On the other end of the spectrum, theology is conceived as the queen of the sciences and trumps psychology whenever there is a conflict, relying on the power of revelation and ultimate Truth, while never acknowledging that theology is an interpretive process.

### MODELS

With this question operating in the background, it is understandable why the early years of the integration task (like the development of any new scientific discipline) included building models of integration. The Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary was established in the years 1964–1965 with the primary goal of integration, so it makes sense that faculty began to build models of integration. Paul Clement, one of the early faculty members in the School of Psychology, developed a tripartite model of integration based on “theory, research, and practice.”<sup>8</sup> Integration meant that theology must impact a psychologist’s work at each of these three levels. Newt Malony, who joined the psychology faculty in 1969, also had a tripartite model: he discussed “integration at the level of principles, of profession, and of person, the 3Ps.”<sup>9</sup> The diagram [above] indicates that these two models can be combined, suggesting that theory, research, and practice may be important at each of Malony’s levels of principles, profession, and person, while theology influences all.

A seminal book in the recent history of integration is the edited volume by Eric L. Johnson, first published as *Psychology & Christianity: Four Views*, now in its second edition with a fifth view added.<sup>10</sup> In this book, integration is

considered one particular view of engaging psychology and theology while advancing at least four others. This has been a widely used text at both the graduate and undergraduate level, although it could be argued that this approach further complicates an already complicated terrain. Perhaps it is best to continue to speak of *integration* as a superordinate principle with many available methodologies for how to practice it. And while this approach and the views have been critiqued (even by each author, which was the format of the book), it has opened up the idea that there is more than one way, or more than one correct way, to conduct integration. Perhaps we should speak of “integration methodologies” rather than the singular “integration.”

Classic model building, however, seems to be running out of steam. In their quest for clarity models often minimize uniqueness and particularity. As the title of this article implies, if one is integrating two disciplines, with what is one integrating? There are numerous branches

“When I gave the integration lectures years ago, the title was the somewhat dated term ‘the Nature of Man.’ I argued that it wasn’t the nature of man; it’s the nature of people. There’s no such thing as a person alone. . . . It is indeed the life of the church where Jesus is expressed, where we learn about him; that’s where we’re corrected through comments other people make, sermons and the like, and that’s really a place where we need to grow.”

+ **RICHARD GORSUCH** is a senior professor of psychology. This quote is taken from an *Integration* panel convened for the School of Psychology’s 50th anniversary. [More online.](#)



in psychology and theology. What branch of theology (e.g., systematic, practical, ethical, etc.) is being integrated with what branch of psychology (e.g., research, clinical, developmental, etc.)? The permutations are numerous and the exercise is not semantic, as the outcomes have real-life implications.

Integration can also be problematic when integrators don't particularize their theological tradition. Much of the early work in integration was conducted from a Reformed theological tradition, which left Christians from other traditions feeling perplexed by some of the assumptions and conclusions. Books and articles have been written on clinical and counseling theories, psychopathology, family therapy, and even particular psychological approaches, with subtitles such as "A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal," or "Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach," or "A Christian Perspective." And yet it is clear that it is impossible to do a comprehensive Christian anything as that would mean including all theological differences. The theological tradition and commitments of the integrator have enormous implications for how one understands and goes about the integrative task. So we have argued for "tradition-based integration,"<sup>11</sup> in which integrators begin with a confessional theological stance. For example, think of the differences between Reformed and Wesleyan traditions when it comes to understanding counseling and its relationship to human freedom and God's sovereignty. Because no integrative model is encyclopedic or monolithic enough to handle all the differences in both theological traditions and the various branches of psychology and theology, perhaps we could be more humble when it comes to some of the integrative "views" or "models" we espouse. Perhaps we should recognize that our view may be more or less equipped to aid in specific types of

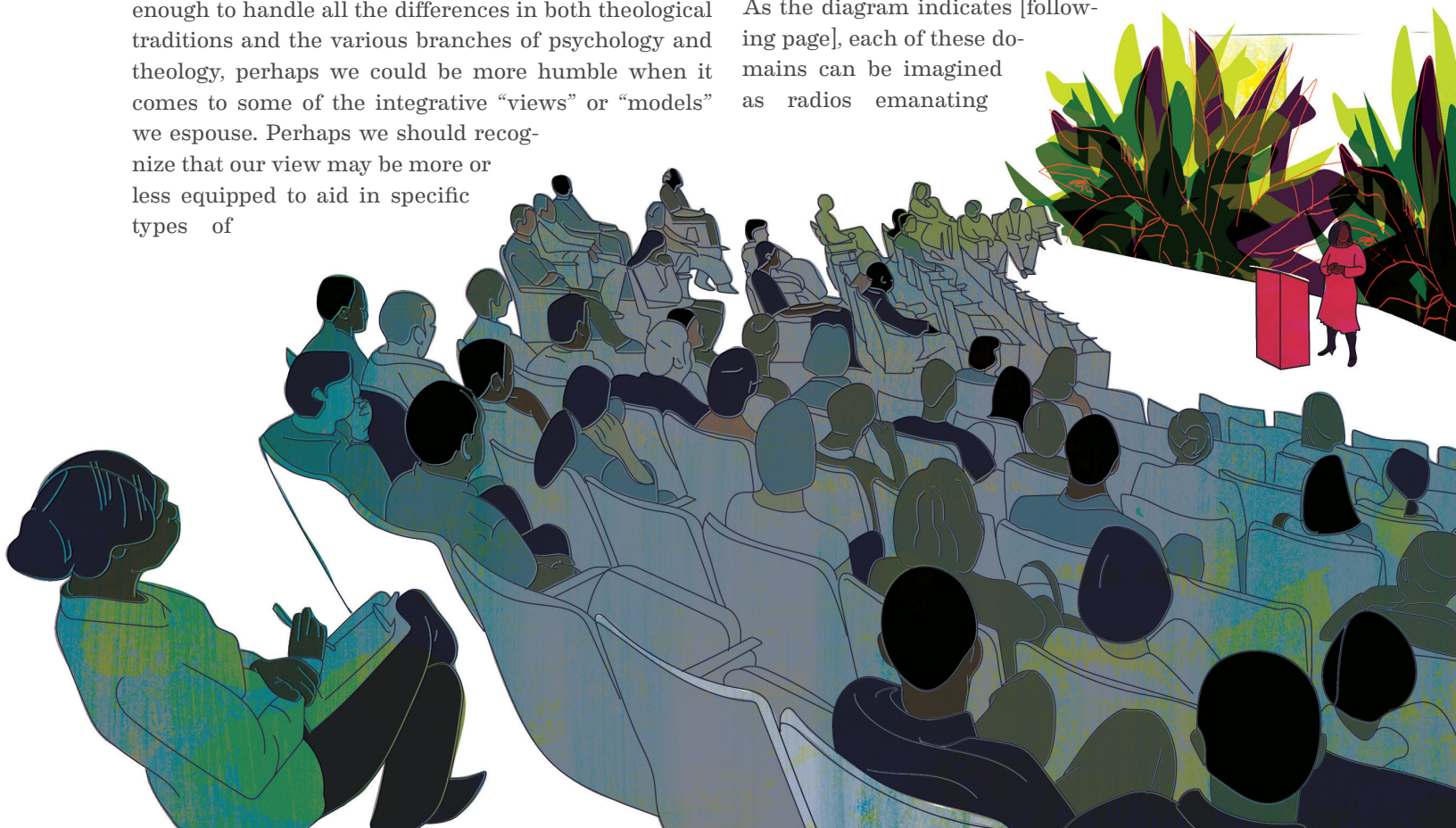
integrative endeavors (e.g., clinical settings, research settings, or ecclesial settings) and even within particular theological traditions.

### INTEGRATION AS PROCESS, RELATIONAL, DIALOGICAL, AND INTRAPERSONAL: WHOM ARE WE INTEGRATING WITH?

The complexity of the integration task above has moved some thinkers away from classic model building and toward process, relational, dialogical, and intrapersonal integrative ways of thinking.

*Integration as process.* Warren Brown has advanced a process of integration based on the idea of resonance.<sup>12</sup> This approach is founded on the Wesleyan quadrilateral developed by Albert Outler.<sup>13</sup> Outler attempted to capture John Wesley's implicit procedure when dealing with multiple authorities in the search for Christian truth. The four domains are Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. These four domains are put into conversation whenever one is trying to capture the truth about God, human creation, or theological concepts. This process implies that each source of authority has a valid voice and that truth is best conceptualized somewhere at the intersection of all four. While it is certainly true that Wesley privileged Scripture, at times he relied on the other domains to assist him in interpretation. Brown separates "reason" into two categories, reason and science, to allow for methodological differences between empirical science and philosophy and logic.

As the diagram indicates [following page], each of these domains can be imagined as radios emanating





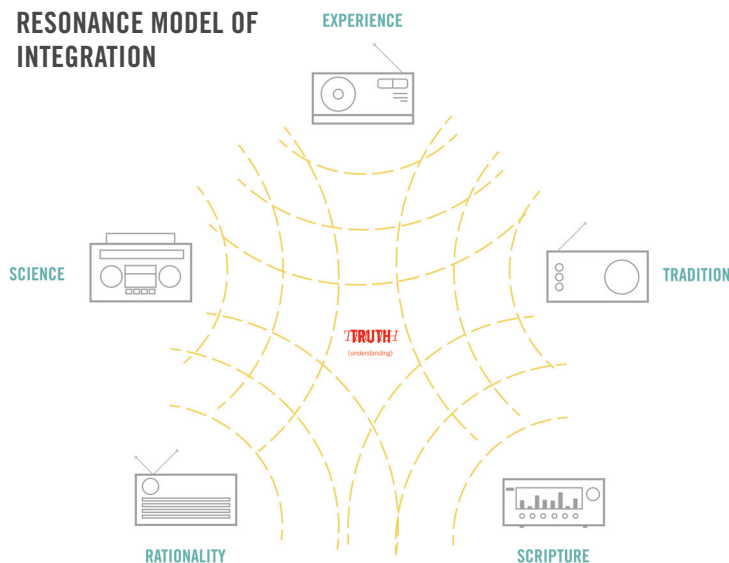
sound waves toward one another with truth residing at the intersection. Brown suggests that when the waves become resonant, truth comes into focus. If our understanding of truth is fuzzy, it indicates that the domains are not resonant, and we will need to “fine tune” one or more of the domains to bring truth into greater clarity. Brown notes that each domain has information limits. We can’t ask neuroscience to speak to the telos of human nature any more than we can ask Scripture to tell us about the structural or functional nature of the brain. Brown’s approach is unique among integration models in that (a) it provides a *process* for the discovery of truth (no domain trumps another but the clarity of truth indicates the right use of each domain); (b) it is a hybrid of modern and postmodern sensibilities in that Brown recognizes that while there is such a thing as “truth” it will always be partially known; and (c) it is a “tradition-based” approach anchored within a particular Christian tradition (Wesleyan) although not limited to it. Brown also notes that resonance is a community endeavor. No one person can be an expert in all fields. For this process to work, there must be relational dialogue between individuals steeped in the various domains.

*Integration as relational.* In a recent article, Sandage and Brown point out that disciplines don’t integrate, people do.<sup>14</sup> They argue for what they call “relational integration,” in which relational issues take center stage. Their challenge is for integrators to think overtly about the

*content* and *process* of the relational dynamics that occur between psychologists and theologians who attempt integration. If integration is truly to be communal and relational it will include interpersonal conflict, destabilizing of one’s perspective, recognition of the other, and the practice of such virtues as humility, justice, and forgiveness. They advocate for a “differentiated relationality,” which is integration “that prioritizes relational connection between differentiated integrators... [and] highlights a dialectical balance for interdisciplinary work between (a) maintaining personal identity and disciplinary integrity and (b) fostering authentic relationship, dialogue, and mutual influence across disciplinary boundaries.”<sup>15</sup> They refer to this process as “relating with differences,”

and clearly it is not for the faint of heart. Like Warren Brown’s approach, this relational model resists monolithic understandings or explanations of integration but provides a process model for how integration can be hospitable to both disci-

## WARREN BROWN’S RESONANCE MODEL OF INTEGRATION



plines and to the integrators themselves.

*Integration as dialogical.* Al Dueck is also in this process-oriented relational camp when he suggests that we move from thinking of psychology and theology as disciplines to viewing them as *cultures*.<sup>16</sup> While he recognizes that there are variations and subcultures within cultures, each culture has a more-or-less common language and grammar. Integration is therefore not abstract theological and psychological model building, but a kind of cultural immersion in which integrators learn the language of the other culture—having actual dialogues with and learning from the other. Integration becomes a cross-cultural dialogue. For Dueck, integration is a kind of peacemaking process between cultures. This is to move integration from the situation of Babel where all differences are collapsed into one language (psychology or theology), to a Pentecost celebration of diversity and exploration, which makes learning a richer, thicker, and more relational process. This anthropological approach is not only process, relationally, and dialogically oriented, but implies that integration is hard and long work! It is hard to learn another language, let alone the dialects, customs, metaphors, and humor they contain.

Hopefully one can see in these later approaches—tradition-based, resonance, relational, and cultural—the commonality of *process* (i.e., how one goes about the task), *relationality* (i.e., it is people/cultures that integrate, not disciplines), and *dialogue* (i.e., integration is so big that it can’t be done by solitary individuals but requires groups of people and cultures in dialogue with one another). *With whom are we integrating?* We are integrating with a



distinct other that speaks a different language (e.g., theological tradition and disciplinary dialect); a real person, not just a theory, but a stranger bearing a gift that we can learn from and with whom we can both be changed. In fact, this is one of the unique contributions of the School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary. There is great heterogeneity among the psychology faculty theologically, clinically, in terms of research, etc. And there are also the built-in dialogue opportunities of being situated within a three-school seminary (theology, psychology, and intercultural studies). While these cultural differences can be challenging, at times leading to miscommunication and even hurt feelings, they can also provide the opportunity for a Pentecost experience where differences are celebrated and new learning takes place.

While it is impossible in such a short space to adequately describe historically or culturally the integration project between psychology and theology, hopefully the reader has gained a glimpse of the work that has gone on over the years, the issues at stake, and an appreciation of the seriousness with which those in the field approach the task.

*Integration as intrapersonal.* But as noted above, disciplines don't integrate—people do, which brings us to integration as intrapersonal. For many years thinkers and writers have recognized that integration is about character, which includes the personal formation of the therapist, professor, or researcher.<sup>17</sup> A Christian integrator is someone who is working on his or her own integrative journey of faith. Christian integrators will take personal responsibility to thoroughly engage their particular faith traditions and practices in holistic ways that bring about theological and psychological formation. If Dueck is right that integrators must immerse themselves in both cultures, then integrators are anthropologists who are changed by this immersion. It is not enough to be objective observers outside the fray. Christian integrators are embodied and embedded, in that they pray, read Scripture, and serve the needs of the neighbor with other believers in the body of Christ. This is the only way to bring integration from intellectual contemplation into day-to-day living. In this way we will be better equipped to know what we are integrating, with what, and with whom. ■

## ENDNOTES

1. See Hendrika Vande Kemp, in collaboration with H. Newton Malony, *Psychology and Theology in Western Thought, 1672–1965: A Historical and Annotated Bibliography* (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1984).
2. For example, see *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James.
3. See Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), esp. chaps. 1 and 4.
4. H. Vande Kemp, "Historical Perspective: Religion and Clinical Psychology in America," in *Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology*, ed. E. P. Shafranske (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1996).
5. While this has been true of many writers, perhaps none so popularly captured the public's imagination than Sigmund Freud himself, who saw religion as an illusion that a mature society would eventually outgrow.
6. See David A. Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in Johnson, *Psychology & Christianity*, 245–73.
7. S. J. Sandage and J. K. Brown, "Relational Integration, Part 1: Differentiated Relationality between Psychology and Theology," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43, no. 3 (2015): 165–78.
8. See H. Newton Malony, in collaboration with Hendrika Vande Kemp, *Psychology and the Cross: The Early History of Fuller Seminary's School of Psychology* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1995).
9. *Ibid.*, 123.
10. Johnson, *Psychology & Christianity*.
11. Brad Strawn, Ronald W. Wright, and Paul Jones, "Tradition-Based Integration: Illuminating the Stories and Practices that Shape Our Integrative Imaginations," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33, no. 4 (2014): 300–312.
12. Warren S. Brown, "Resonance: A Model for Relating Science, Psychology and Faith," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23 (2004): 110–20.
13. For a detailed look at the quadrilateral, see W. S. Gunter, S. J. Jones, T. A. Campbell, R. L. Miles, and R. L. Maddox, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).
14. Sandage and Brown, "Relational Integration, Part 1."
15. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
16. Alvin Dueck, "Babel, Esperanto, Shibboleths, and Pentecost: Can We Talk?" *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 21 (2002): 72–80.
17. See John D. Carter and S. Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). See also Siang-Yang Tan, "Intrapersonal Integration: The Servant's Spirituality," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 6, no. 1 (1987): 34–39.



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Strawn is a member of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies; Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Studies (founding member and officer); Society for the Exploration of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapies and Theology (founding member and associate director); and the Brookhaven Institute for Psychoanalysis and Christian Theology (faculty member). Prior to joining the faculty of Fuller's Graduate School of Psychology in 2012, Dr. Strawn was professor of psychology at Point Loma Nazarene University and also practiced as a clinical psychologist and served as vice president for spiritual development and dean of the chapel at Southern Nazarene University.



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