GRIEF-WORK IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS: ILLUSTRATING TRANSFORMATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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During the past two-and-a-half decades, an array of practical theologians, pastoral counselors, therapists, psychologists and psychology professors who are self-professed Christians have attempted to answer these two methodological questions, “What is the relationship between psychology and theology? How does the construal of this relationship impact ministerial and therapeutic practice?” In this article, I contribute to the ongoing discussion by (1) summarizing a typology of interdisciplinary models, (2) delineating a “transformational model,” and (3) demonstrating the use of this model in relating grief-work and a theology of the cross. In regard to the latter, I place Alice Miller’s Drama of the Gifted Child in conversation with Karl Barth’s understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ and Frank Lake’s Clinical Theology.

Richard R. Osmer (2005) identifies three categories of interdisciplinary models—correlational, transversal, and transformational—that have emerged in recent discussions among practical theologians, and I would add self-professing Christian clinicians and professors of psychology. This section introduces these three models and notes their distinct construal of both the nature of academic disciplines and the task of theology.

Correlational models relate theology and psychology (and other social sciences) as equal contributors to interdisciplinary conversation. Theological and social scientific theories exert mutual influence on one another. They exist in a symmetrical relationship. Three variations of the correlational models of interdisciplinarity can be seen, though not exclusively, in Paul Tillich, Don Browning, and Matthew Lamb. Tillich’s (1981) correlation is uni-directional. Interpretations of culture from disciplines such as psychology pose questions to theology, and in turn, theology answers with concepts plausible to the modern person. At times, Tillich’s interdisciplinary conversation collapses theology into psychology, while at other times, it creates a tertium quid, literally “a third thing,” a hybrid concept that is neither strictly psychological nor theological. Don Browning (1996) and Matthew Lamb (1982) draw upon David Tracy (1975) to extend Tillich’s method of correlation. Don Browning’s “revised” correlation (1996) is bi-directional. That is, theology and non-theological disciplines pose questions and answers to one another. All disciplines are hermeneutical and thus need to be subjected to the same analytical criteria (i.e., validity claims). Matthew Lamb sets forth a “revised praxis” correlational model. In this model, the emancipatory praxis of social movements and communities is correlated with the praxis of communities of faith in hopes that both will work collaboratively toward the humanization of life.

In contradistinction to these correlational models and the transformational models discussed below, Wentzel van Huyssteen (1999) argues for a transversal model of interdisciplinarity. According to...

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2Browning delineates these validity claims as “five levels of practical reason.” They include the visional (metaphysical), obligation (ethical), anthropological (tendency-need), environmental-social (related to ecological constraints), and rule-role criteria.
van Huyssteen, academic disciplines, by very nature, exist in transverse relationships. To transverse is to lie across, intersect, meet at a particular point and then diverge. Thus academic disciplines can be imaged as the childhood game of pick-up sticks, wherein sticks lie across one another in all directions. Like the sticks, disciplines transverse one another; they are interdisciplinary by nature. Interdisciplinary dialogue is unavoidable. Its aim is the establishment of “intersubjective agreements,” which emerge from the persuasive reasoning of all dialogue partners, including persons of different academic backgrounds and religious affiliations.

Osmer identifies Hans Frei (1992), James Loder (1998) and Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger (1995) as utilizing a “transformational” model of interdisciplinarity. Frei’s approach can be depicted as an “ad hoc” correlational model. By “ad hoc,” he means that theology cannot be systematically correlated with any other academic discipline, though particular psychological concepts, for instance, may be analogies for particular theological concepts. Here Frei follows Karl Barth’s insistence on the unique task, subject matter, and linguistic conventions of theology. Theology may discover common causes with other disciplines, and even accompany them, but only from within its own domain, in light of its own concerns.

Grounded in these theological convictions, Hunsinger and Loder, independently of one another, construct an asymmetrical model of interdisciplinarity. This model is based upon the logic of the Incarnation, as interpreted by the Council of Chalcedon (451) and imaginatively used by Barth as a pattern of thought to relate a host of conceptual relationships—e.g., healing and salvation, divine and human agency, faith and works, confession and conversation. This model conceptualizes academic disciplines in a stratified hierarchy, which differentiates disciplines in terms of their levels of complexity and comprehensiveness. Each discipline interprets phenomena according to its own internally generated objectives, methods, and linguistic conventions. Of the academic disciplines, theology is the most comprehensive in that it alone addresses questions about the identity of God and the ultimate telos of human existence. Theology, however, has no ontological superiority over any other disciplines. It is a human, finite and often flawed endeavor.

**Transformational Interdisciplinarity: The Chalcedonian Pattern**

Having located the Chalcedonian, or asymmetrical, model of interdisciplinarity within a larger typology, this section of the article delineates its specific parameters as presented by Hunsinger. It concludes by seeking to answer how this model might generally be transformational.

**Terms of the Pattern**

The Chalcedonian pattern of thought relates theology and its non-theological dialogue partners “without separation or division” (inseparable unity), “without confusion or change” (indissoluble differentiation), and “with asymmetrical ordering” (indestructible order).³

“Without separation” means that psychological and theological interpretations pertain to any given pastoral situation.⁴ Not only can human existence be understood accurately from within these disciplines but also the psychological and theological issues in a person’s life interpenetrate and reciprocally influence one another. Psychosocial changes may lead to profound spiritual shifts and vice versa.

“Without confusion” indicates that the relevant disciplines are “logically diverse; they have different aims, subject matters, methods, and linguistic conventions” (Hunsinger, 1995, p. 6).⁵ The language and concepts of psychology and theology each maintain their own integrity. Reductionistic interpretations are eschewed. Theological concepts and interpretations of situations are not translated into psychological concepts or interpretations. Likewise, each discipline’s normative criteria are generated.

³It is important to note that the use of the Chalcedonian pattern in relating various disciplinary interpretations of a given phenomenon is itself analogous to Barth’s use of the pattern in describing ontological unions. In similarity of usage, there also is a great dissimilarity. Thus the three terms of the pattern take on different meanings in interdisciplinary dialogue than when interpreting the mysterious unions established in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

⁴We could add to this list any number of disciplines within the hierarchy of the sciences.

⁵In other words, the subject matters of psychology, sociology and theology, for instance, are distinct. Each field interprets and sets norms for human being and doing at its own level. Psychology considers human being and doing at the intrapsychic, interpersonal and systemic levels; sociology at the communal, societal, and cultural levels; theology at the level of ultimacy or eternity.
internally, i.e., within their respective disciplines, so that, as Hunsinger explains, theology cannot interfere with the proper functioning of psychology. Theology cannot reveal to us, as demonstrated below, the intrapsychic components of grief-work. Conversely, psychology cannot determine, for instance, normative criteria for living the way of the cross.

"Asymmetry" means that logical precedence is given to theology, because it is a more comprehensive discipline. While the social sciences interpret the penultimate realm, theology alone addresses the ultimate questions of human existence. It alone has as its object the Triune God. Asymmetry also refers to the fact that social scientific interpretations can be understood within a theological framework though the reverse is not true (as demonstrated in section 3 of this article). Hunsinger (1995) explains,

"The stratified hierarchy ... suggests that while each academic or scientific discipline is upwardly open to more comprehensive systems of knowledge, it cannot legitimately be reduced downward. Thus psychology is conceived as being appropriately understood within a larger theological framework and theology is conceived as not being reducible to psychology." (p. 60)

It is important to note again that this asymmetrical ordering does not imply an epistemological superiority of theology over any other disciplines. Theology is a fully human discipline. As human reflection on and response to the Word and Spirit of God, theology (or more accurately the theologian) is put to death and resurrected, again and again, by its Object who is indissolubly Subject.

Barth’s Use of the Pattern

Barth’s interpretation of “Jesus’ Healing of the Paralytic,” as delineated by Hunsinger, demonstrates his nascent interdisciplinary interpretation of a pastoral encounter (Hunsinger, 1995, pp. 66-69). Here the forgiveness of sins, a theological reality, and physical healing, a biological reality with psychological implications, are related to one another according to Chalcedonian logic. In this story, forgiveness and healing are unified in one encounter with the Living God, yet they are differentiated from one another. They are asymmetrically ordered in that the forgiveness of sins provides the ultimate context of meaning for physical healing. Healing is temporal, penultimate, while the forgiveness of sins has eternal, ultimate significance. The forgiveness of sins has “conceptual priority” and “independence” of the healing (p. 68).

Furthermore, though physical healing and forgiveness of sins occur simultaneously in this story, they are to be understood as “ad hoc” and “contingent.” “Ad hoc” refers to the fact that in the temporal realm “healing” might not accompany faith, the recognition of one’s reconciliation to God through the forgiveness of sins (Hunsinger, 1995, pp. 73-74). “Contingent” refers to the status of the relationship between God and all creation. Creation is contingent upon God not only for its inception but for its continued existence. The church is contingent upon Christ; it has no being outside of Christ. “Healing” is contingent upon salvation. Apart from union with Christ, humanity would cease to exist. Thus healing would be irrelevant and non-existent.

The ad hoc and contingent nature of the relationship between healing and salvation can be clarified further by Barth’s conceptualization of the history of reconciliation between God and humanity. Reconciliation, for Barth, is an event in three tenses. It is complete in the past, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “It is finished!” In Christ, humanity has received all the benefits of reconciliation with God. In the present, the benefits of reconciliation are not experienced fully in daily life. Sin remains and persons contradict their being in Christ. We “see” our status in Christ by faith not sight, though we glimpse signs of our reconciliation to God and others. Physical healing, viewed from the perspective of faith, is one such sign. It witnesses to the future coming of Christ when God will be all in all and humanity will experience fully the benefits of reconciliation.

Transformational Potential

Having set forth this interdisciplinary model, we might ask why Osmer (2005) classifies the Chalcedonian pattern as a “transformational” model of interdisciplinarity. In contrast to the correlational and transversal models, this one might better be defined as “asymmetrical.” What or who experiences transformation in interdisciplinary dialogue structured according to the Chalcedonian pattern?

For both Loder and Hunsinger, transformation occurs first and primarily in the person of the practical theologian, pastor, or clinician who is pursuing her practice with fidelity to the disciplines of both psychology and theology. The practitioner becomes bilingual, able to “feel, act, and think in conformity with two different modes of thought” (Hunsinger, 1995, p. 5). She interprets her counselee’s situation with theological and psychological
acumen, untangling, for instance, one’s knowledge of God and one’s psychological God-representation.6

Secondly, transformation occurs in the interpretation and application of the theological and psychological concepts that are brought to bear on a particular situation or issue. Theology and psychology become mutually illuminative. Psychological theories may help translate theological norms into the actual practice of pastoral care. Social scientific concepts may be analogies for theological concepts and thereby may prompt deeper comprehension of theological analogues. Further yet, concepts and theories from psychology may function as “secular parables of the truth” (Barth, 1961). They may interpret an aspect of the human predicament or a given situation in a manner more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ than the church and its theologians. In such instances, psychology may admonish the church to return to the resources of its own tradition in order to uncover that which has been lost, repressed or never fully developed.

ILLUSTRATING TRANSFORMATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY: GRIEF-WORK IN LIGHT OF THE CROSS

In order to demonstrate the transformational capacity of the Chalcedonian model of interdisciplinarity, the rest of this article constructs an interdisciplinary dialogue between Alice Miller’s understanding of healing from childhood trauma via “never-ending mourning” and Karl Barth’s understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ. The dialogue proceeds structurally according to the terms of the pattern—without confusion, without division, with indestructible order. It begins by setting forth each theory on its own terms, thus maintaining the integrity of both. It then demonstrates conceptual connections between Miller’s theory of grief-work and Barth’s theory of the cross and orders the two theories asymmetrically so that grief-work can be interpreted in the larger theological framework of the cross. Frank Lake’s Clinical Theology (1966) illustrates the intimacy, integrity, and order of the relationship between grief-work and the cross.

Alice Miller’s Grief-Work: Components, Benefits, Obstacles

Swiss psychotherapist Alice Miller (1997) depicts the essential element of psychological wholeness for those suffering from childhood trauma as the discovery of repressed, personal, and painful truth. She persuasively illustrates, with case studies from her own clinical practice, the necessity of grief-work, its components, its benefits, and factors that potentially undermine it.

The components of this grief-work include: experiencing repressed emotion; discovering the true self; relinquishing the false self; confronting internalized parents; developing a new foundation for self-esteem; meeting needs and mourning those that can never be fulfilled; and, an ongoing recapitulation of all the above.

De-repression may be precipitated by an event in adulthood that triggers memories and intense childhood feelings of despair, rage, helplessness, or terror. In other instances, the buried emotions and memories surface during therapeutic treatment of their symptoms. This emotional release constitutes the discovery not only of one’s history but also of one’s true self. As the fragmented self moves toward integration, the client is slowly freed to experience a plethora of formerly denied feelings—joy, anger, fear, sexual arousal, greed, despair. Rather than reject her true self through denial, rationalization, idealization, etc., she learns to listen to and express her inner world. “Now she can realize how she still sometimes tries to persuade herself, when she is scared, that she is not; how she belittles her feelings to protect herself, and either does not become aware of them at all, or does so only several days after they have already passed” (Miller, 1997, p. 15).

Embracing the true self and relinquishing the false self are reciprocal components of grief-work. When a child is forced to repress his own needs and his ambivalence toward his care-takers in order to secure their love, he will develop a false self that fuses with others. Rather than individuate, he will be held captive by an unrelenting and unconscious drive to please others, a drive that fails to achieve its intended results.7 However, as the client accepts the reality of his own history, he will shed (albeit slowly) this false self. Miller (1997) writes:

If a person is able, during this long process [of grief-work] to experience the reality that he was never loved as a child for

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6See Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, pp. 105-150.

7For instance, grandiose posturing represents a desperate attempt to assuage a craving for unconditional love and affirmation. Ironically, the more successful a person is at grandiosity, the more he fails to fill the aching void left from childhood, as he is “loved” not for his true self but rather for his accomplishments and projected image.
what he was but was instead needed and exploited for his achievements, success and good qualities—and that he sacrificed his childhood for this form of love—he will be very deeply shaken, but one day he will feel the desire to end these efforts. He will discover in himself a need to live according to his true self and no longer be forced to earn ‘love’ that always leaves him empty-handed, since it is given to his false-self—something he has begun to identify and relinquish. (p. 60)

This grief-work enables the client to recognize not only the failings of her parents (or others) but also her internalization of their destructive patterns. Identification of these patterns is not enough, however. “To free ourselves from these patterns we need more than an intellectual awareness: we need an emotional confrontation with our parents in an inner dialogue” (Miller, 1997, p. 112-113). This internal dialogue may be enhanced through an actual dialogue with one’s parents if possible.

As the false self is relinquished, the true self is embraced, and internalized parental images are confronted, the client’s self-esteem shifts to a sturdier foundation—the acceptance and full experience of her feelings and needs (Miller, 1997, p. 34). Transference contributes to this burgeoning esteem, providing an opportunity for the therapist to help meet many of the client’s needs—e.g., needs for warmth, empathy, respect, affirmation. However, as Miller duly notes, the therapist (nor any other person) cannot meet the childhood need for unconditional love. She cannot become the “perfect parent.” Thus the client eventually must cease the compulsive search for an ideal mother and grieve this irreplaceable loss, or as Miller puts it, engage in the “never-ending work of mourning” (p. 21).

Living one’s grief transforms relationships with one’s self, one’s sexual (marriage) partners, children, and society. The release of repressed emotions and memories yields vitality and creativity. The discovery of one’s personal truth halts repetition compulsion as destructive patterns inherited from previous generations lose their chokehold. Confronting one’s own history increases empathy and compassion for others as well as discernment of their festering wounds. In particular, according to Miller (1997), grief-work sensitizes clients to the emotional exploitation of children and reduces the risk of unconsciously manipulating their own children to meet their own unmet childhood needs for mirroring and unconditional love. Especially pertinent to our current socio-cultural context, Miller suggests that grief-work can assist the flourishing of human life in a given society by diminishing individual proclivities toward racism, sexism, homophobia, and oppression of all sorts (p. 114). In

this regard, grief-work may be essential to the maintenance of democratic freedoms. When hate is externalized and projected onto others, rather than de-repressed, it creates factions among groups of people, polarized groups who seek annihilation of the other, which can only occur after trampling upon the other’s human rights and dignity.

Finally, Miller (1997) illustrates numerous obstacles that threaten to undermine the process of grief-work. Primal fears may send the client rushing back into denial (p. 16). Unbearable shame may suppress the emergence of “negative” feelings. Consistently successful grandiose posturing will, ironically, inhibit the fulfillment of the void it is intended to fill. The "in-toxification of success,” like a temporary salve, blocks the necessary lancing and “de-toxification” of psychic wounds. “Continuous performance of outstanding achievements may sometimes enable a person to maintain the illusion of the constant attention and availability of his parents … such a person is usually able to ward off threatening depression with increased displays of brilliance, thereby deceiving both himself and those around him” (p. 39).

Religion and theological interpretation of psychological realities foster projection and denial, according to Miller (1997). She suggests that acts of violence committed in the name of religion throughout history are likely the consequence of repressed childhood abuse. Religion, like other ideologies, inherently encourages this externalization of hatred (p. 2). Spiritually-based support groups, including Twelve-Step groups, ensure the maintenance of the false self and prevent mourning through dependence upon a Higher Power and hope for unconditional love. Likewise, a therapist who interprets resiliency as a sign of “God’s grace” or a “miracle” or some act of God actually has failed to deal with her own history (p. 41-42). Miller sees in this type of theological interpretation a form of denial and, worse yet, a failure to assess and treat the source of the client’s pain.

**Karl Barth’s Theology of the CROSS**

The Cross of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of his earthly existence, the consummation of the

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8Throughout this section, I alter the presentation of the word “cross” to highlight both the similarities and dissimilarities, the unity and distinction and asymmetry of the cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian. “Cross” refers to Jesus’ crucifixion, while “cross” refers to that which Christians bear in likeness to Christ. “CROSS” refers to both forms, the Cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian.
Incarnation of the Son of God (Barth, 1958, p. 140-141). His death upon the Cross destroys every enemy of human existence—suffering, sin, death, and hell. It is the basis for relationship between God and humans, accomplishing the forgiveness of sins and destruction of sinful humanity. While Jesus is the “Judge Judged in our Place,” he is also the true human, revealing the divine intent for human life. Thus the Cross is more than the climax of the history of God in Jesus Christ. It characterizes Jesus’ entire earthly existence. “[I]n the whole of the New Testament He is the Crucified … Faith in Him is faith in the Crucified. Love for Him is love for the crucified. Hope in Him is hope in the Crucified” (p. 250). The Passion was not unexpected, catastrophic, or a deviation, but instead “a description of the whole existence and divine likeness and activity of the man Jesus” (p. 249). In both life and death, Jesus Christ has identified with every form of human suffering.

Just as God, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, participates in the double plight of humanity, so also humanity participates both objectively and subjectively in the Trinitarian life of God. Humanity is included in Christ’s crucifixion, death, and resurrection. We are related internally to the death of Jesus Christ. We actually participate in his history, which above all is the history of God’s liberation of humanity. This objective reality precedes and provides the foundation for subjective, i.e., existential, appropriation of this participation. This subjective appropriation occurs as the Christian “takes up her cross” in faith that, in doing so, she fellowships with Christ in the here-and-now. As Barth writes, the cross of the Christian “is the most concrete form of the fellowship between Christ and the Christian” (1958, pp. 599). In other words, the CROSS defines Christian identity and lifestyle.

More specifically, the cross of the Christian may take the form of persecution, rejection, alienation, temptation, or any other forms of creaturely suffering. The latter is most directly relevant to grief-work. Barth writes, “[T]he cross of Christians also consists in their particular share in the tension, transience, suffering and obscurity by which every man is in some form constricted and disturbed and finally condemned to death” (1958, p. 611). Thus we can conclude that one’s cross may include traumatic suffering, such as neglect, abuse, debilitating illness, and meaninglessness.

Finally, two important caveats are in order. (1) Self-infliction, passive endurance of suffering when there is a way of escape, or failure to prevent the suffering of another do not constitute faithful participation in the Cross of Christ.9 (2) The Cross of Christ and the cross of the disciple are different in kind. (In fact, Barth orders them according to the Chalcedonian pattern.) The cross of the Christian is subsequent to and contingent upon the Cross of Christ for its proper meaning and significance. The human cross corresponds to but does not reenact the Cross of Christ. While the Cross exists eternally, the human cross exists temporally. It is a provisional characteristic of the Christian’s existence. Christ alone suffered God-abandonment; he alone endured the second death, pure chaos, utter agony and inaccessible darkness in his descent into hell. Christ’s suffering was original, direct and pure obedience, while faithful appropriation of suffering as a way of the cross is always “stained with disobedience.” Even when we are innocent victims of suffering, we still are sinners in relationship to God. Further, Christ’s Cross has reconciled the world to God; the human cross does not. Christ’s suffering liberates and exalts humanity, but “it is only with serious qualifications that we can say of the suffering of a Christian that it is significant and effective for others, and takes place in their favour” (Barth, 1958, p. 605).

Understanding Grief-Work in Light of the CROSS

In his clinical treatment of persons who experienced early childhood trauma, Frank Lake (1966) interpreted their suffering as *participatio crucis* and treated them with a combination of psychological and spiritual practices. Lake writes that having a mother who was “totally inadequate in some essential respect” is “a cross and passion too heavy for infant shoulders to bear” (p. 1098). When such suffering is repressed, it is borne neurotically. “The personal centre of being remains indelibly related to this experience of agony …” (pp. 1098-99).

However in adulthood, one may choose to experience formerly repressed pain as living the way of the cross. By faith, previous terrors may finally
become integrated into one’s living history as a cross that corresponds to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

[Is the Word of the Cross] irrelevant to the suffering of innocents, the defenceless and the deprived children? Not at all, for the Cross of Christ enables them in later life to take up a new and consistently maintained attitude of acceptance and active bearing of the pain they could not and cannot escape. (Lake, 1966, p. 1101)

For Lake, embracing formerly repressed pain as one’s own cross is always a matter of choice. For Barth, it is a matter of obedience. It is not merely one option among others but rather a matter of faithfulness in one’s Christian vocation. In this regard, Barth provides rationalization for considering grief-work as one form of subjective participation in the Cross of Jesus Christ. “If Jesus himself was a suffering creature, and as such the Lord of all creatures, we are not only permitted but commanded to regard … the irruption of … suffering into the life of the Christian as the sign of this fellowship, and thus the manifestation of the supreme dignity of the Christian (Barth, 1958, p. 611).

Lake demonstrates various psychological benefits for connecting grief-work and the CROSS. For example, knowledge of the CROSS may establish security and eventually peace in the midst of unbearable psychic pain. Knowledge of Christ’s ontological identification with human suffering on the Cross may lay the foundation for existential identification with God by toppling every distorted notion of God’s omnipotence and wrath. Without the context of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, some persons may never be able to re-integrate their repressed pain. Jesus’ descent into hell, his utter passivity in the presence of sheer terror and non-being, and his triumph over death and destruction may be the only reality that enables them to face the depths of their repressed anxiety and dread.

On this point, Barth’s theology of the CROSS, illuminated by Lake’s clinical theology, encourages a modification of Miller’s view of human psychological stamina. She claims that, through mourning, we can “repair,” or “transform,” ourselves (Miller, 1977, p. 2). She does not seem to appreciate fully the fact that some, in spite of all their knowledge to the contrary, will be unable to endure the irruption of terrifying childhood memories and emotional proximity to abandonment, chaos, and dread. She writes, “It will become possible for old, unremembered situations to be experienced consciously in their full tragedy for the first time and be mourned at last” (p. 59). In contrast, Barth (and the Reformed tradition more broadly), underscores the tragic brokenness (and sinfulness) of humanity. Outside of participation in the very being of God, we are “but dust.” The freedom to obey God, perhaps most supremely in regard to de-repressing psychic suffering, is a gift granted by God in Christ through the sustaining presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Conversely, Miller’s critique of religion calls for caution and clarity in any theological proclamation about suffering and violence. The Cross of Jesus Christ judges all violence inflicted upon humanity, especially that which is inflicted in the name of God. It also confronts all denial of human suffering. When the Cross of Christ defines the pastoral care-giver’s identity, he will reject so-called “spiritual” therapy that seeks healing through avoidance of the client’s suffering. He will recognize any tendency to spiritualize or moralize as indicative of his own defense mechanisms. His ministry of care will depend not upon technique but rather upon a willingness to “suffer with” others.

This does not, however, precipitate relinquishing all forms of theological interpretation. From the standpoint of faith, all healing of human ailments is a consequence of the death of Christ. Human life, let alone its restoration, is contingent upon its connection to the Trinitarian life of God. Again this reality does not justify the confusion of psychological and theological interpretations. Any visible healing of psychic disturbance can be explained on two levels of reality—the psychological and theological—in such a way that both disciplines maintain their own integrity.

At this point, numerous connections between grief-work and our theology of the CROSS can be stated explicitly. (1) Grief-work and the CROSS, by nature, are paradoxical. Healing depends upon active suffering—the de-repression of painful childhood memories and emotions. The destruction of sin and death depends upon the crucifixion and death of Christ. Only through losing life can one gain one’s life in Christ. (2) Grief-work involves discovery and integration of the true self and relinquishment of the false self. The Christian’s identity (indeed that of all humanity) is grounded in the Cross. The way of the cross involves “putting off the old self with its practices and putting on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col. 3:9-10). (3) The avoidance of one’s own suffering through intellectualization, grandiosity, denial, etc., is antithetical to both
grief-work and the way of the cross in human existence. (4) Just as grief-work may be a life-long process, so is the way of the cross for the Christian. Sorrow and joy, woundedness and healing exist together in the temporal realm. The full and complete actualization of reconciliation between God and humanity and the eradication of sin and suffering occur only in eternity. (5) Compassion toward others is a natural consequence of both grief-work and participation in the Cross of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul wrote,

For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are being comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (2 Cor. 1:5-7)

Grief-work and the CROSS Ordered According to the Chalcedonian Pattern

Bilingual therapists and pastoral care-givers can relate grief-work and the CROSS according to the Chalcedonian pattern of interdisciplinarity. Indissoluble differentiation means that both Miller’s description of grief-work and a theology of the CROSS retain their own disciplinary integrity and boundaries. Neither the language of grief-work nor that of the CROSS should be translated into the other discipline’s terminology. Psychological critiques of religion should be considered in such a way that the pastoral theologian or counselor re-examines the practice and doctrine of the church. Yet these would be revised only on the basis of Scripture, church history, and historical theology, etc., so that theology retains its own integrity. Conversely, theological critiques of psychology might call for the counselor or psychologist to re-examine psychological conclusions in light of further research, case studies, and related schools of psychology.

Inseparable unity affirms the relevance of both grief-work and the CROSS to the human predicament and indicates that the psychological considerations cannot always be neatly separated from the theological and vice-versa. In fact, in preaching and in pastoral care, a minister may encourage a congregation to endure and work through suffering as an act of faith and obedience, in conformity to the Cross of Christ.

Third, indestructible ordering posits the CROSS as the ultimate context of meaning for grief-work rather than the reverse. Grief-work is a sign, or parable, while the CROSS is the thing signified. The CROSS is conceptually prior to and independent of grief-work in the life of a sufferer. Similarly, grief-work is not identical with the CROSS. It does not exhaust the meaning of the CROSS. It is not a necessary condition for participation in the Cross. The significance of grief-work is temporal, while that of the CROSS is eternal. Emotional healing accomplished via mourning is penultimate while reconciliation to God and others accomplished by the Cross of Jesus Christ is ultimate. Similarly, grief-work may yield limited results—a degree of psychological healing—while the Cross of Jesus Christ eradicates all sin, suffering, and death (though this is currently evident only by faith).

See Figure 1 for a visual depiction of the asymmetrical ordering of grief-work and the CROSS. The Cross of Jesus Christ provides the largest context of meaning for human existence. Grief-work in the life of a client signifies some aspects of our subjective participation in the cross, but the reverse is not true. Grief-work, as one form of the way of the cross, is penultimate (temporal), while the Cross of Jesus Christ has ultimate (eternal) significance.

Summary

By constructing this interdisciplinary dialogue between Alice Miller’s understanding of grief-work and Karl Barth’s understanding of the CROSS according to the Chalcedonian pattern of thought, we have avoided both reductionism and the creation of a tertium quid; we have maintained the integrity of each discipline and deepened our understanding of both grief-work and the CROSS. Grief-work moves a person from shame to esteem, from depression to hope, from bitterness to forgiveness, from victim to survivor, from emotional paralysis to creative, spontaneous, vital living. On the psychological level, it is the “one thing that is needful” in response not only to personal but also communal tragedy. In the practice of pastoral care and counseling, such grief-work may be interpreted and experienced as one form of subjective participation in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Besides providing parishioners and clients with comfort and hope in the face of unbearable pain, the theology of the CROSS may transform the identity and ministry of the pastoral care-giver and counselor as well. For dependence upon the Cross enables her to hear the seemingly unbearable pain of others and continue her own personal process of healing through mourning.
Figure 1. Alice Miller’s grief-work in theological context.

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