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**Here-and-Now:  
Linking Practical Theology with Group Psychotherapy**

by

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I declare that **Here-and-Now: Linking Practical Theology with Group Psychotherapy** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## Author's Acknowledgements

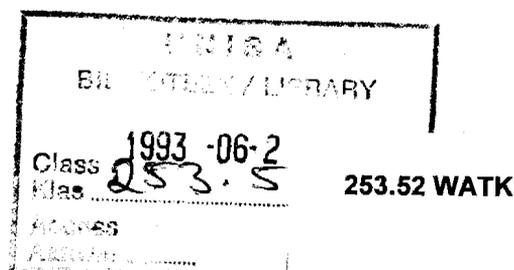
Among my varied colleagues to whom I am indebted for shared insights, professional supervision, and many, many good times, I especially wish to thank:

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### Author's note on style

Wherever possible the language in this thesis is de-sexed, i.e., exclusively masculine pronouns are avoided in favor of general terms such as one, s/he, persons, etc. All appearances of masculine pronouns are either direct quotes or direct implications from the works of authors quoted. To alter their language, thought and intention, would have been both unfair and unwise. They, like us, are simply the products of their culture.

I have also adopted an increasingly popular habit of linking pronouns which are technically plural, e.g., they, their's, them, etc., with pronouns which are technically singular, e.g., one, s/he, etc. This practice reflects the original usage of these pronouns in the early days of the English language. Like other scholars, mainly American, I feel that this is the appropriate time to revive this linguistic tradition. I hope readers will find that it enhances rather than detracts from the contents of this thesis.

This manuscript was prepared largely in accordance with the stylistic rules and regulations found in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian, 5th ed. revised (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Since the advent of computer word-processing and printing packages, however, the conventions of academic theses have changed. In keeping with the the modern style I have striven to maintain the spirit of both Turabian's publication and the University of South Africa's guidelines but have taken the liberty to make minor deviations from convention when advised to do so by those whose knowledge of current printing and clerical procedures exceeds mine. Therefore I have consulted professional typesetters and desktop publishers regarding current convention regarding layout and design of footnotes, references and format. Their suggestions, while not always in strict accordance with Turabian, have provided a clearer, easier to read manuscript. I have complied, however, with Turabian's dictum to be consistent throughout the reference system and indeed throughout the entire document. Hence any stylistic deviations from Turabian's standard are keeping both in line with the intention of the standard as well as modern publishing conventions.

Readers should also note that in citing secondary references I have followed another of Turabian's dictums:

In preparing the manuscript, time and space can be saved and the appearance of the page improved by reducing the number of note references in the text. In a single paragraph containing several quotations, for example, a reference number following the last quotation will permit all the quotations to be cited in one note.(Turabian, p.124)

Finally, for purposes of brevity the *New English Bible* and *The New Oxford Annotated Bible Revised Standard Version* are abbreviated NEB and RSV respectively.

The path to your door  
Is the path within:  
Is made by animals,  
Is lined by flowers,  
Is lined by thorns,  
Is stained with wine,  
Is lit by the lamp of sorrowful dreams:  
Is washed with joy,  
Is swept by grief,  
Is blessed by the lonely traffic of art:  
Is known by heart,  
Is known by prayer,  
Is lost and found,  
Is always strange,  
The path to your door.

-- Michael Leunig<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Leunig, *A Common Prayer* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990)

## SUMMARY

Facilitating improvement, here-and-now, in a person's psycho-spiritual functioning is an aspect of both practical theology and group psychotherapy. This improvement can only occur through human intermediary, as both practical theology and group psychotherapy recognise.

The premise of this thesis is that people reveal their religious and existential concerns (i.e., one's deepest feelings about God, life, and existence) through their here-and-now interpersonal interactions.

These existential and religious concerns can be successfully addressed within psychotherapy groups by adopting a nonlinear, psychotherapeutic approach which focuses on here-and-now interpersonal interactions. This here-and-now style of psychotherapy provides the pastor/therapist with a practical-theologically sound method by which to relate to another person on the deepest level, and it provides the means by which the pastor/therapist can identify, describe, and analyse another person's existential/religious issues.

The following propositions are put forth:

- \* Existential concerns are inevitably religious in nature but not always articulated in religious terms. These existential/religious concerns are the subject of both group therapy and practical theology.
- \* Practical theology is characterised by a Janus-like, self-reflective loop of theory to praxis. This loop is also seen in the here-and-now style of group psychotherapy.
- \* Group psychotherapy and practical theology deal with religious ideation: group therapy by examining interpersonal interactions; practical theology by examining the person-to-God relationship.
- \* Psychotherapy groups can be a "coming of God with human action as intermediary."
- \* Group psychotherapy and practical theology address genuine human need through the four pastoral functions.
- \* Group psychotherapy and practical theology adhere to the scientific method of constructing hypotheses based on deductions stemming from heightened awareness.
- \* Group psychotherapy has a practical theological function when it serves as a means of transiting through the theological stages of God the void, to God the enemy, to God the companion.

- \* Group psychotherapy fulfils a practical theological function by transforming human ways, i.e., opening one up to the influence of other people and the Christian God who works through those people as intermediaries.

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## Chapter One:

*Actions speak louder than words.*

-- Anonymous

*Life is an incurable condition.*

*The only known treatment is to try to keep  
the patient comfortable.*

-- Ashleigh Brilliant<sup>1</sup>

### Method Of Approach

Practical theologian Eduard Thurneysen said, "Tell me how you conceive of humanity and I shall tell you what kind of pastor you are!"<sup>2</sup> I would extend this and say, "Show me how you interact with others in a psychotherapy group and I will tell you how you conceive of God and humanity!" Just as Thurneysen maintained that "All confusion concerning pastoral work can be traced to a warped or mistaken understanding of what human beings are."<sup>3</sup> so too I maintain that an accurate and fuller understanding of what human beings are, and what they believe religiously, is revealed through their interpersonal interactions in the here-and-now. Hence the old adage "actions speak louder than words" has special significance in terms of practical theology.

My desire in this thesis is to make a novel contribution to the literature of practical theology by posing a mutually beneficial collaboration of the disciplines practical theology and group psychotherapy. I therefore examine the links between practical theology and group psychotherapy. My main premise is simple: *people reveal their religious and existential concerns through their interpersonal interactions which, in turn, can be examined in the setting of a psychotherapy group.* This hypothesis is put forward, investigated, discussed and supported through the contributions of diverse disciplines. One research parameter of this thesis, however, must be stated at the outset: this thesis is not an analytical investigation of an existing situation because the subject matter of psychotherapy groups does not lend itself to a strict research methodology. As prominent group psychotherapist Dr. Irvin Yalom explains,

In the best of all possible research worlds...One would study a massive

number of patients admitted on an acute inpatient ward who would be randomly and strategically assigned to various types of therapy groups and to a control condition with no group therapy. All other parts of each patient's treatment program would be identical. Outcome would be systematically and objectively determined, and correlations measured between outcome and the nature of the therapy group experience.

But no such project has ever been done! Nor will it ever be done. Methodological problems are so overwhelming that there is little rigorous research on inpatient group therapy on contemporary acute wards. Furthermore, because the inpatient unit has undergone recent drastic modification, much of the older inpatient therapy research is not relevant. Consequently, we must settle for studies that are less than perfect: either methodologically flawed or performed in different but related clinical settings.<sup>4</sup>

Yalom's comments are aimed primarily at inpatient group psychotherapy but are equally true of outpatient group psychotherapy.

Added to this methodological problem is the other methodological difficulty of providing hard data in terms of theology. As University of South Africa practical theologians Heyns and Theron remind us, scientific studies from a practical-theological point of view are still rare<sup>5</sup> and scientific substantiation about God is not feasible because premises about God are made in faith.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, there are strong indications to support my contention that one's religious life is revealed in the quality, depth, and style of one's interpersonal interactions. In offering my proposition I echo Jacob Firet's belief that the "highest and at the same time the most fundamental relationship is the relationship to God."<sup>7</sup> In holding that one's interactions in a therapy group reflect, embody, or epitomise one's deepest beliefs, assumptions, and cognitions about the world, I extend both Leander Keck's observation that the "deepest issues

in life are theological"<sup>8</sup> and Thomas Ogletree's assertion that

Theology is practical in the sense that it concerns, in all of its expressions, the most basic issue of human existence. It has to do with the human pilgrimage in its totality: with its meaning and significance, with the determination of appropriate responses to the realities we confront during its course, with the growth of persons in community, with the construction of institutions suited to human well-being. The origin of theology is practical; it arises out of prior worldly involvements. Its end is likewise practical; it plunges us once more into the sea of experience. If our deliberations as theologians are sound, then we learn to immerse ourselves with deeper insight, understanding, and fidelity in those worldly realities that make up our lives. We apprehend anew and with greater wisdom and maturity what was in no small measure already ours. Whenever and wherever we take it up, theology is bound up with the practical rhythms of human life.<sup>9</sup>

I contend too that one's interactional style in a therapy group represents an interface between the psychodynamic internal cosmos of the person's mind and the external world in which that person lives. This interface of the internal and external is revealed through the nonlinear, here-and-now approach of group psychotherapy. Hence I discuss the efficacy of the here-and-now style of group psychotherapy.

My approach throughout this thesis accords with the pivotal belief of Dr. Jacob Firet, a seminal thinker in practical theology, that when God comes to people through the intermediary of pastoral role-fulfilment<sup>10</sup> he aims at a change in their psycho-spiritual functioning.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, this change occurs through the intermediary of an interhuman relationship and is therefore open to some degree to analysis and reflection.<sup>12</sup> My approach also accords with a statement by Don Browning, Professor of Religion and Psychological Studies at the University of Chicago, that "the religious issues are fundamental (although not in all respects determinative) of the ethical and the psychodynamic issues."<sup>13</sup> I also agree

with practical theologian Eduard Thurneysen that a "Christian" psychology is senseless; nor is there any need for it.<sup>14</sup> What is needed is a Christian use of psychology.

I occasionally employ terminology from *process theology* because it best captures and describes elusive concepts such as existential curative factors, the here-and-now, and other aspects of the interpersonal theory of psychiatry to which I also refer throughout this thesis. This combination of group psychotherapy and practical theology is meant to extend Firet's insight about "the possibility and reality of the coming of God in ways other than those of ecclesiastical institutions."<sup>15</sup>

I commence with a personal position statement describing my own perspective as both a theologian and a therapist, followed by a solid but by no means exhaustive description of process theology. Subsequent sections detail my understanding of practical theology and the principles of group psychotherapy. I then proceed to delineate more clearly the linkages between practical theology and group psychotherapy.

### **Personal Position Statement**

I am fortunate. Following my graduation from the Yale Divinity School, I have worked as a parish minister, chaplain/group psychotherapist at a psychiatric hospital, consultant psychologist for a human resources consulting company, as a Senior Consultant with an international management consulting firm, and as a consultant for an Australian executive search firm where I continue to specialise in the usage of psychological assessment techniques in business. My articles on the latter topic have been published regularly in Australia.

I have worked in parishes in New Zealand, Scotland, Australia, and the United States. I have preached to the deaf in Connecticut and illegally to a house-church in Nepal where, if arrested, the congregants could have had their property confiscated. I have administered one of Australia's few growing congregations, attended a week long seminar at the world's largest church in Seoul Korea, retreated to Scotland's isle of Iona which was a primary source for the christianising of Europe, and eventually come to echo John Wesley's

sentiment: the world is my parish. It is these diverse experiences of studying the behaviours of people in systems<sup>16</sup> upon which I draw in writing this thesis.

As a chaplain with the Uniting Church in Australia working in Sydney's large psychiatric hospitals, I specialised in inpatient group psychotherapy. These institutions provided the arena in which much of my thought about the practical theological dimensions of group psychotherapy was hammered out. In five and a quarter years, I pioneered my position, established a network of 8-10 psychotherapy groups per week, and gained over three thousand clinical hours leading therapy groups. I augmented this with an additional six years in individual therapy as a patient and two years participating as a patient in a therapy group. In accordance with the American Group Psychotherapy Association's requirements, I also obtained regular supervision from more experienced practitioners, thus learning my craft much as an apprentice in a smithy would learn to wield the hammer and tongs with the skill of a senior blacksmith. I subsequently attained membership in the American Group Psychotherapy Association, Group Analytic Society- London, and other local Australian professional associations for group therapists.

This thesis is a direct result of my work as a chaplain and a group psychotherapist and reflects my intense interest in both the diagnostic value of religious ideation and the theological significance of interpersonal interaction.

## **Religious Illness and Wellness**

There is an interplay between one's theology and one's world view. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote that "your character is developed according to your faith" and that in the "long run your character and conduct of life depend upon your intimate convictions."<sup>17</sup> In a lecture given at the University of South Africa in July 1986, American theologian Ray Anderson<sup>18</sup> described the task of the practical theologian as that of helping cure a patient's sick theology since one's theology can contribute to and maintain an illness. This is done in various ways, he suggested, but notably by siding with the victim, i.e., the person who suffers. "God," Professor Anderson says, "can look after Himself."<sup>19</sup>

Adaptability must figure prominently if practical theology is to be relevant to the mentally ill. The world views of psychiatric patients often incorporate unorthodox, ill-conceived, sick theologies which are believed ardently to the point of psychosis. Patients' delusional systems often contain religious imagery, verbiage, and content.<sup>20</sup> In leading inpatient therapy groups for example, I prohibited discussion of religious material because it often set into motion a patient's delusional system.<sup>21</sup> Discussing and analysing delusions can give them credence and thus become more acceptability.

The practical theologian is called upon to pastorally but negatively reinforce sick theology (e.g., I'm mentally ill because God is punishing me for something.) and positively reinforce the person's ability to progress to a healthier theology despite illness (e.g., I'm mentally ill but God is with me still.). Sick theology acts as an impermeable perceptual filter preventing the richness of life to pass through. Sick theology fails to allow an individual's life experiences to be enhanced. Practical theology can provide a therapeutic antidote to sick theology, especially in the case of mental illness. As Firet says,

Pastoral role-fulfilment is predicated on the hope that "the truth may persuade"--as St. Augustine has it--but then it had better be the truth which did the persuading, and not something in his dream world to which he is now more firmly tied or on which he is made even more dependent.<sup>22</sup>

Evidence links religious perceptions with illness and wellness. Dr. Edgar Draper and colleagues found that if a patient's current religious interests are determined by whole life experience, i.e., influenced not only by religious exposure but also by early life development, personality structure, and current life situation, then from religious data one could make a symptomatic and character diagnosis about the patient's psychosexual development, and also arrive at an understanding of their psychodynamic formulation.<sup>23</sup>

Draper and colleagues devised a study in which fifty randomly selected psychiatric patients were concurrently but independently interviewed by two medical teams. Team A was composed of a medical student (not psychiatrically trained) and two psychiatrists. This team

arrived at diagnoses based on a religious interview (performed by the medical student) containing questions about favourite biblical characters, concepts of evil, earliest religious memories, etc. Team A's task was to arrive at psychiatric diagnoses through gathering religious material rather than medical material via the interview. Team B, however, was headed by a psychiatrist who, on the basis of a staff clinical meeting notes forwarded to him, made his diagnoses of the same fifty patients.<sup>24</sup>

The results were: team A drew no incorrect conclusions in differentiating psychotic from neurotic patients, and in scoring symptom and character diagnoses team A was correct 92% of the time when compared to team B. That is, there was a 92% rate of correlation between the religious interview and the medical interview as a means of diagnosis. Draper notes that it could have been higher had not two patients been unusually verbally constricted.<sup>25</sup>

Says Draper,

Of perhaps more interest was the finding that the religious data not only enlivened the psychodynamic formulation, but also offered keys to the understanding of certain patients' current conflicts that were not easily grasped from the available clinical data. A number of patients who might be called unpsychologically minded, whose communications in the psychiatric interviews were stilted and guarded, talked with interest, eagerness, and enlivened affect of their philosophical or religious views. Elderly patients especially talked revealingly of their conflicts in religious terms, whereas communications in areas of sexuality, hostility, and dependency were less easily tapped....[It seems that] the unknown in the God idea is a powerful projective stimulus to which we each respond according to our own individual personality patterns.<sup>26</sup>

## **Psychic Chaos**

A minor premise of this thesis is that anyone can handle a little chaos, but nobody can

handle very much, be it mentally, physically, or emotionally.<sup>27</sup> Psychological health hinges upon one's capacity to handle the stresses arising when the disorder inherent within existence impinges on one's structuring of that existence. Pastoral theologian James Lapsley says, "In the realm of the psyche the most prominent factors related to maintenance needs are a sense of personal identity and a sense of self-worth, without which persons cannot function as persons."<sup>28</sup>

Chaplain Sean Caulfield describes "chaos" as

...those random, haphazard happenings, the unpredictable situations in life, the random chances, the rotten luck, the fortuitous events, the uncertainties, coincidences and confusion, the unforeseeable and the uncontrollable. They are the very stuff-of-life that complement the routine expectations of law and order.<sup>29</sup>

Caulfield's point is whimsical. In fact, too large an increase in disorder can result in psychic chaos manifesting as mental illness. In most modern societies mental illness is treated by a combination of psychiatry and (group) psychotherapy, both of which attempt to restore order.

Psychiatric patients suffer a high degree of disorder. As a result, one of the "general characteristics of the chronic mentally ill is their difficulty in becoming meaningfully engaged in a therapeutic endeavour."<sup>30</sup>

This makes it especially difficult to establish a pastoral relationship with psychiatric patients or minister unto them in terms of practical theology. Yet as Dr. Farideh De Bosset, staff psychiatrist at the University of Toronto, says,

Chronic psychiatric patients like other human beings, desire contact and closeness, but because of their emotional fragility they are often inhibited in their social interaction. This perpetuates their loneliness, isolation, and sense of inadequacy.<sup>31</sup>

Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Duke University (USA) Michael Ferencik notes that

Existential philosophers and therapists argue that a major factor in psychopathology is limited awareness of experience and estrangement from others. Early existentialists such as Kierkegaard<sup>32</sup> argued that a full life demands an ability to stand and confront the distress of anxiety as it actually occurs; only in doing so was personal growth possible.<sup>33</sup>

Lapsley writes that the church has historically "viewed the actual (as opposed to the ideal) personal and/or spiritual state of affairs of individuals and groups of Christians as being of importance theologically."<sup>34</sup> If we assume that the church also cares about non-Christians, we will see the historical ties between pastoral care and psychotherapy. Lapsley takes the position that there is necessary ambiguity as to what actually constitutes pastoral care. Both poles of the ambiguity (the individual and the whole flock), he says, are themselves so closely related that the shepherd cannot afford to attend to one and not the other.<sup>35</sup> This pastoral ambiguity can be addressed and perhaps resolved through group psychotherapy. Lapsley asserts that

The central characteristic of any theory of pastoral care must be the discernment of and appropriate strategies and tactics for attaining the possibilities for a particular person or persons as these are understood with a model of human life that is responsibly related to an identifiable position in Christian theology.<sup>36</sup>

Theologian Don Browning makes the point that a pastor is not required to place religious issues before psychodynamic ones.<sup>37</sup> This is an important concession because the world of the psychiatric patient is not easily understood, and it must be understood on its own terms before effective pastoring can occur. The patients' attempts to share their chaotic world with other persons often results in chastisement, scorn, and derision. The mode

(*paraklesis*<sup>38</sup>) by which God comes to people in their situations of dread, suffering, sin, despair, error, and insufficiency is the rightful domain of practical theology.<sup>39</sup> Says theologian Thomas Ogletree,

The human sciences facilitate a distancing from our concrete worldly engagements. Studies in developmental psychology...[among others] provide us with a new angle of vision on our quest for the appropriate enactment of Christian faith. They surface dynamics that constrain and channel our action possibilities. They suggest the sorts of skills and competencies likely to be requisite for effective action amid those realities making up our social existence.<sup>40</sup>

This is precisely why group therapy proves efficacious: it is the mode by and in which situations of dread, suffering, sin, anxiety and the like can be addressed. Dr. De Bosset writes:

Group psychotherapy is a medium that facilitates [the patient's] integration into the community through interpersonal learning and reality testing. It is also a medium for observation and assessment of the patient's symptoms through one hour of interaction with one or two therapists, and with the group as a whole. This observation is often more astute than an assessment during an individual interview.<sup>41</sup>

As Firet points out, the point to providing nurture from a practical theological perspective is "aimed a person's being able to function mentally on her own in her own world."<sup>42</sup> Or as Ogletree says, practical theology concerns the formation of human selves.<sup>43</sup>

The presence of mental disorder, however, confounds the formation of the human self. Psychiatric patients suffer disorder rather than merely experience it. This is what separates the mentally ill from the mentally well. The mentally ill frequently have an awareness that

their mind is less ordered than the healthy mind, that their experience of chaos differs substantially from that of most people.

When individuals realise that their ways of thinking, feeling, and relating to the world are askew, they feel anxious and often attempt to cover up the problem. I have observed at first hand many patients "playing the game," i.e., manipulating the psychiatric system in order to gain discharge from the hospital. This usually entails behaving sufficiently well for a minimum amount of time in order to convince a magistrate, doctor, or nurse, of the patient's wellness. Medical and legal staff, however, are rarely fooled by contrived behaviours. In my experience, the concern of professional carers is usually that the patient be able to cope outside the hospital system and not become a street person, suicide, or threat to society. Reasonably astute staff members become adept at accurately assessing the masking behaviours of patients because it occurs commonly in psychiatric settings.

In my clinical practice I was repeatedly questioned by young, well-scrubbed, naive nursing students as to why a particular person is a patient. "They look/sound so normal!" said the neophytes. I invited the quizzical students to observe the patients when in a therapy group. The usual result was that the observing students quickly noticed how the effort of interacting heavily taxed the defences of the patients and thereby revealed the true nature of the patients' illnesses. In a group pathologies are hard to hide. Holding up the mask is too difficult and the pressure of interacting too strong. However convincing the acting performance is, the curtain comes down when in group.

The confusion of the young nurses and the difficulty in diagnosing mental illness accurately stems from a fortunate fact: the mentally ill are more similar than dissimilar to the mentally well despite the differences effected by organic, biological and genetic disorders such as schizophrenia. Although there is a gap between the mentally ill and the mentally well, it is not unbreachable.

In order to understand the mental illnesses to which I refer throughout this thesis, it is necessary to describe briefly the nature and origin of psychiatric illness.

## **Mental Disorder**

Standard mental health diagnostic manuals<sup>44</sup> refer to mental disorders as derangement of physical and mental health functions. It is this lack of regularity and order, the inability to prudently predict with a reasonable degree of accuracy a persons behaviour, thought, action, or speech which is often classified in Western societies under the rubric of mental disorder. American Professor of Psychiatry Nick Kanas paints a graphic picture:

Schizophrenia is a disorder of the content and process of thought. Reality testing is impaired, and psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions are present. Thinking may be disorganised to the extent that one idea relates poorly to another, leading to looseness of associations. Schizophrenic patients are socially isolated and respond inappropriately to others. Not only are casual contacts affected, but relationships with friends and relatives are hampered. Other social problems follow, such as unemployment and legal difficulties.<sup>45</sup>

I differentiate, however, between the subjective experience of the inner fragmentation called mental illness and the pathology of that experience. Pathology is the scientific study of the conditions and processes of disease, be it in an organ or a psyche, and has an empirical basis. There is a great deal of regularity and order in many psychiatric disorders (e.g., major depressions, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders; less so with personality disorders, alcohol dependence), just as there is in physical pathology (e.g., influenza). Even so, I concur with Thurneysen that

No strict distinction between somatic and psychic conditioning and treatment of psychic and nervous disorders is possible because man's inner and outer being are inseparably related to one another, indeed both must be seen as a unity in their relationship to man's ego.<sup>46</sup>

This body-soul relationship is the core issue, specifically, how the state of one's soul is manifested through one's interpersonal interactions.

Nonetheless, it is wise to bear in mind that psychiatric illnesses and their antecedent mental disorders are not a homogeneous group. The first division is that of illnesses with organic/biological/genetic etiologies (e.g., major depression, bipolar mental disorder, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, etc.) as distinguished from the disorders with psychogenic/developmental origins, (e.g., neuroses, and personality disorders).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the subjective experience of these pathologies are all very different.

According to the current edition of the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders**<sup>48</sup> (commonly referred to as the **DSM-III-R**) no definition adequately specifies precise boundaries for the concept mental disorder. The working definition found in the **DSM-III-R** is that mental disorder is conceptualised as a clinically significant behavioural or psychological syndrome or pattern which must currently be considered a manifestation of a behavioural, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the person.<sup>49</sup>

Such looseness in definition is necessary because it is difficult to distinguish when a person presents with symptoms of complicated origins. For example the diagnosis of schizophrenia can be made only when the clinician concludes, after an appropriate evaluation, that no organic factor (such as a psychoactive substance or a brain tumor) can be established to have initiated and maintained the disturbance.<sup>50</sup> Yet as eminent Australian psychiatrist John Ellard reminds us, there is no satisfactory definition of schizophrenia because no basic underlying pathology has been discovered.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, organic mental disorders are themselves a heterogeneous group. No single description characterises them all. The difference in clinical presentation reflects differences in the localisation, mode of onset, progression, duration, and nature of the underlying pathophysiologic process.<sup>52</sup> In describing mental illness the **DSM-III-R** employs three clusters:

The first is based on odd eccentric behaviour (the paranoid, schizoid and schizotypal varieties); the second on dramatic, erratic or emotional behaviour

(the histrionic, narcissistic, antisocial and borderline varieties); and the third on anxious or fearful behaviour (the avoidant, dependent, compulsive and passive-aggressive types).<sup>53</sup>

The essential features of schizophrenia are the presence of characteristic psychotic symptoms during the active phase of the illness, a functioning below the highest level previously achieved by the person, and a duration of at least six months that may include characteristic prodromal (i.e., premonitory) or residual symptoms. The diagnosis is made only when it cannot be established that an organic factor initiated and maintained the disturbance. Schizophrenia characteristically involves disturbances in several of the following areas: content and form of thought, perception, affect, sense of self, volition, relationship to the external world, and psychomotor behaviour. It should be noted, however, that no single feature is invariably present or seen only in schizophrenia.<sup>54</sup>

Two other significant disorders are mood disorders and personality disorders. A mood disorder's essential feature is disturbance of mood, accompanied by full or partial manic or depressive syndrome that is not due to any other physical or mental disorder, and which occurs for a minimal duration of time. Mood disorders are also called affective disorders.<sup>55</sup>

Personality disorders (e.g., individuals with disruptive personal life-styles and disturbed personal coping patterns such as habitual intravenous drug users) operate along more stable and predictable lines.

Personality traits are enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself, and are exhibited in a wide range of important social and personal contexts. It is only when personality traits are inflexible and maladaptive and cause either significant functional impairment or subjective distress that they constitute personality disorder. The diagnosis as a personality disorder should be made only when the characteristic features are typical of the person's long-term functioning and are not limited to discrete episodes of illness.<sup>56</sup>

Individuals with personality disorder are frequently dissatisfied with either the impact their behaviour has on others or with their inability to function effectively. This may be the case even when the traits that lead to these difficulties are ego-syntonic (i.e., not regarded by the person as undesirable). In other cases, the traits may be ego-dystonic (i.e., regarded as undesirable) but which the person may be unable to modify even if it be the person's chief complaint.<sup>57</sup>

In sum, there is great ambiguity in the definition, origin, and manifestation of mental illness. The evolution of mental illness is dynamic and subject to unpredictability. Personal experience has taught me that the psychiatric cure is no less complicated or sophisticated than the psychiatric illness it addresses. This is as true theologically as it is clinically. In the following section I offer a less clinical description of the religious manifestations of mental illness.

### **Sick Theology: from Players to Pray-ers**

If the God idea alone is a powerful projective stimulus, then one's total religion can reveal much more about one's inner world. It has been many years since the apostle Paul stood on Mars Hill and said to the Athenians, in a less than complimentary manner, "you are religious in all things" (Acts 17.22). Yet religion continues to mean different things to different people. Dr. Wayne Oates, head of the Psychology of Religion Department at the University of Louisville (USA), lists the following levels of religious concern found in psychiatric patients which he classifies according by the degree of devotion and desperation found in the patient rather than by denomination.<sup>58</sup> I expand and paraphrase (for mnemonic purposes) Oates' rubrics on the basis of my own clinical experience:

1. **Superficial concern-** These people I call **players** because to them religion is a game at which they play. Individuals drowning in a sea of anxiety will desperately grab any plank which might support them. That plank is often religion. The individual history of players usually reveals little previous concern with religion, and their

degree of interest is a benchmark for their general mental health. Uncharacteristic religious interest can be a prelude to a psychotic episode. There is a direct but inverse proportional relation between these patients' mental health and their spiritual concerns. For players the concern with religion decreases in direct proportion to the re-establishment of mental health.

2. Compulsive concern- These are the **bathers**. Bathers immerse themselves in a torrent of ritualistic behaviours (e.g., washing, counting, checking, touching, etc.) in order to stifle feelings of anxiety. Like Lady MacBeth washing her hands repeatedly in order to be rid of that "damned spot," individuals with compulsive religious concern engage in fruitless activity not based in reality. I recall seeing a Hollywood movie in which the Pontius Pilate character, after sentencing Jesus to crucifixion, calls for a basin of water in which to wash his hands. The nearby servant replies, "but sir, you have just washed your hands?" At which point Pilate looks at his hands and intones solemnly, "so I have...." In like manner, no amount of religious washing, cleansing, or scrubbing removes the blemish bathers feel. As in individuals who repeatedly rush down the aisles at Christian revivals in order to be saved nightly, the anxiety remains despite the activity. Bathers often have a long history of disturbed religious thinking combined with an equally long history of defective religious training and emotional deprivation. These patients often present the most stubborn symptoms, seemingly defying treatment because the symptoms are dyed in the very fabric of the personality. It was his contemporary bathers whom the apostle Paul chastised and accused of being in bondage to the law. Instead of the ceremonialism of ancestral religion Paul affirmed faith, hope and love.
  
3. Contrived concern in character disorder- These people are **masqueraders**, using religion as a guise or mask to hide their ulterior motives. Masqueraders employ a sociopathic use of religion as a platform for their exhibitionism. In the American novel, *Elmer Gantry*<sup>59</sup> the protagonist masquerades as a devout preacher in order

to seduce women and extort money. In real life, the Guyana massacre<sup>60</sup> instigated by the Rev. Jim Jones was a chilling example of a perverse use of religion masking a mentally unstable condition. Masqueraders are the false prophets warned against in the New Testament, those prophets "depraved of mind and bereft of truth" (I Timothy 6.5), those prophets to whom is addressed the instruction "do not believe every spirit, but test it and see if it is of God" (I John 4.1). It is interesting to note that masqueraders rarely appear as psychiatric inpatients, though they often avoid the responsibility of their actions by pleading insanity. Their ability to manipulate the legal and health systems to their advantage, and thus escape the full consequences of their behaviour, typifies their sociopathic self-centred concern.

4. Conventional concern- These are the stayers, people whose Christian faith reflects and informs their psychiatric conditions. Stayers are church goers of orthodox belief who become mentally ill and subsequently have their religion become ill as well. For stayers there is a direct proportion to the gain/loss of their mental health and the gain/loss of their healthy religion. As one improves, so does the other. For stayers church affiliation may be positive or negative. That is, their churches may contribute constructively to their coping with mental illness, or act destructively by hastening their illness. Re-entry into the community after a breakdown is the largest problem with which churches are able to aid stayers. The fellowship of a good church community can do much to keep outpatients from becoming inpatients. Once while working as a parish minister, I was informed by an outpatient congregant that her psychiatrist had observed that her church involvement had given her strength to weather life's storms and prevent her from being re-admitted into hospital. This is typical of stayers: they "hang tough," persevere in faith, and use their Christian convictions as a resource with which to fight the chaos of mental illness and regain mental stability. Stayers tend to value medicos highly, appreciate solitude, and possess a personal understanding of grace.

5. Authentic religious concern- These are the **pray-ers**, people who genuinely seek meaningful interpretations of the chaos that invades their lives. They ask sincere questions based on their experience. They exemplify healthy religion with its accent on delivering from the old and discovering the new. Pray-ers search for new meaning in life after the tragedy of illness. They value integrity before God in a world which values appearance. Like Anton Boisen, the founder of Clinical Pastoral Education and a pastor with a history of mental illness, pray-ers use their traumatic experience to re-define the meaning and significance of their lives. Because they encounter a depth of failure few of us experience, they understand the meaning of forgiveness in a way that few of us can comprehend. They are the pray-ers.

These brief descriptions of mental disorder give, I hope, an idea as to the enormous difficulties faced in constructing a practical theology specifically relevant to the extraordinary experiences of the mentally ill. Standard, pedestrian theories and "solutions" from theological textbooks are highly unlikely to prove effective in the extremely taxing environment of a psychiatric hospital. The problem is further exacerbated, I believe, by the what seems to me to be the medical profession's proprietary claim on the concept "therapy."

### **The Appropriation of Therapy**

According to practical theologian Jan de Jongh van Arkel, the original Greek meaning of "therapy" is "to serve."<sup>61</sup> Theologian Carroll Wise points out that the Greek word *therapeuo* is used frequently in the New Testament, and specifically by Jesus in commissioning others to "heal the sick" (Mt. 10:8, Luke 10:9 NEB). Since New Testament times, however, the word "therapy" has been appropriated by the medical profession,<sup>62</sup> notably psychiatry. This is because psychiatry now deals with what was formerly the exclusive domain of religion. As Thurneysen points out, psychiatry has no monopoly in dealing with the psychic disturbances of present-day man.<sup>63</sup>

Even some medicos concede this point. American psychiatrist Morton Lieberman writes:

Although the use of groups by mental health practitioners for aiding people in distress is of relatively recent origin, small groups have always served as important healing agents in human society. Group forces have been used to inspire hope, increase morale, offer strong emotional support, induce serenity and confidence, or counteract psychic and bodily ills. Religious healers have always relied heavily on group forces, but when healing passed from the priestly to the medical profession, deliberate use of group forces was avoided until post-World War II.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Lieberman cites a national survey in the United States<sup>65</sup> concerning the utilisation of self-help groups which found that

One-year prevalence rates for help-seeking were: 5.6 percent sought out mental health professionals; 5 percent used clergy or pastoral sources; and 5.8 percent participated in self-help groups.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps increasingly, psychiatry now provides the relationship in which existential/religious issues are examined and worked through. Perhaps increasingly, psychotherapy groups are the vehicles through which people gain help in coping with their lives. Perhaps increasingly, it is the psychological rather than the overtly religious sources of assistance to which people now turn in order to make more sense of their everyday lives. If so, then practical theologians need to take notice of this pattern of events in order to respond adequately as intermediaries in what Firet calls pastoral role-fulfilment. Nothing less will do if practical theology is to facilitate what Firet describes as God's aim: to effect a change in a person's psycho-spiritual functioning.

The practical theological task is, I believe, to creatively construct an effective praxis which incorporates the numerous insights to be gained from non-theological disciplines, and then devise a theory-turned-method by which to address pastorally the deep-seated existential/religious needs of a person. The language with which we can best construct this

theory is the language of process theology; the arena in which we can implement the method is group psychotherapy.

To construct a useful practical theology one must, I believe, commence with the task of "making sense of ordinary experience," and deal specifically with the psychological impact of change.

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1. Ashleigh Brilliant, *Pot Shots* (Published privately in USA: Brilliant Enterprises, 1969)  
Ashleigh Brilliant, Ph.D (1933- ) describes himself as a "philosopher-poet-prophet" and makes his living both by teaching at the university level and as an award winning cartoonist. He likens his epigrams to Japanese haiku and hopes that they function as "very concise descriptions of reality."
  2. quoted in and translated at Unisa, in H.J.C.Pieterse, M.Hestenes, L.Heyns, J.Van Arkel, J.P.J.Theron, J.S.Dreyer, *Practical Theology PTA 100-T* "Introduction to Practical Theology" (Pretoria: Unisa 1991) p.113
  3. Ibid.
  4. Irvin Yalom, *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy* (NY: Basic Books, 1983) p.27
  5. J.P.J. Theron, *Practical Theology 409-F: "Diakonia: The Serving Church"* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988) p.50
  6. L.M. Heyns, *Practical Theology 1A PTA100-T* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984) p.11
  7. Jacob Firet, *Dynamics in Pastoring* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986) p.185 (citing H. Berkhof)
  8. Leander Keck, "Toward a Theology of Rhetoric/Preaching" in *Practical Theology* ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.140
  9. Thomas Ogletree, "Dimensions of Practical Theology: Meaning, Action, Self" in *Practical Theology* ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.85
  10. "The doctrine of pastoral role-fulfilment would treat especially the problematics of pastoral communication in preaching, teaching and pastoral care." [my underscore] Firet makes the point that it the key to pastoral role-fulfilment is the ability to analyse pastoral situations, all of which are unique, and identify what is essential for pastoral communication. [Firet, p.11.]
  11. Firet, p.ix
  12. Ibid.
  13. Don Browning, "Pastoral Theology in A Pluralistic Age" in *Practical Theology* ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.191
  14. Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962) p.209
  15. Firet, p.xi
  16. I use "system" similarly to Jacob Firet's description of an area or subject that forms a single whole. Translated and quoted in Louis M. Heyns, *Practical Theology 1A PTA100-T* "Introduction to Practical Theology" (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984) p.128

17. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion In the Making* (Cambridge: University Press, 1927) p.5-6
18. Professor Anderson teaches at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California USA
19. Ray Anderson, lecture delivered at the University of South Africa, July 1986.
20. for further explication on how delusions are manifested in religious terminology see Wayne Oates, *The Religious Care of the Psychiatric Patient* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) and Wayne Oates, *Religious Factors in Mental Illness* (London: G. Allan & Unwin Ltd. 1957)
21. As Dr. Nick Kanas points out, "direct confrontation of delusional material is more likely to be successful when the patient is beginning to question psychotic productions himself, and when several other patients are able to support reality along with the therapist." Nick Kanas, "Inpatient and Outpatient Group Therapy for Schizophrenic Patients" *American Journal of Psychotherapy* v.39, no.3 (1985) p.435
22. Firet, p.224
23. E.Draper, G.Meyer, A.Parzen, G.Samuelson, "On the Diagnostic Value of Religious Ideation" *Archives of General Psychiatry* v.18 (Sept. 1985) pp.202-207
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Pastoral theologian James Lapsley cites Walter Cannon's principle of homeostasis (from W. Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body* (NY: Norton, 1939)) which holds that organisms can tolerate instability only within limits and that any person or organism needs a relatively stable equilibrium in order to survive. James Lapsley, "Practical Theology and Pastoral Care: An Essay in Pastoral Theology" in *Practical Theology*, ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.172
28. Ibid., p.172
29. Sean Caulfield, *In Praise of Chaos* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981) p.1
30. Walter N.Stone, "Treatment of the Chronically Mentally Ill: An Opportunity for the Group Therapist" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.1 (1991) p.13
31. Farideh De Bosset, "Group Psychotherapy in Chronic Psychiatric Outpatients: A Toronto Model" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.1 (1991) p.76
32. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/The Sickness Unto Death* (NY: Doubleday; Anchor, 1954)
33. Michael Ferencik, "A Typology of the Here-and-Now: Issues in Group Therapy" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.2 (1991) p.172
34. Lapsley, p.168
35. Ibid., p.168-9
36. Ibid., p.170
37. Browning, p.191
38. Firet's term, used to describe the "personal address with a view to the contingent situation-- the "now-and-thus-ness" of a person--....." Firet, p.82
39. Firet, p.82
40. Ogletree, p.93

41. De Bosset, p.76
42. Firet, p.187
43. Ogletree, p.94
44. **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders**, 3rd ed. revised (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987)
45. Nick Kanas, "Group Therapy with Schizophrenic Patients: A Short-Term, Homogeneous Approach" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.1 (1991) p.33
46. Thurneysen, p.242
47. DSM-III-R
48. Ibid.
49. DSM-III-R, p.xxii
50. Ibid., p.22
51. John Ellard, "Schizophrenia 1975" *Psychiatry for the Non-psychiatrist* reprinted from Modern Medicine (Sydney: Ciba-Geigy Pharmaceuticals) p.21
52. DSM-III-R p.98
53. Michael Rutter, "Temperament, Personality and Personality Disorder" *British Journal of Psychiatry* v.140 (1987) p.451
54. DSM-III-R p.187-8
55. Ibid., p.213
56. Ibid., p.335
57. Ibid., p.335-6
58. Wayne Oates, **The Religious Care of the Psychiatric Patient** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) p.17-24
59. Sinclair Lewis, **Elmer Gantry** (London: Howard Baker Publishers Ltd., 1970). This was the first American novel to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.
60. On November 18, 1978, U.S. Representative Leo Ryan and four other investigators were shot and killed at the Jonestown airstrip in Guyana; and 911 followers of the Reverend Jones died by gunfire and also by drinking, at Jones's direction, cyanide-laced punch in the Jonestown jungle compound. Dr. Herbert Benson observed that "removed from the other, more responsible mediating perspectives far away in the Guyana jungle, they [the group] apparently underwent a group transformation of their thinking processes" under the demonic tutelage of Jim Jones. Herbert Benson, **Your Maximum Mind** (Worcester, UK: Billing & Sons Ltd., 1988) p.207
61. Jan T. de Jongh van Arkel, *Practical Theology PTB302-A* "Pastoral care for specific situations" (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1983) p.23
62. Carroll Wise, **Pastoral Psychotherapy** (NY: Jason Aronson, 1983)
63. Thurneysen, p.87
64. Morton A. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.40, no.3 (July 1990) p.253
65. G.Mellinger, & M. Balter, Collaborative Project, GMIRSB Report, National Institute of Mental Health, Washington, DC (1983) in Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.255

66. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.255

## Chapter Two:

*This discord in the pact of things, this endless war 'twixt truth and truth.*

-- Boethius<sup>1</sup>

*Life can only be understood as an aim at that perfection which the conditions of its environment allow.*

-- Alfred North Whitehead<sup>2</sup>

### Making Sense Of The Ordinary

Process theologian Norman Pittenger sees the task of theology as to give sense to the ordinary experience of men and women.<sup>3</sup> Yet ordinary experience contains the height, width, and breadth of human experience. Nothing is more common or certain than death, yet the mere thought of experiencing death can leave us metaphysically gasping and grasping.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps we may understand extraordinary experience only to the degree that we understand ordinary experience. Explaining ordinary experience is a difficult task shared by theology and group therapy. Professor Don Browning states that

Pastoral theology must attempt to discern and articulate the relevance to care of both the religious dimension of common experience as well as the explicit faith themes of the historic Judeo-Christian tradition.... If pastoral theology is to have a public character, it must concern itself with both the explicit themes of our historic faith as well the tacit religious dimensions of everyday experience.<sup>5</sup>

When mental illness strikes, the extraordinary phenomenological experience of the illness begs explanation. Group therapy's task is to make sense of the extraordinary experiences concomitant with mental illness. Group therapy reduces the anxieties of members by encouraging the sharing of extraordinary experiences and the awkward feelings accompanying those experiences. Members find solace and consolation in group because of this. There

simply is strength and comfort in learning that others understand our most personal and private experiences. As Dr. Nick Kanas points out,

...learning primarily occurs through patient interactions, in two ways. First, patients acquire strategies of dealing with problems through discussions with other group members who have similar experiences. Second, by interacting with each other, group members practice interpersonal skills that are generalised to relationships outside the group, thereby decreasing their sense of isolation and loneliness.<sup>6</sup>

For example, I recall that in group once a patient relayed to me the horror of his psychotic episode and the humiliation entailed in his admission into hospital. When he was finished another Australian patient turned to him and said, "you're not Robinson Crusoe, mate!" i.e., you are not alone in your experience. Research indicates that:

...successful outcomes for patients are related to a range of group processes, such as self-disclosure, feedback, and interpersonal support, as well as personal qualities and technical expertise modeled by the leaders of the training groups.<sup>7</sup>

Therapy groups help make sense of ordinary experience. Indeed, groups must help members experience the ordinary. When extraordinary experiences proliferate, as when psychosis abounds, a person loses touch with normalcy. Mentally ill persons lose contact with the common, shared, ordinary experiences which provide the bulk of humanity with a shared "existential language."

This gap between the normal and the extraordinary human experience is a substance of practical theology as well. Professor of Systematic Theology John Burkhart summarises Frederick Schleiermacher's position in saying that, for Schleiermacher-- regarded as the father of practical theology-- practical theology's

task is to understand--incarnationally, in theory and practice, using the resources of philosophical and historical theology, and itself contributing insight to them--the ways to overcome the distance between what human life is and what human life is meant to be....Perhaps for Schleiermacher, and for us as well, practical theology thinks its distinctive theological tasks precisely by attending to what is required by its historical understanding of the goal of human life.<sup>8</sup>

This is why theologian David Tracy can purport practical theology as a collaborative enterprise (with psychology, among other disciplines) for the development of models of human transformation.<sup>9</sup> Group therapy is one such vehicle for human transformation.

Similarly, Fret states that the pastoral relationship as intermediary of God's coming aims at change, a change which is realised in a person's actually functioning mentally and spiritually as a new person in all the concrete situations of his daily existence. Therefore it makes sense to pay attention to the planning of change within the framework of practical theology.<sup>10</sup> Process theology espouses a world characterised by change.<sup>11</sup> It coincidentally describes the workings of group therapy, for the essence and goal of therapy is change. Underneath all group activities lies the assumption that cure or change is based on the exploration and reworking of relationships in the group.<sup>12</sup> Yet in therapy groups it is often the ordinary things which prove most difficult for patients: interacting, speaking, forming relationships, receiving feedback, listening, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Venbaad.

In both process theology and psychotherapy the process of change involves all three tenses. First, the past is re-presented. It brings us to the future and largely shapes that moment which we call the now. Second, the present is the here-and-now, the point in time at which we are aware of ourselves as selves. Third, the future, having been partially shaped by the past and present, shapes our experience of the here-and-now by luring us forward to unrealised possibilities. These may take form as unmade choices, possible decisions, and other forms of heretofore undeveloped potential. In short, the past gives birth to the present and thus continually shapes the future.

## The Psychological Impact of Change

Poet William Wordsworth wrote that the child is father to the man,<sup>14</sup> i.e., childhood experiences shape and define what the adult becomes. Modern psychology reveals, however, that the child is more like a "favourite uncle" to the adult, i.e., childhood experiences can be much less deterministic than was originally hypothesised. For example, British psychiatrist Michael Rutter writes that

Early psychoanalysts and behaviourists both agreed that the events of the early years were of paramount importance for later development...and tended to regard the ill-effects of serious deficiencies in early parenting as permanent and irreversible. Subsequent reviews of the empirical findings have shown that these views are untenable. Children are more resilient than had been appreciated; early experiences may have important effects but so do later ones; and changes in the development process for the better or the worse are common in the later years of childhood or adolescence....It is now generally agreed that isolated traumatic events rarely mould individual lives, that healing processes continue to be operative throughout life and that the life cycle does not follow an invariant sequence with outcomes that are strongly predictable from either early behaviour or early experiences.<sup>15</sup>

As a result, both psychiatric theory and practice have rather shifted focus from the distant past to the immediate present.<sup>16</sup> In his survey of the literature on personality development Dr. Rutter found:

It became clear that people changed a good deal over the course of development and that the outcome following early adversities was quite diverse, with long-term effects heavily dependent on the nature of subsequent life experiences. Even markedly adverse experiences in infancy carry few

risks for later development if the subsequent rearing environment is a good one.... Suffice it to say that...there is some tendency for children's behaviour to predict adult behaviour, but the correlations are too weak for much useful prediction at the individual level....<sup>17</sup>

Though childhood experiences determine much of an adult's behaviour and attitudes, the adult's emotional resilience and ability to reinterpret those experiences gains increasing status in both theory and practice.

As Rutter points out,

A major tenet of attachment theory is that early parent-child relationships constitute the basis for all later relationships and that a failure to develop secure attachments in the first few years leads to a relatively lasting impairment in the ability to form close confiding relationships as an adult. Early writings, heavily influenced by psychoanalysis, postulated a rather fixed effect on personality organization.... However...current views hypothesize a much more fluid process involving developmental pathways that remain open to change throughout life. What remains distinctive, nevertheless, is the notion that the key thread underlying continuities derives from the effect of early relationships as shaping influences on later ones. There is a lack of good data on the extent to which such an association does in fact exist and, insofar as it does, on the mechanisms involved.<sup>18</sup>

This does not deny, however, that there is a very strong mother-to-infant relationship which provides the preverbal core of the self, and which is therefore fundamental to the self. I have seen little evidence to the contrary based on my own clinical experience. The growing child's relationship to the parents is a central formative influence, up until the thirties or forties. If patients with diagnosed personality disorders mature and overcome their stunted development, it is unlikely to be before they reach their fifties and sixties.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps Furet sums it best:

the process of personality formation occurs in a dialectic between the person and her world. In the *equihuman*<sup>20</sup> dialogue something out of that world is brought out and lifted up for examination, a possibility of restructuring that world is offered, and a new response to that world is expected. This is to say that inherent in equihuman address is the recognition of the other as someone called and entitled to give an account of his or her actions.<sup>21</sup>

### Psychological Underpinnings of Change

One's perception of the world has significant psychological implications. The notion that "perfection = absolute unchangeability" has bequeathed to our modern age an unfortunate legacy. It was taken for granted historically, and reflected the intellectual ingestion of the Hellenistic presuppositions of the day.<sup>22</sup> Perfection thus came to be linked to immutability.<sup>23</sup> God's dynamic activity was overlooked. Perhaps the notion of change as the substance of reality has been unconsciously sacrificed by philosophers through the ages in order to stave off the unpalatable psychic implications. Doing so allowed people to embrace another important psychic value, security, but at the loss of a fuller understanding of both the way the world works and the way God works in the world. The notion of immutability lends itself to psychological and emotional stability. More to the point, the very notion of change can raise ire, anxiety, and distress, often on a subconscious level.<sup>24</sup> As Furet notes, however,

Our time is rightly described as one of rapid social and cultural change. Not only is the rate of change rapid; more important is the fact that what modern physics discovered in its field applies increasingly to our society and its culture; i.e., reality does not exist but happens.<sup>25</sup>

Failing to recognise the relentless nature of change as the stuff of which our personal and social reality consists is perhaps a small loss historically given the security, predictiveness, and safety one may feel is gained in return. That the security gained is more imagined than real is moot. It is the sense of security gained that feels definite. Living in hope of things unseen is difficult if it goes against one's psychological grain. It is not surprising that only a radical religious philosophy like Christianity would extol living in hope of things unseen.

Yet security is but the one side of the coin. On the obverse side is the need for stimulation. Too much security is boring and stultifying. Too much stimulation produces anxiety. Yet the needs for both security and stimulation must be met. Both needs require recognition in a comprehensive philosophical manner, for a person cannot participate in reality fully without recognising both needs.

I argue that an effective practical theology, like an effective group psychotherapy, must recognise that life issues a call forward to the uncertainty of the future, with its concomitant adventure, and also recognise the novelty inherent in the universe. The main difference between merely existing and living fully is creativity. Creativity hinges upon novelty, yet many cannot endure the latter in order to attain the former.

Understanding this fully entails a focus on the process in both practical theology (hence the appropriateness of process theological language) and group psychotherapy. We examine the latter through the here-and-now approach of group psychotherapy.

## **The Here-and-Now**

In psychotherapy groups, members act out here-and-now their familiar, past patterns of coping and relating. Dr.s Robert Matano and Irvin Yalom of Stanford University (USA) write:

Based on the fundamental assumptions that interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in the development of the individual and that maladaptive interpersonal patterns result in psychiatric symptomatology, the interactive

group process focuses upon the dynamic interplay of individuals within the here-and-now of the group meeting....

An interactive approach assumes that patients will, sooner or later, within the group, tend to display the same maladaptive thoughts and behaviours that they exhibit outside of therapy. Thus, the group develops into a social microcosm in which individual pathology is reproduced and is clearly observable in the here-and-now interaction among group members. Through the reactions and feedback of other group members patients become acutely aware of the consequences of their maladaptive behaviour and alternative approaches within the safe confines of the psychotherapy group.<sup>26</sup>

In the group's here-and-now these past patterns are elicited and scrutinised with an eye towards modifying them. Hence the group provides the arena in which past behavioural patterns can be corrected.<sup>27</sup>

Therapy groups call attention to a person's activity as it unfolds within the group's here-and-now. This accords with Firet's point that the equihuman address focuses not on the future of the person-in-process but on the present of the person who is, and who has his freedom and responsibility.<sup>28</sup> In therapy groups, for example, neither the past nor the future is ignored; both are considered as the patient interacts with other group members. In this way group members act as mirrors reflecting back to one another their behavioural appearances. Indeed, a therapy group has been likened to a hall of mirrors.<sup>29</sup> This mirroring provides the basis for feedback and establishes a base line of data from which one may infer and deduce conclusions about one's self. As Firet puts it, "a person relates to a maturing fellow human in such a way that his process of personality formation will occur in the dialectics of contextual influence and personal assimilation of the influences that impinge on him."<sup>30</sup> By repeatedly grounding a member in reality through interaction within a therapy group, mental stability is increased.<sup>31</sup>

## Inner World And Outer Expression

Firet notes that in some situations "a person simply cannot achieve lucidity alone, not even in the way of prayer to God. She simply needs another person who can listen, who will walk with her through the darkness and the anguish."<sup>32</sup> Thurneysen writes that the "transcendent Word intends to become and really does become wholly immanent"<sup>33</sup> and that in order to "deliver the Word of forgiveness to man, we must avail ourselves of a knowledge of his inner life in as exact, methodical, and comprehensive a way as is possible."<sup>34</sup>

In dealing with the disorder of psychiatric illness, a patient must feel that s/he is understood. Hence an ingredient common to all forms of psychotherapy is listening. Listening is a pastoral activity.<sup>35</sup> Listening assists a person give voice to their inner thoughts and give outer expression to their inner world.

In psychoanalytic terms the therapist listens to the patient in order to increase the amount of conscious material known by the patient. The purpose of psychoanalysis is that the patient become more conscious. As consciousness expands, a person becomes more aware of their internal drives, motivations, fears, etc. Thus while no one can say with assurance why the analysand gets better, i.e., what cures, it is clearly related to growth in consciousness.<sup>36</sup>

Listening also has a theological function. In their historical survey of pastoral care William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle quote German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:<sup>37</sup>

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and

patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.<sup>38</sup>

Clebsch and Jaekle quote an unnamed Cistercian monk<sup>39</sup> from the 13th century wrote that, "One cannot cure an illness of which one is unconscious."<sup>40</sup> The modern psychological emphasis on uncovering inner dissonances and repressions in order to allow patients to work through the dynamics of their inner chaos has its antecedents in the introspective life that arose in medieval Christian monasteries. Although modern psychology diverges greatly from that of Catholic mystics, there is a shared conviction that troubles, especially those surrounding important decision-making functions, abide in the human spirit.<sup>41</sup>

Thus in Christian circles there is an interrelationship between one's inner thought world and one's spirit. As practical theologian Eduard Thurneysen points out

the Bible expresses the idea that the reality of man exhibits a double aspect, an inner and an outer, a visible and an invisible one. Although man is united in himself, he lives as a citizen of two worlds, one physical and visible and the other psychic and invisible.<sup>42</sup>

The upshot of this, says Thurneysen, is that there is nothing psychic that is not personal.

To have an inner life, to be psychic and personal, to be human, to have an ego, are one and the same. This distinction between inward and outward, between psychic and physical life, however, is not absolute but only relative, because man's psycho-personal life is inseparably bound up with his physical existence. The psychic life is not something apart, but it entirely permeates the physical life.<sup>43</sup>

To better illustrate the interface between the inner thought world and its outer expression, I employ the symbols of the psychoanalyst's couch and the priest's confessional in the following section.

### **The Couch And The Confessional<sup>44</sup>**

Eduard Thurneysen writes that "Pastoral care means and is care for the soul of man." and that, when we speak of the soul of man, "we have to understand it to mean the whole man, man's unity and totality in the duality of his body and soul."<sup>45</sup>

In an essay focusing specifically on psychoanalysis, Dr. Gilbert Russell writes that psychoanalysis is a technique for dealing with human souls. It is not a development of some older method, but a discovery of one not hitherto dreamt of. It came about because of the disintegration of living religious faith, and the withdrawal of projections. As long as people can cast their burdens at the feet of the gods or on the outside world, says Russell, they do not find it more than they can bear. The choice is between this unburdening process or fighting against evil in the guise of demons, witches, ghosts, the forces of nature, and their human counterparts and equivalents. Put simply, what is unconscious is projected.<sup>46</sup>

To become conscious then is the task and, in a sense, the only task. The confessional of religion shows the penitent revealing to the pastor that which is consciously known, owned, and would be disowned. The couch of psychoanalysis deals with what is yet unknown,<sup>47</sup> in the stream-of-consciousness manner of free association. The couch brings to awareness unconscious feelings, fantasies, fears, etc. The confessional deals with conscious feelings (frequently guilt) about voluntary, deliberate wrongdoing which requires forgiveness.<sup>48</sup> The couch deals with the unconscious; whereas the confessional deals with the conscious. But if expanded consciousness is the goal, we must ask, consciousness of what? The answer is consciousness of "the other," of the parts of us that are active within us but with which we have few conscious liaisons. In short, consciousness of the unknown within us. Psychoanalysis leads to knowledge of the unknown. The unknown is partly religious.

Russell notes that the birth of a personality occurs when it is no longer nourished only by those attitudes and assumptions which have ruled the conscious psyche.<sup>49</sup> This increased consciousness must include an openness to the spiritual dimension, for this dimension more than any other is the repository of the unknown, the Other.

There is a risk encountered on the couch: the conscious examination of unconscious material. Unconscious drives and motivations are powerful enough to find expression despite repression and suppression. The confessional deals with these expressions rather than their underlying motives. While such *ex post facto* examinations are instructive, they seldom de-mystify or enfeeble the fearsome material of the unconscious. As long as unconscious material remains unexamined it retains its potency. Impulses, fears and fantasies thus bequeath a legacy longer than their origin might appear to merit. This disproportionate relationship between unconscious material and conscious expression of that material is the context for both psychotherapy and religion.

Sick religion often equates impulse with intention. For example, Matthew: 5.28 appears to equate (at least in English translations) the act of adultery to the act of gazing upon a woman, presumably married, with sexual thought in mind. This equation, however, seems to imply that unconscious mental processes run roughshod and unchecked over conscious mental processes. Such an equation would seem to confuse fantasy with fact, rational with irrational, mental intention with actual expression. In fact, unconscious processes are continually checked and modified by conscious processes. It is the primitive, irrational process of the unconscious which makes it inadequate as a basis for conscience. Hence a differentiation is needed.

If the intention to commit adultery is unopposed by conscience then the thought, or desire, would in some sense equal to commission of the adulterous act. But this would be to say that the mere experience of temptation is in and of itself a "bad" act, or equal to a "bad" act. This seems to equate reality with fantasy.

In any event, the analyst's aim is not goodness (in the sense of moral virtue) but integration, wholeness, maturity, and the responsible action which flows truly from these.<sup>50</sup> The psychotherapeutic assumption is that it is better to know the full measure of evil within

oneself and learn of one's capacity for evil, than to go on living a false and precarious security based on one's conscious but limited attitudes. One either devotes psychic energy to keeping certain dark potentialities in the unconscious, or one reaches the standstill we call a nervous breakdown, or repressed impulses overcome the resistance massed against them and drive the person into conduct astonishing to us all who know the person, including him/herself.<sup>51</sup> Here Thurneysen is on psychologically sound ground when he says that when one's inner freedom is restored and "when the ego has regained the most extensive control possible over the inner forces, then the psychic state is attained which we refer to as normalcy or as psychic health."<sup>52</sup>

Hence a presupposition of all depth psychology is that unconsciousness is in some measure a repression or evasion of full consciousness.<sup>53</sup> This is important for pastoral role-fulfilment too. Firet writes that the first responsibility is toward the other person in the pastoral relationship and that at the core of pastoral problems is always a blockage, an inability or refusal really to understand, to understand "in the first person."<sup>54</sup> This is why he stresses the nature of "voluntary participation in a variety of situations aiming at change. This applies to social work, psychotherapy, reeducation, and spiritual formation. It is also true of pastoral role-fulfilment."<sup>55</sup>

In summary, therapy's aim to reduce the fear of repressed impulses accords with the pastoral role-fulfilment inherent in practical theology. The belief that these impulses, once expressed, renders one unlovable and unacceptable is what confounds a person. This belief is challenged in psychotherapy. The success of the psychotherapy, however, is directly related to the overcoming of resistance.

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1. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* v:13. Quoted by Sean Caulfield, *In Praise of Chaos* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981)
  2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (NY: Free Press, 1961) p.81
  3. Norman Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* (NY: Seabury Press, 1976) p.1
  4. The full significance of this is discussed by Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death* (NY: Free Press, 1974) p.ix, 53. American psychologist Nathaniel Branden also provides an enlightening discussion on this issue in terms of the psychology of self-esteem in his *Honoring the Self* (NY: Bantam Books, 1985) p.135
  5. Browning, p.193

6. Nick Kanas, "Group Therapy with Schizophrenic Patients" p.43
7. Erich Coche, Robert Dies, Katherine Goettelmann, "Process Variables Mediating Change in Intensive Group Therapy Training" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.3 (1991) p.379
8. John Burkhart, "Schleiermacher's Vision for Theology" in *Practical Theology*, ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.56
9. David Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology" in *Practical Theology*, ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.76
10. Firet, p.203
11. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love*, p.5f
12. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.265
13. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.259-61
14. William Wordsworth in *Stevenson's Book of Quotations* 10th ed., recorded and arranged by B. Stevenson (London: Cassell & Co., 1974) p.251:13
15. Michael Rutter, "Psychopathology and Development: I. Childhood Antecedents of Adult Psychiatric Disorder" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* v.18 (1984) p.225-6
16. *Ibid.*, p.226
17. Michael Rutter, "Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life" *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* v.30, no.1 (1989) pp.23-51
18. *Ibid.*, p.43
19. Dr. Michael Williamson to Duff Watkins, private correspondence May 1991, Sydney, Australia. Dr. Williamson is a psychiatrist in private practice in Sydney.
20. coinage of this word is meant to be the semantic equivalent of the Dutch word *evenmenselijk* which apparently has no English equivalent. The word implies a preethical presumption of equality between persons not usually thought of as equals. Translator's (John Vriend) comment in Firet, p.159
21. Firet, p.167
22. Norman Pitenger, *The Divine Trinity* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977) p.36
23. for a more detailed discussion of the notions of immutability see Jeremy Rifkin, *Entropy* (NY: Viking Press, 1980)
24. Ainslie Meares, *The Way Up* (London: Souvenir Press, 1970) p.223 The late Dr. Meares was an Australian psychiatrist who wrote extensively about anxiety.
25. Firet, p.189
26. Robert A. Matano & Irvin D. Yalom, "Approaches to Chemical Dependency: Chemical Dependency and Interactive Group Therapy -- a Synthesis" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, n.3 (1991) p.270-1
27. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.265
28. Firet, p.178
29. J.S.Rutan & W.N.Stone, *Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy* (Lexington, MA: Collamore Press, 1984)
30. Firet, p.178-9

31. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.259-60
32. Firet, p.256
33. Thurneysen, p.200
34. Ibid., p.201
35. William Clebsch & Charles Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964) pp.53-55
36. Gilbert Russell, "Individual Treatment in Psychiatry" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. P.Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) p.127-132
37. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, tr. John W. Doberstein (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1954) pp.97-8
38. Clebsch & Jaekle, p.53
39. from the *Meditatio Piissima*, tr. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker in *The School of Self-knowledge, A Symposium for Mediaeval Sources* (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co. 1956) p.35; quoted in Clebsch & Jaekle
40. Clebsch & Jaekle, p.54
41. Ibid.
42. Thurneysen, p.55
43. Ibid., p.207
44. These terms are a conceit. Speaking strictly, the *couch* is used by psychoanalysts specifically, as differentiated from psychotherapists generally. A *confessional* is used by priests of the Roman Catholic church, as differentiated from ministers of protestant denominations. For analogical purposes, however, I use *couch* as a symbol representing all forms of psychotherapy and *confessional* as a symbol representing all forms of religious/pastoral counseling.
45. Thurneysen, p.54-5
46. Russell, p.127
47. Ibid., p.128
48. Douglas Stafford-Clark, "The Nature of the Problem" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. by P. Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) p.13-29
49. Russell, p.132
50. Hugh Mullan, "Inherent Moral Practice in Group Psychotherapy" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.2 (1991) pp.185-197
51. Russell, p.189
52. Thurneysen, p.237
53. Victor White, "Guilt: theological and psychological" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. P. Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) p.169
54. Firet, p.217-8
55. Ibid., p.249

## Chapter Three:

*There is nothing so practical as a good theory.*

-- Kurt Lewin<sup>1</sup>

*Practical theology is a discipline which does not ask, in the first place, what and how a thing is, but raises questions like: What is happening and how can it happen?*

-- Jacob Firet<sup>2</sup>

### **Rudiments Of Practical Theology: Introduction**

Practical theology is a relatively young academic discipline, having been studied at universities for only about 200 years.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps for this reason it has sometimes appeared "confused and soft-headed because it was indeed the most difficult branch of theology, requiring the widest range of theological skills and judgments."<sup>4</sup> Practical theology is concerned with the event that takes place between God and man,<sup>5</sup> i.e., the experience of God by a person resulting in a communion. It has "given theology in general a new interest in questions of right action in addition to its traditional interests in right meaning and correct belief."<sup>6</sup>

The subject of practical theology is the coming of God to man, in man's own world, through the pastoral actions of believers.<sup>7</sup> It seeks to make intelligible the interaction of gospel and humanity, e.g., how the preacher understands the context of the audience, their collective situation, their respective experiences of God, etc. Thus practical theology pursues theory for the sake of praxis<sup>8</sup> and is concerned with human words and how they are heard.<sup>9</sup> The field of practical theology is God's coming in the Word through human beings as mediators. It has to do with human happiness here-and-now, happy relationships; being free and secure, having enough to live on.<sup>10</sup> Or, according to Professor of Theology David Tracy, "practical theology has primarily to do with the criteria or norms for the transformation of human brokenness."<sup>11</sup> In G. Heitink's telling phrase (translated by Louis Heyns of the University of South Africa) practical theology takes the believer as its text.<sup>12</sup> For this reason practical theology is an intradisciplinary theological development calling for an interdisciplinary, mutually beneficial cooperation and dialogue between theology and the

human sciences.<sup>13</sup> As Jacob Firet says, "The practical theologian cannot avoid entering into areas of theology other than his specialty."<sup>14</sup> James Fowler puts it more succinctly: "practical theology is not self-sufficient as a discipline."<sup>15</sup>

The practical theologian's task is to establish theories of the praxis of religious actions, and to continually evaluate, improve and refine these theories.<sup>16</sup> Taking inspiration from J.P. Theron's comment that practical theology can only benefit from a fresh approach,<sup>17</sup> this thesis considers group psychotherapy as a vehicle for the manifestation and implementation of practical theology.

In the Department of Practical Theology at the University of South Africa, practical theology is regarded as an operational science and divided into five operations: communication, care, celebration, instruction and service.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis I focus exclusively upon practical theology as an operational science.

### **Practical Theology as Science**

An initial difficulty is that we are simply not used to thinking of theology as a science or discipline.<sup>19</sup> Practical theology endeavours to scientifically examine the words of people and determines whether those words are used in such a way that the message has its proper, intended impact. We can scientifically consider the encounter between God and person because the object of study is clearly definable, i.e., the person. The encounter happens in this world, in time, and the behaviour, experience and reactions of people can be scientifically examined. Therefore we can think and formulate theories about such encounters.<sup>20</sup> Yet as Thurneysen points out, "The mystery of man's nature is not subject to psychological knowledge, but is accessible only to faith."<sup>21</sup> Though this may be so, the science of psychology--and group psychotherapy<sup>22</sup> in particular--can enhance our access to the mystery of human nature.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), perhaps the father of Practical Theology, differentiated between speculative knowledge associated with reason, and empirical knowledge associated with perception or observation.<sup>23</sup> Schleiermacher saw practical

theology as science; not praxis (where theory becomes practical) but the theory of praxis.<sup>24</sup> Practical theology was not to be concerned with the actual mandate of theology but with proper ways of acting.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most concise formulation of Schleiermacher's concept of practical theology is that it is the study of techniques for the maintenance and perfection of the church.<sup>26</sup> Therefore practical theology simply studied and indicated the appropriate rules, procedures, and methods to be used in overcoming the gap between the ideal and the actual, i.e., practical theology became a "technology."<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, this posed a problem. The chief criticism of Schleiermacher is that he ultimately erred by limiting practical theology to being an appendix to other more "real" theological subjects (e.g., systematic theology, dogmatics, exegetical subjects, etc.) such that practical theology becomes only the practical application of the other subjects' theories.<sup>28</sup> As Burkhart puts it, "what Schleiermacher fails to notice or understand in any effective way is that if believing affects thinking, [then] practice influences theory."<sup>29</sup>

The Department of Practical Theology at the University of South Africa's position is that practical theology is a real, true and independent theology having its own scientific basis and theory.<sup>30</sup> Even so, practical theology's distinguishing feature is its practical, "earthy" nature which finds its grounding theory to practice and thus completing the circuit by which the "electricity" of the God-to-person encounter becomes operative. Without repeating Schleiermacher's blunders, namely, failing to look beyond the pastor or establish firmly the scientific footing of practical theology,<sup>31</sup> and thereby unwittingly reducing practical theology to a compendium of clerical techniques rather than a scientific discipline with its own independence and integrity,<sup>32</sup> I shall concentrate on practical theology as an operational science.

Now as then, practical theology seeks to scientifically illuminate the interrelationship between practice and theory. Practical theology is a science because it reflects critically on existing practices and theories.<sup>33</sup> Operational science investigates the actions (deeds) of people.<sup>34</sup> Hence practical theology is an operational science.

Practical theology must perpetually span the gulf between the esoteric nature of theology and the crude realities of human experience. An evergreen criticism of the Church is that

ivory towered academicians produce sterile theologies which are sadly out of touch with the vicissitudes of everyday life. To combat this, practical theology examines human actions scientifically.

In order to be scientific, practical theology must be more than a practical appendage of theology.<sup>35</sup> It must have its own object of study, method, and theory. It does not suffice to simply oil the church's technical machinery.

The cardinal activity of practical theologians is prospective process analysis<sup>36</sup> wherein the focus of attention is not static fact but events. This analysis considers the event of the coming of God in his Word with human action as the intermediary.<sup>37</sup> It is this operation about which practical theology seeks to be scientific.

Yet it is difficult to be scientifically precise about the coming of God in the Word with human action as the intermediary. Jacob Firet points out that

What actually happens in this pattern between God and the person or the person and his God, or in Bavinck's words, what happens at "the point where the finite touches the infinite," is not for psychological research to determine. But this is not only true of religious phenomena; it is true of every phenomenon...<sup>38</sup>

Scientific studies from a practical-theological point of view are still rare<sup>39</sup> and scientific substantiation about God is not feasible because premises about God are made in faith.<sup>40</sup> This may lead to a muddle-headedness in the scientific investigation of the phenomenon of human religious experience. Yet as Alfred North Whitehead said, muddle-headedness is a condition precedent to independent thought, and may actually be independent creative thought in its first stage.<sup>41</sup>

Practical theology as an operational science is concerned with communication, care, service, and celebration.<sup>42</sup> Practical theology pursues the elusive truths about human behaviour via operational science by liaising with disciplines which possess methods of empirical analysis,<sup>43</sup> e.g., psychology, psychiatry, sociology, epidemiology, etc. Heyns states that

practical theology must as a matter of urgency take cognisance of other operational fields<sup>44</sup> such as psychotherapy. Practical theology, as an operational science, concerns scientific methods of controlling and educating social relations. Practical theology reflects on praxis<sup>45</sup> in order to discover the theories underlying praxis and evaluate their effectiveness. In short, practical theology is concerned in the closest possible way with the God-to-person event that involves other people.<sup>46</sup> Fierst writes that the miracles which God would do for a person occur in the situation of an interhuman relationship; therefore practical theology, if it is to be helpful to the pastor in his role-fulfilment, must go as far as possible in its attempts to understand what God does through the intermediary.<sup>47</sup>

The standard view holds that the scientific method starts with observation and leads to deduction.<sup>48</sup> This view led to the belief that strict scientific observation was not encumbered by subjective impressions or swayed by sentiment. Scientists studiously observed processes, acquired a heightened awareness of them, and constructed useful hypotheses accordingly. As Whitehead noted in his essays on the philosophy of science:

Geniuses such as Aristotle, or Archimedes, or Roger Bacon, must have been endowed with the full scientific mentality, which instinctively holds that all things great and small are conceivable as exemplifications of general principles which reign throughout the natural order.<sup>49</sup>

The formula for success in science seemed to be: observe dispassionately the small in order to understand fully the great. But observation is selection<sup>50</sup> as philosophers of science such as Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, and Michael Polanyi have indicated.<sup>51</sup> Science is a thoroughly human activity.

This entails that practical theology be both deductive, reasoning from given facts, and inductive, synthesizing and building up information from data.<sup>52</sup> It starts with the facts of Jesus: his historical existence, his execution, his subsequent effect upon people throughout history; but it also investigates religious experience, for the channel between praxis and theory is experience, especially contrasting experiences.<sup>53</sup>

## Theory and Praxis

The difficulty of relating theory to praxis is summed up by Whitehead:

It is easy enough to find a theory, logically harmonious and with important applications in the region of fact, provided that you are content to disregard half your evidence.<sup>54</sup>

"Praxis" is the Latin word for practice and is the term used commonly in practical theology today, including at the University of South Africa.<sup>55</sup> In accordance with this tradition "practice" and "praxis" are used interchangeably throughout this thesis except where noted. Praxis comprises all concrete, deliberate actions in society, including human actions in politics, commerce, agriculture, sport, education social relations, church life and so on.<sup>56</sup>

Praxis also means practical action with a view to change.<sup>57</sup> At the University of South Africa practical theology is seen to concern the theological theory of ecclesiastical praxis.<sup>58</sup>

Praxis also denotes theory and the interrelationship between the two. This interrelationship is one of awareness-to-hypothesis, and practice-to-theory, such that to affect one is to affect the other. Hence theologian James Fowler's quoting of group therapist Kurt Lewin's terse dictum that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory."<sup>59</sup>

The relationship of awareness-to-hypothesis is one of critical confrontation rather than collusion. Experience is scrutinised continuously under the light of theory in order to ensure that all facets of that experience can be explained, accounted for, understood rightly and appreciated fully. Theory works to stay one step ahead of practice, and transcend it. Yet theory itself changes and grows under the light of the ever changing data supplied by experience. The interrelationship of the praxis and theory is a process characterised by change. Practical theology deals with theory as applied in practice and the interrelationship of praxis and theory.<sup>60</sup> Neither praxis nor theory exists wholly nor successfully without the other. Praxis and theory cannot be separated and long-lived. Theory without practice is stillborn,<sup>61</sup> esoteric, and irrelevant. Praxis may be unconsciously theoretical but it never

occurs apart from theory.<sup>62</sup> All praxis is codetermined by theory.<sup>63</sup> Indeed this harks back to Burkhardt's criticism of Schleiermacher:

That, although Schleiermacher knows, and knows thoroughly, that thought itself can be transformative, he nevertheless does not come to realise that life itself can be illuminative. In a word, his own life and thought did not bring him to any systematic understanding of the interpretive dimensions of praxis.<sup>64</sup>

Pure praxis is a conceit. All our experience, indeed all praxis, is theory-laden.<sup>65</sup> All praxis contains theory, which provides the capital from which the praxis is funded. If this funding is not consciously recognised and considered critically, or if the practitioner deliberately rejects theory, then praxis becomes bankrupt.<sup>66</sup>

Pure theory is also a conceit.<sup>67</sup> If theory becomes so independent of praxis as to be unrelated, it is ideology. When theory takes precedence over praxis it stands in danger of becoming visionary doctrine; interesting but enervated. When praxis takes precedence over theory the result can be a mindless stabilising and/or preserving of the status quo.<sup>68</sup>

The result of this theory-to-praxis interplay is a bipolar tension. They are not alike but are inextricably enmeshed, like two sides of the same coin.<sup>69</sup>

The optimal relationship of theory and praxis is one in which they act upon each other like twin poles in a bipolar tensile unit.<sup>70</sup> Praxis constantly demonstrates if theory is true or false. Theory transcends practice in order to maintain its critical distance.<sup>71</sup> Yet theory does not merely accommodate the status quo.<sup>72</sup> It remains open to new input. This is the tensile nature of the bipolar unit. Theory must remain sufficiently open so that new experiences become possible.<sup>73</sup>

University of South Africa Professor of Practical Theology Murray Janson says that the relationship between theological theory and ecclesiastical practice is governed neither by complete distinction, nor by identification, but by bipolar stress.<sup>74</sup> The transition from theory to practice involves qualitative change. Theory requires constant verification from

praxis, while praxis must constantly be transcended by theory.<sup>75</sup> In other words, from this bipolar stress must emerge creativity, otherwise qualitative change becomes a misnomer, a mere repetition of past activities which fail to enrich either the present or the future. This enrichment must be attained if mere preservation of the status quo is to be avoided. If theory truly serves praxis it is critical theory, continually assessing praxis. Conversely praxis must always call theory to account.<sup>76</sup>

The tensile nature of theory-to-practice has other far-reaching philosophical and religious implications. It is important that practical theology not befriend the status quo but remain true to itself by being perpetually open to change. If it fails to do this, it fails to fulfil its dual function of taking equally seriously both God's Word and the human hearing of that word.<sup>77</sup> Practical theology seeks to do exactly this.

Like a multi-armed bridge, practical theology spans many gulfs and links several shores. As Janson describes it, practical theology covers the gulfs between theory and praxis, science and art, university theology and congregational life, church and society, theology and other sciences.<sup>78</sup> Therefore practical theology may be less a bridge and more a process of bridge building.

The following is a summary of the major propositions of practical theology as discussed by Janson:<sup>79</sup> The theory of practical theology is theological, i.e., composed of normative statements about "the cause of Jesus" and its transmission history, to current ecclesiastical practice and to modern society. Practical theology is concerned with the meaning of Jesus' cause for the modern world. Practical theology is deductive: it reasons from the given facts. Praxis is theory applied in practice. Applied to practical theology, praxis is the common practice of the church: the actions of individuals or groups inasmuch as these are performed or interpreted as ecclesiastical action. The cause of Jesus comes to us through an historical context and the two cannot be divorced. Praxis cannot exist without theory but it may be unconsciously theoretical. Jesus himself had no abstract theory instead operating in discrete social situations with specific individuals in what I have described elsewhere as the here-and-now. To him, truth was a matter of deeds (John 3:21). One can rely only upon a theory that recognises that God continues to be self-disclosing today, in the here-and-

now. Moreover, God wants to self-disclose to people and the church in this age. God wants to incarnate the gospel here-and-now. This is impossible if the current praxis is sanctioned as unalterable. Hence practical theology is necessarily critical of the status quo, but for the sake of the salvation of humanity, in order to overcome human alienation and enable humanity to find a new identity. Without its critical nature practical theology becomes increasingly vulnerable to the accusation that it is ordered toward the maintenance of middle-class religion.<sup>80</sup> Practical theologians must be sufficiently practical to take seriously the reality of human response to God's activities.

In short, when practical theology remains open to change it is essentially creative; when resistant to change it becomes another bourgeois ideology; a part of the problem rather than the solution. As James Fowler writes:

Practical theology lives close to the crucibles in which the power of religious symbols and language vindicate themselves as indispensable in the grasping and illumination of the depths of our experiences of limit, threat, goodness, and grace.... Practical theology aims at a kind of knowing that guides being and doing.... Its knowledge is a practical knowing--a knowing in which skill and understanding cooperate; a knowing in which experience and critical reflection work in concert; a knowing in which disciplined improvisation, against a backdrop of reflective wisdom, marks the virtuosity of the competent practitioner.<sup>81</sup>

This practical knowing means, says Fowler,<sup>82</sup>

the bringing together of our well-formed convictions about the purpose of an activity, our reflective experience and understanding of the persons and situations involved, our grasp of the shape of personal appropriations we desire to sponsor in the activity, all uniting to inform the selection or creation of specific strategies that are "fitting" and efficacious.<sup>83</sup>

One way of acquiring "practical knowing" is, I believe through the study of interpersonal interactions which reveal "our well-formed convictions," "reflective experience," and "selection of specific strategies." If we are to illuminate "the depths of our experience" (Fowler), then we must first possess the means to do so. Interpersonal interaction is, I suggest, one such means. Thurneysen writes that

The word, speech, and conversation seem to [romantic philosopher Adam Muller] to be the great means of sharing, the means by which life becomes human. The word liberates us; it is a divine force which is imparted to man. To be sure, this indicates at the same time that we face a crisis from moment to moment: Psychic power must, as it were, go through the narrow gate of the word; only then does it become forceful and truly alive....Only the word, only speech, converts the vague psychic fluctuations into mental life in which others can also participate. Once again: Only the fact that man can speak and does speak makes him man.<sup>84</sup>

Through the study of psychotherapy groups we can explore the manifestations of psychic power as it emerges from the narrow gate of the world.

### **Practical Theology and the Here-and-Now**

The therapeutic concept of the here-and-now has particular significance for practical theology. If we experience life only in the here-and-now, then the here-and-now is the only possible time in which to alter our experience of life. Therefore if practical theology seeks to be relevant to the human condition, it must take the here-and-now as seriously as psychotherapy does. The coming of God to man through human intermediary must and can only occur in the here-and-now. As Alfred North Whitehead said, "...perishing is the initiation of becoming. How the past perishes is how the future becomes."<sup>85</sup>

For Whitehead, philosophy "is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted."<sup>86</sup> This is also true for practical theology and psychotherapy. A person acts out their life in accordance with a philosophical framework of which they are not entirely conscious. This framework incorporates feelings towards existence and religion. When that philosophical framework proves dysfunctional, a person may seek help through psychotherapy in order to examine and perhaps reconstruct the framework. Hence examination of one's internal life can be an intrinsically religious act. In Whitehead's view religion is "the art and theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself, and on what is permanent in the nature of things."<sup>87</sup> Pittenger<sup>88</sup> points out that readers of Whitehead must not misinterpret what is perhaps Whitehead's most famous sentences: "Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness,"<sup>89</sup> and, "If you are never solitary, you are never religious."<sup>90</sup> Says Pittenger,

Whitehead did not mean that the religious man is by definition a solitary. He did mean, as the context of these two sentences shows, that if religion is vital and real it must be apprehended in the inner place of each man's personal life. Religion which does not bring a man starkly up against the nature of things--and this must happen to each man for himself--is simply conventional or customary. It "cuts no ice" with a man unless it is his own.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed Whitehead criticises theology as defective when it confined itself to the suggestion of minor, vapid reasons why people should continue to go to church in the traditional fashion.<sup>92</sup>

Life unfolds only in the here-and-now since emotions and feelings can only be experienced in the here-and-now. The "coming of God to man, in man's own world, through the pastoral action of believers,"<sup>93</sup> is an event between God and man which involves other people as intermediaries<sup>94</sup> and can occur only in the here-and-now. Therefore the perspective of the here-and-now is integral to practical theology as well as psychotherapy.

## Discontinuous Change

The ways we conceive of and formulate change, the very words we use to describe it, can lead us further into understanding the way the world actually works. Take for example the potential for discontinuous change inherent within therapy groups, as described by psychological researchers Brent Slife and Jane Lanyon:

Change processes in groups have long been recognised as not always smooth and orderly. Sometimes, often unexpectedly, the group will be seen to shift cataclysmically into a new stage of development. This discontinuous shift is typically explained through the linear notion that change was accelerated, but is still smooth and continuous. Because events are always connected with temporal "lines," no change can occur without some interval of time, that is, no change can be truly instantaneous. A nonlinear approach, however, considers discontinuous change the more basic reality. The group appears continuous at times because the changes are slight, but in fact each change is discontinuous, particularly as people make different moment-by-moment decisions and try on different interpersonal styles.

[Yet]...developmental stages of the group are by no means disallowed in a nonlinear approach...just because one stage precedes another in time does not mean that each stage "causes" the next in a linear manner. Stages can also be viewed as emergent properties, already inherent in the group, but needing time to develop or manifest themselves. Each stage, in this sense, is discontinuous from the previous stage, because a new *gestalt*<sup>95</sup> or relation between the parts has emerged. This also permits group members to take some responsibility for their emergence into advanced stages of group processes.<sup>96</sup>

But causality does not have to be viewed as occurring across time. It can work through the simultaneous interaction of parts and wholes. When a part changes, the meaning of the whole is simultaneously affected, and when the meaning of the whole is affected, the meaning of each part within the whole is also affected, without any time having passed. This approach to causality has been variously labelled by philosophers and psychologists as "structural determinism," "synchronous causality," or "formal causality." The point is that we do not have to give up causal efficacy in accounting for the power of the present; we merely have to give up our Western views of how this causality is thought to operate....Somehow--inexplicably by Western standards--the understanding and treatment of contemporaneous interpersonal and intrapersonal events are effective. Somehow this treatment cuts across time, to affect our construal of the past and future, and somehow it cuts across the factors of the "now" to affect group members both inside and outside of therapy (i.e., social microcosm).<sup>97</sup>

The here-and-now nonlinear approach explains how this occurs:

Understanding and treating contemporaneous events helps remediate patient problems because these are the events that cause and maintain them. All of the necessary conditions for the moment are there in the moment itself. Past memories and future expectations are affected, because these never exist apart from the present anyway. Indeed, it is the person in the present that construes and reconstrues his or her past and future. And when the group or the person's role in the group changes, this has a simultaneous effect upon the person's life outside of the group. Changes in a part (the group) can cause changes in the meaning of the whole (the person's life), without time having elapsed.<sup>98</sup>

In short, nonlinear approaches offer explanatory power without the excess metaphysical baggage that typically accompanies Western notions of time and causality.<sup>99</sup>

Eliminating "excess metaphysical baggage" is precisely what practical theology can do. Practical theology does this when it purports not only the truth, but the process by which the truth manifests itself in the world of human interrelationships. Australian psychoanalyst Neville Symington points out that:

Ultimately the mind is healed by truth. Truth is closely wedded to love and to goodness which is the wholeness of the human person. Psychoanalysis is a servant in that human struggle after goodness. Psychoanalysis is subordinate to truth, it does not possess truth but has its place in relation to truth along with the natural sciences, human sciences, art, literature, philosophy, and religion.<sup>100</sup>

That we are healed by truth is itself a truism and hardly an original thought. Jesus himself announced the liberating power of truth when he said, "The truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). The catch is, "...truth is the hardest missile one can be pelted with."<sup>101</sup> Hence what requires explication is the way that truth functions in our world and in our interpersonal relationships. This is, I believe, the province of both practical theology and psychotherapy.

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1. in James Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives" in *Practical Theology* ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.150
  2. Firet, p.92
  3. Louis Heyns, *Practical Theology 1A PTA 100-T* "Introduction to Practical Theology" (Pretoria: Unisa, 1984) p.70
  4. Browning, p.1
  5. Heyns, p.12
  6. Browning, p.3
  7. Hennie J.C. Pieterse, Jan T. de Jongh van Arkel, & Denise M. Ackermann, *Practical Theology PTA 301-4* (Pretoria: Unisa 1985) p.24
  8. Heyns, p.13

9. Ibid., p.126
10. J.P.J.Theron, *PTH 409-F "Diakonia: The Serving Church"* (Pretoria: Unisa 1988) p.132
11. Browning, p.6
12. Heyns, p.12
13. Johan Wolfhaardt, quoted in J.P.J. Theron, *Practical Theology 409-F "Diakonia: The Serving Church"* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988) p.137. Dr. Wolfhaardt is on the staff of the Dept. of Practical Theology at the University of South Africa.
14. Firet, p.xi
15. James Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives" p.149
16. H.J.C.Pieterse, M.Hestenes, L.Heyns, J.Van Arkel, J.P.J.Theron, J.S.Dreyer, *Practical Theology PTA 100-T "Introduction to Practical Theology"* (Pretoria: Unisa 1991) p.218
17. Theron, p.5
18. L.M.Heyns, J.P.J.Theron, *Practical Theology PTA 302-5* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1986) p.108
19. Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm" in *Practical Theology* ed. D. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) p.23
20. Heyns, p.133
21. Thurneysen, p.213
22. Ibid., p.221. Thurneysen defined psychotherapy as the chief form in which psychology is applied in the form of an art of healing and thus becomes an auxiliary science to medicine.
23. Murray Janson, *Practical Theology PTH 101 "Introduction to Practical Theology"* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1979) p.5
24. Ibid., p.6
25. Ibid., also Heyns, p.79
26. Johan Symington & J.A.Wolfhaardt, *Practical Theology PTA 400-5* (Pretoria: Unisa 1983) p.31
27. Burkhart, p.48
28. Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.10
29. Burkhart, p.52
30. Heyns, pp.132, 9-17, 127-133
31. Ibid., p.80
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.14
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p.15
36. Ibid., p.108

37. Ibid., p.136
38. Firet, p.198
39. Theron, p.50
40. Heyns, p.11
41. Lucien Price, recorder, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (NY: Mentor Books, 1954) p.42
42. Heyns, p.15
43. Ibid., p.138-9
44. Ibid., p.23
45. Ibid., p.16
46. Ibid., p.17
47. Firet, p.200
48. H.J.C.Pieterse, M.Hestenes, L.M.Heyns, J.De Jongh van Arkel, J.P.J.Theron, J.S.Dreyer, *Practical Theology PTA 100-T: "Introduction to Practical Theology"* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991) p.222
49. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (NY: Mentor Books, 1963) p.13
50. Ibid., p.24
51. Pieterse, et. al., "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.222-3
52. Heyns, p.137
53. Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.95
54. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.167
55. Heyns, p.85
56. Ibid., p.111
57. H.J.C.Pieterse, J.T.de Jongh van Arkel, D.M.Ackermann, *Practical Theology PTA301-4* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986) p.6
58. Heyns, p.136
59. Fowler, p.150
60. Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.86
61. Janson, quoted in Heyns, p.86
62. Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.89
63. Murray Janson, "Practical Theology" in *Introduction to Theology* 3rd. ed., ed.s I.H.Eybers, A.Konig, J.A.Stoop (Pretoria: NKGB, 1982) p.314 and Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.88-9
64. Burkhart, p.53
65. Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology" p.61

66. Ibid.
67. Janson, quoted in Heyns, p.90
68. Janson, "Practical Theology" in *Introduction to Theology* p.315
69. L.M. Heyns, J.P.J. Theron, *Practical Theology PTA 302-5* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986) p.120
70. Heyns, p.117-8
71. Janson, quoted in Heyns, p.95
72. Ibid.
73. Heyns, p.95-6
74. Janson, "Introduction to Practical Theology" p.92
75. Ibid.
76. Janson, "Practical Theology" in *Introduction to Theology* p.316
77. Heyns, p.100
78. Janson, "Practical Theology" in *Introduction to Theology* p.310
79. Heyns, p.87-102
80. Farley, p.34
81. Fowler, p.154-5
82. Fowler acknowledges the unpublished contributions of Rod Hunter, his colleague at Emory University (USA), on this point.
83. Fowler, p.162
84. Thurneysen, p.103
85. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.238
86. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.3
87. Whitehead, *Religion In the Making* p.6
88. Norman Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969) p.39
89. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* p.6
90. Ibid., p.7
91. Pittenger, *Alfred North Whitehead* p.39
92. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (NY: Free Press, 1961) p.170
93. Pieterse, et.al., *Practical Theology PTA 301-4* p.24
94. Heyns, p.136
95. *Gestalt*: an organised psychological configuration or pattern of experiences or acts

96. Brent D. Slife, Jane Lanyon, "Accounting for the Power of the Here-and-Now: A Theoretical Revolution" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.2 (April 1991) p.163
97. Ibid., p.164
98. Ibid., p.165
99. Ibid.
100. Neville Symington, **The Analytic Experience** (London: Free Association Books, 1986) P.331
101. from George Eliot, **Middlemarch**. Quoted in Neville Symington, **The Analytic Experience** (London: Free Association Books, 1986) p.15

## Chapter Four:

*Only organic things persist for great lengths of time...  
The art of persistence is to be dead.*

-- Alfred North Whitehead<sup>1</sup>

*One cannot outlive the present--it always keeps up with you....  
The present, not the future, is the eternal tense.*

-- Irvin Yalom<sup>2</sup>

### Theology As Event: rudiments of process theology

According to John Burkhart, the professed father of practical theology Friedrich Schleiermacher (whom we discussed in the preceding chapter) saw

Christianity [as] a fundamentally historical reality. Always expressed in a living community, it is a "becoming" (*ein Werdendes*) in which the actual present grows as the fruit of the past and as the seed of the future. Christianity is always a reality in process.<sup>3</sup>

Modern and seminal thinker in practical theology Jacob Furet writes that

Theology is not only the study of the knowledge of God; it is also the study of the process of getting to know God, of the events which happen between God and human beings, and between persons, with a view to the process of getting to know, and knowing God. In other words, theology's field of study embraces all factors essential to knowing God...."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Eduard Thurneysen notes that the truth of Christianity is a practical truth, an "occurring truth."<sup>5</sup> This supports an important point made by Furet namely, that there is a dynamic structure to the coming of God through the intermediary of pastoral role-

fulfilment.<sup>6</sup> The "process of getting to know God" starts, I believe, with one's conception of God and of the processes by which God operates in the world. I also believe that the language of process theology best describes "the events which happen between God and human beings, and between persons, with a view to the process of getting to know, and knowing God." The fundamental actions of being together in interaction and communication are, as Firet notes, full of dynamics.<sup>7</sup> Hence a theological language is required which reflects adequately and accurately the dynamism inherent in the coming of God to humanity through the intermediary of pastoral role-fulfilment. I believe process theology serves this purpose well. As I have said elsewhere,

Herein lies the value of the empirical flavour of process thought: earthly reality is considered to be an experiential touchstone, a pointer to or an avenue by which to gain access to higher truths.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter introduces rudiments of process theology. There are many books devoted to describing process theology and it is not my purpose to replicate them. Rather I wish to summarise process theology, by telling its genesis and describing its notions of God and religion.

Systematic theologian John Burkhart writes that, Schleiermacher saw God neither as absentee landlord nor miraculous meddler.<sup>9</sup> For Schleiermacher there were

no fixed lines between sacred and secular, since God is the ground of all reality. Thus, for example, as Schleiermacher puts it in the **Speeches**, "miracle" (*Wunder*)

is simply the religious name for event. Every event, even the most natural and usual, becomes a miracle, as soon as the religious view of it can be the dominant. To me all is miracle.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, for Schleiermacher, theology is not a matter of seeing some special realities, but of seeing some ordinary realities differently. Theology is in the eye of the beholder.<sup>11</sup>

Process theology's conception of theology-as-event lends itself to a modern day explication of practical theology.

### **Introduction to Process Theology**

Process thought (and its derivative process theology) is the modern appellation applied to Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism<sup>12</sup> originally delivered as the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh during the session 1927-28. His work was subsequently published in 1929 as an essay on cosmology entitled **Process and Reality**; a book which remains his *magnum opus*. In an epigram, Whitehead's philosophy is: The process is itself the actuality.<sup>13</sup> This view accords with practical theologian Jacob Firet's assertion that practical theology is a movement; one which itself generates movement; a movement which addresses itself to human beings and then mobilises them.<sup>14</sup> Therefore any model of practical theology must incorporate and give a distinct place to the element of a "motion-generating movement."<sup>15</sup>

Process theology does this. Rather than conceiving of fixed, unmoving, immutable absolute powers, Whitehead argues that process rather than fact is ultimate<sup>16</sup> and that the agency of power in the universe is persuasion.<sup>17</sup> Says Whitehead, Plato's conviction that the divine element in the world was to be conceived as a persuasive rather than coercive agency was one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion.<sup>18</sup>

In the philosophy of organism it is held that the notion of "organism" has two meanings, interconnected but intellectually separable, namely, the microscopic meaning and the macroscopic meaning. The microscopic meaning is concerned with the formal constitution of an actual occasion, considered as a process of realising an individual unity of experience. The macroscopic meaning is concerned with the givenness of the actual world, considered

as the stubborn fact which at once limits and provides opportunity for the actual occasion.<sup>19</sup>

Whitehead emphasises becoming<sup>20</sup> rather than being and viewed reality as consisting of actual entities, also termed actual occasions, which are the final real things of which the world is made up.<sup>21</sup>

There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.<sup>22</sup>

Whitehead differentiated his philosophy from those which viewed reality more mechanistically rather than, as he preferred, an organism. A less technical description is offered by eminent Australian biologist and noted process thinker, Professor Charles Birch:

Each occasion, each succession of occasions, that constitute each individual entity can be thought of as a minute organism. Each organism is internally related to other such organisms. This binds them together in larger organisms such as animals, and since these are internally related to one another as well, larger groupings too have an organic character. It is obvious why Whitehead called his philosophy the philosophy of organism. Biology, he said, was the study of large organisms and physics was the study of small organisms.<sup>23</sup>

Mastering the conceptual jargon of process thought is difficult. Whitehead's metaphysics are abstruse. American theologian Professor Lewis Ford once said that a fundamental and frequently occurring error in writing about process theology is an insufficient grasp of Whitehead's metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> This is due largely to the complex and intricate nature of Whitehead's thought and language. Percy Hughes wrote in an attempt to construe Whitehead's terminology into terms of common use:

When we discuss matters of fact it is events we talk about. But we know events don't bring themselves about; they are brought about by activities individualised in acts (occasions of experience), which therefore are the actualities, the really real things, of nature. But in an event acts take account of or deal with each other; what one act does is done to other acts, so that acts become matters of mutual and public concern.<sup>25</sup>

This thesis focuses only on the aspects of process theology I deem most relevant to the here-and-now approach of group psychotherapy and practical theology. A summation of process theology follows:

As a philosophical system, process thought was popularised in the United States. English mathematician/philosopher Alfred North Whitehead started teaching philosophy at Harvard University in 1924, and to this day the United States remains central for the study of process thought. Whitehead's process philosophy in turn spawned process theology, principally through the works of Charles Hartshorne,<sup>26</sup> Henry Nelson Wieman, John Cobb, Norman Pittenger and others. Since Whitehead spoke and wrote of God in philosophic rather than theological terms, it has been left to his interpreters to put a specifically Christian edge to his work.

The basic concept permeating process theology is that reality is a series of interrelated becomings, such that how a thing becomes, determines what it is.<sup>26</sup> In process theology, reality is no longer viewed in terms of static being or as immutable, absolute, and therefore perfect; rather reality is seen as dynamic, largely amorphous, and absolute only in narrowly defined and relative ways. As Whitehead says, actualisation is a selection among possibilities.<sup>27</sup>

It is the process of selection from among eternal possibilities that defines our everyday reality. Reality is perfect only in its capacity to change and respond. I choose process theology as the means by which to describe the practical theological dimensions of group psychotherapy for two reasons: 1) because it accords with Schleiermacher for whom the historical reality of change made genuine theology possible and necessary<sup>28</sup> and 2) because

process theology is an attempt by individuals of our species to articulate their existential concerns *vis a vis* the transcendent dimension perceived to be operating in their lives. What Whitehead said of philosophy can be said of psychotherapy: its function is to render explicit and efficient a process which otherwise is unconsciously performed without rational tests.<sup>29</sup>

In group therapy, it is the unconscious interactions which are rendered explicit.

Whitehead referred to process thought as the philosophy of organism because it emphasises the living, growing aspects of reality, and insists that reality is composed of "becomings and perishings"<sup>30</sup> rather than the traditional but static being.

The ancient doctrine that 'no one crosses the same river twice' is extended. No thinker thinks twice; and, to put the subject more generally, no subject experiences twice....In the philosophy of organism it is not 'substance' which is permanent, but 'form.' Forms suffer changing relations; actual entities 'perpetually perish' subjectively, but are immortal objectively. Actuality in perishing acquires objectivity, while it loses subjective immediacy.<sup>31</sup>

Every actual occasion, says Whitehead, exhibits itself as a process; it is a becomingness, a transformation of incoherence into coherence.<sup>32</sup> In so disclosing itself, it places itself as one among a multiplicity of other occasions, without which it could not be itself.<sup>33</sup> For Whitehead reality is a "discordant multiplicity of actual things, requiring each other and neglecting each other, utilising and discarding, perishing and yet claiming life as obstinate matter of fact...."<sup>34</sup>

Whitehead's general concept is of an event as a process whose outcome is a unit of experience which entails substantial activity, conditioned potentialities which are there for synthesis, and the achieved outcome of the synthesis.<sup>35</sup> In process theology reality is an endless process of becoming and perishing; an endless series of relationships in which moments of experience, the fundamental building blocks of reality, actively encounter, interact, and grasp one another. This "grasping" of actual occasions by one another Whitehead called "prehension,"<sup>36</sup> and refers to non-cognitive apprehension.<sup>37</sup> Prehension

means a grasping of experience by a subject in such a way as to take account of other entities. It means that what is experienced is taken up into the new experience, and is thus determinative of the relation.<sup>38</sup> It refers to the tendency of any act to initiate a procedure which may be analysed into concrete process; and upon this procedure--upon every process within it--the unity of the act imposes its quality of seeking a certain fulfilment.<sup>39</sup> As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the process of becoming and perishing has important parallels to the here-and-now dynamics of a psychotherapy group, through which members seek to "perish" certain aspects of themselves or their behaviours while "becoming" and embracing other more desirable attributes.

All actual entities can be analysed in terms of "prehensions" for a prehension reproduces in itself the general character of the actual entity.<sup>40</sup> In short, prehension is a term for the way in which present experience includes, and thereby takes account of, past experience.<sup>41</sup> In like manner, we might say that patients in psychotherapy groups re-present their appropriations (prehensions) of their past in new and concrete ways through their here-and-now interactions within the group.

## God In Process

In process theology God is the chief exemplification of the created order rather than its chief exception.<sup>42</sup> The God of religion is personal and has a relationship to all things; but God is truly absolute only in appearance, since like the rest of the world and things in it, God is in some way perpetually undergoing becomings and perishings.<sup>43</sup> God's love then, is characterised not by possession but by participation.

Whitehead rejects the notion of a self-sufficient God, inquiring why pay such metaphysical compliments?<sup>44</sup> In Whitehead's schema, restriction is the price of value and God is the ultimate limitation.<sup>45</sup> That is, real value is determined by exclusion, discrimination, and selection from the plethora of possibilities that are on offer. God is the principle of limitation which provides the how of the process which results in the what of actual occasions.<sup>46</sup> God meets the metaphysical need for a principle of determination.

What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind has differed profoundly. He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it.<sup>47</sup>

The traditional Christian position goes further, of course, and clarifies Whitehead's position by maintaining that God has provided in the form of Jesus Christ one unique and exceptional manifestation of divinity. This peculiar form of divinity gains its speciality precisely because it was a person, a human being, a man-- fully human yet fully divine. This in turn allows followers of Christ to share in this unique divine experience, for Christ is always open, always receptive to interacting with human beings. Thus the God who became here-and-now in the form of Jesus two thousand years ago, remains here-and-now in the form of the eternally available Christ.

### **World in Process**

The world consists of complicated interrelationships. What happens here affects there. Everyone is influenced or affected by what happens to others, and to the world in general. Whitehead described this aspect of reality in terms of "internal relations":

From that relationship, the event would not be itself. This is what is meant by the very notion of internal relations. ...the concept of internal relations requires the concept of substance as the activity synthesising the relationship into its emergent character. The event is what it is, by reason of the unification in itself of a multiplicity of relationships.<sup>48</sup>

An internal relation is a relation which so connects things that one or more of them could not be what they are, were it not for the other things related to them.<sup>49</sup> Relatedness is characteristic of process theology and indeed all of reality.<sup>50</sup> The world is seen in terms of its relations. Even God is relational:<sup>51</sup> of something to something. A Christian life lived in relation to the way things actually occur in the world, means a life lived in relationship to what God is accomplishing in the world.<sup>52</sup> Whitehead interprets the world as being essentially dynamic, energetic, societal in character, and one which operates best through the primacy of persuasion.<sup>53</sup>

For example, we may take Professor Hennie Pieterse's examination of the practical theological task of preaching. To communicate successfully as a practical theologian, says Pieterse, one must acknowledge such diverse phenomena as selective perception and retention, secondary rationalisation, and the effect of primary groups, all of which affect the way in which one is influenced or the way in which one allows one's self to be influenced.<sup>54</sup> Even the experience of simply hearing the Christian gospel (let alone appropriating it) is relational and occurs through a pelting of various influences. English process theologian Norman Pittenger says the process theology is best suited for our age because it provides the coherent and consistent basis from which to express Christian theology, and is therefore a fitting and proper schema through which to re-conceive our faith.<sup>55</sup>

Many pastoral implications of process theology come from Norman Pittenger. Pittenger was greatly influenced by Whitehead and devoted many of his sixty books to interpreting and relaying Whitehead's thought. Whitehead's work is reflected clearly in Pittenger's views: the world and we in it cannot be described in terms of hard absolutely enduring things; the world is verbal, not substantival, and is constituted of activities rather than fixed entities; this is a societal world rather than merely a heaping up of separate and independent things, persons, or experiences.<sup>56</sup>

According to American process theologian Randolph Miller, Whitehead's organic view of reality affects the social nature of humanity such that the will to belong becomes primary in human aspirations.<sup>57</sup> The known world we experience is in process through becoming;

there is a dynamic thrust towards the fulfilment of potentiality, with the emergence of genuine novelty as a necessary and concomitant result.<sup>58</sup> This is echoed in the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow,<sup>59</sup> Carl Rogers<sup>60</sup> and others, who assert that there is a general drive in humans toward personal fulfilment and self-actualisation. This is why Pittenger can claim that to live as a social isolate may be possible but it is a lie<sup>61</sup> and why popular American Christian writer John Powell can refer to the myth of privacy which holds that everyone needs their own private retreat into which none may enter. The fuller truth, says Powell, is that we need others in whom we can confide; others to know us completely and deeply, for "I can know only as much of myself as I have the courage to confide in you."<sup>62</sup>

This drive towards self-actualisation is a dynamic routing from the past, through the present, toward the future. We cannot understand ourselves or others unless we take this dynamic, directional process very seriously indeed.<sup>63</sup> As Miller puts it, "To be alive means to have a past and a future, both of which contribute to the meaning of the present."<sup>64</sup> This emphasis on the peculiar interplay of past, present and future represents an attempt by process theology to fill a particular philosophical gap in Christian thought.

A philosophical pitfall of Christian thought has been that its thinkers have traditionally emphasised non-Jewish elements not clearly implied in the loving activity they knew to be operative in Jesus.<sup>65</sup> Consequently the concept of God became increasingly based on speculative philosophy and was subsequently articulated in terms of first cause, absolute being, omnipotent power, tyrannical rule, uncriticised notions of dictatorial control, etc., rather than the living, loving God of the Jewish working religion.<sup>66</sup>

For example, in Exodus 3:14 the name of the living God, "I shall be doing what I shall be doing" or "I shall reveal myself in what I reveal myself to be doing" is usually translated in the English of the Old Testament as "I am what I am." The vitalistic nature of the Jewish understanding of God is lost in such an English translation.<sup>67</sup> Charles Birch refers to the Japanese scholars Ariga and Tanaka who discovered that the text is better rendered "I am what I am becoming."<sup>68</sup> This transliteration captures best the notion that there is always more God can and will do, a point which features significantly in process

theology.<sup>69</sup> Thus process theology represents and combines two traditional aspects of God: the non-Jewish, Hellenistic aspect based on speculative philosophy, and the thoroughly Jewish aspect of Jewish folk religion.

Pittenger,<sup>70</sup> reacting to Aristotle's point that something absolutely unique is unintelligible, likens the God-to-world relationship to the relationship of mind-to-body, wherein the mind informs and is expressed via the body. This is not to be confused with pantheism, which identifies God with the world, but rather identified with panentheism<sup>71</sup> which views God and the world as distinct from one another yet interrelated and never entirely separated. Just as one cannot locate the mind in any particular part of the human organism, yet it operates in every part of that organism, so too one cannot locate God in any particular part of the organism of actuality, even though God operates in all parts of the organism.

God is relational and always in relationship says Pittenger<sup>72</sup> and, like people, possesses both personality and sociality. We are persons precisely because we are social creatures; our interrelationships help define us. In like manner God's personhood and personality are determined by sociality. This is why Whitehead can refer to God as the "great companion," the "fellow-sufferer who understands,"<sup>73</sup> and more generally as the growth of meaning and value in the world.<sup>74</sup>

Norman Pittenger gives a basic exposition of the Christian faith in terms of process thought in his book **Unbounded Love**. He sees the task of theology as: to make sense and give sense to the ordinary experience of men and women, who must come to terms with the way things go in the world, and whose grip on Christian faith becomes far more real and convinced when that faith is expressed in understandable and acceptable terms.<sup>75</sup>

Process theology makes available a way of seeing God as active, living, related, and loving deity who is both chief causative agency and chief recipient.<sup>76</sup>

Process theology does not provide us with a set of terms or necessary categories in which to place the modes of existence and activity about which triunitarian doctrine speaks.<sup>77</sup> It does, however, make possible a general view of the world into which those modes may fit.

One's world view is important. Having the philosophical capacity to change one's world

view may be even more important. American theologian Professor Ray Anderson says the chief task of a pastoral theologian is to cure people of their sick theologies since these operate as perceptual filters and prevent the richness of life from penetrating one's experience.<sup>78</sup> Process theology is a means by which to accomplish this pastoral/therapeutic task.

In Whitehead's words, religion is world loyalty.<sup>79</sup> One's world, however, starts with one's relationships; relationships with self and others. To assess one's macroscopic world loyalty, we may examine one's microscopic world loyalty, i.e., one's interpersonal relationships, through psychotherapy groups.

Psychotherapy opens wide the gates of understanding by taking with utmost seriousness the impact of the past's contribution to the present, and relates it towards the future.

Because both God and therapy groups are constituted by relationships such that it is the relationship which gives definition and character to the entity, it is my contention that adopting the here-and-now approach in psychotherapy groups can graphically reveal in practice what process theology asserts in theory.

### **A Nonlinear Look at the Here-and-Now**

Brent Slife and Jane Lanyon of the Department of Psychology at Baylor University (USA) write in a penetrating article written on the power of the here-and-now, that it is the insufficiency of Western notions of time and causality which help conceal the here-and-now's curative efficacy.<sup>80</sup> If we accept that the here-and-now is a spatial and temporal parameter on the process and content of group psychotherapy,<sup>81</sup> then we may comfortably consider group psychotherapy in terms of process theology, with its emphasis on interconnectedness<sup>82</sup> and interdependence.<sup>83</sup> In process theology, reality is a constant becoming and perishing, with structure.<sup>84</sup> This has implications for psychology and, I would add, for the pastoral function of practical theology.

The fundamental problem, according to Slife and Lanyon, is that:

...the conceivers of psychology looked to Newtonian physics as their model of science. These conceivers adopted not only the linear method of Newton, but also his linear explanations.

Unfortunately for psychology, however, the Einsteinian revolution of physics followed soon after this adoption. Einstein removed the absolutivity of time, and the linear sequence of independent events. Indeed, two observers can see opposite sequences in the same event at the same time, and yet each be entirely correct within his or her own inertial [sic] frame of reference. For Einstein, time and space were "free creations of the human intelligence, tools of thought which are to serve the purpose of bringing experiences into relation with each other..." In other words, time is not "out there"; it is a frame of reference, being used as an organization of events. Einstein preferred an organization that encompassed events in one figure "all at once" to the usual organization of three dimensions "one at a time." The idea of the linear flow of time made no sense from this preferred perspective. Four-dimension space-time just "is," it does not flow as Newton (and modern psychology) had constructed it.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore,

modern physics has not only relativised time, it has also challenged the continuity of causality across time. Quantum physicists have shown that electrons move from one orbit to another instantaneously. Electrons simply disappear from one quadrant and reappear in another. This is akin to a flower growing from a bud to a full bloom instantaneously-- one instant it is closed, the next instant it is fully opened. This seems to fly in the face of our linear notions of "common sense." Our usual notion of causality implies that one event has to be connected to the next with a line, and thus there is always a small interval of time across which the change must occur. Quantum

physicists have demonstrated, however, that change can truly be discontinuous - not just faster rates of change but change without temporal duration. Many developmentalists and psychotherapists claim they too have observed discontinuous change.<sup>86</sup>

Hence, conclude Slife and Lanyon, linear time and causality are not "realities," but points of view with debatable metaphysical validity.<sup>87</sup>

Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead forewarned of this years ago in what he termed "The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness"<sup>88</sup> which English philosopher Dorothy Emmet describes as:

the tendency in science and philosophy to look on abstractions as anything more than abstractions, i.e., as capable of existing, though they can be thought of, separately in their own right. E.g., talking of sensation as if it were anything more than the activity of concrete actualities.<sup>89</sup>

Firer lends credence to Slife and Lanyon's point by also warning of the danger in ascribing more content to abstraction from reality than to reality itself.<sup>90</sup>

Slife and Lanyon further point out that the fundamental assumption in the bulk of psychologies is that time is linear:

That is, time is considered a sequence of moments all connected into a continuous flow, like a line. The present moment is the ending "point" on the time line, preceded by other "points" more or less like it. The line can be extended to depict the "future," but most Westerners would agree that this line is at best fuzzy, given the uncertainty of the future. From this perspective, it is easy to see why so many therapists place so little emphasis upon the "now." The now is only one point on the line, and an evanescent point at that; the vast majority of the known line consists of the person's past.

Therefore, one's life consists primarily of the past, and so it is only logical that the most therapeutic attention should be paid to the past.<sup>91</sup>

Slife and Lanyon contend, however,

...that one's life does not consist primarily of the past—one's life occurs and keeps occurring in the present. This is not to discount the importance of understanding one's past and planning for one's future; it is simply to state that one's life occurs in the present.<sup>92</sup>

Hence, as esteemed psychotherapist Irvin Yalom says, "one cannot outlive the present—it always keeps up with you....The present, not the future, is the eternal tense."<sup>93</sup>

### Significance of the Here-and-Now

The here-and-now approach of psychotherapy has theological significance, especially when cast in terms of process theology's emphasis on becoming and perishing.

My basic premise throughout this thesis is that group psychotherapy can be a functional manifestation of practical theology. I employ the language of process theology because I believe it comes closest to describing the existential psychodynamics occurring within therapy groups.

Interpersonal interactions function as the *lingua franca* of both psychotherapy and practical theology. These interactions are governed by discernible and predictable motivations. What Fromm-Reichman said of psychotherapy ("The patient needs an experience, not an explanation."<sup>94</sup>) can also be said of practical theology: those undergoing the process need an experience, not an explanation. In the case of practical theology, an experience of God is required; in the case of psychotherapy, a "corrective" emotional experience is required. Practical theology and psychotherapy can facilitate these experiences through their respective focuses on human experience. Philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman points out repeatedly that

religious experience must be human experience, i.e., an experience of something, felt by humans.<sup>95</sup> Whitehead commented that "The basis of experience is emotional."<sup>96</sup> Therefore, practical theology necessarily concerns itself with the emotional life of the people for whom it is constructed, for no religious experience happens outside human emotional life.

Understanding the workings of an interpersonal experience increasingly requires familiarity with the here-and-now approach, and a departure from the notion of "structural causality," wherein

Present conditions holistically "determine" the present due to their structural relations, rather than their causal chaining across time." ...Structural causality...operates in the moment to affect the moment. It does not "push" or "hit" the event into the next instant. Moments are discrete wholes, and not connected in the sense of chaining. Linear causal chains of events are never inevitable, because one of several necessary conditions may be missing in the next instant.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore,

a structural perspective means that the present is the proper focus for experiential therapy, because all of the causal conditions exist in the present....All the conditions that have produced the effect are contemporaneous with it....<sup>98</sup>

As Slife and Lanyon point out, however,

All therapists work in the present, of course, but most presume that therapeutic content should centre on the past, given that the past caused the problems in the first place. Here-and-now approaches, on the other hand, assume the importance of the present. They imply that the conditions

necessary for understanding and treating abnormality can be found in the present. From this perspective, the linear past is neither crucial nor even necessarily germane.<sup>99</sup>

Thus there appears to be an inherent conflict between our Western metaphysics and the metaphysics required to account for the power of the here-and-now.<sup>100</sup> A practical theology which wishes to overcome this barrier may need to resort to the language of process thought, as I have done, in order to do so.

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1. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Fundamentals of Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962) p.4
  2. Irvin Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (NY: Basic Books, 1980) p.161. Quoted in Slife & Lanyon, p.154
  3. Burkhart, p.44
  4. Firet, p.5
  5. Thurneysen, p.12
  6. Firet, p.91
  7. Firet, p.92
  8. Duff Watkins, "The Screwtape Letters and Process Theism" *Process Studies* v.8, no.2 (1978) p.115
  9. Burkhart, p.51
  9. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* trans. John Oman (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1958) p.88. In Burkhart, p.51
  11. Burkhart, p.51
  12. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.18
  13. Lucien Price, recorder, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (NY: Mentor Books, 1954) p.173 and A.N.Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (NY: Free Press, 1961) p.274
  14. Firet, p.92
  15. Ibid.
  16. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.7
  17. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.83
  18. Ibid., p.166
  19. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.128-9
  20. Ibid., p.22

21. Ibid., p.18, 80
22. Ibid., p.18
23. Charles Birch, *On Purpose* (Australia: NSW University Press, 1990) p.xiii
24. Lewis Ford, letter from Old Dominion University, Virginia USA, to Duff Watkins, Feb.1978. Dr.Ford was the editor of *Process Studies*, the journal of process thought. Our correspondence discussed a paper I authored which was subsequently published in *Process Studies*.
25. Percy Hughes, "Is Whitehead's Psychology Adequate?" in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* ed. P.A.Schilpp (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1941) p.279
26. Both Hartshorne and Wieman are important American philosophers in their own right.
26. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.23
27. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (NY: Mentor Books, 1925) p.144
28. Burkhart, p.54
29. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.144
30. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.274-5
31. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.29
32. Ibid., p.25
33. Whitehead, *Science And the Modern World* p.158
34. Whitehead, *Process & Reality* p.349
35. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.159
36. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.19
37. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.67
38. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.20
39. Hughes, p.279-80
40. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.19
41. Birch, *On Becoming* p.76
42. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.343
43. a fuller discussion of this is presented in the chapter "God and the World" Whitehead, *Process and Reality* pp. 342-351
44. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.161
45. Ibid., p.160
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p.161
48. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* p.115

49. James Wesley Robson, "Whitehead's Answer to Hume" *Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on his Philosophy* ed. George Kline (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc. 1963) p.60
50. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.xiii
51. Robert Moller, *What is Process Theology?* (NY: Paulist Press, 1975)
52. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.22
53. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.166, and 69-87; also  
Ewert Cousins, "Process Models in Culture, Philosophy and Theology" in *Process Thought* (NY: Newman Press, 1971) p.15
54. Pieterse, et.al., "Introduction to Practical Theology" pp.s 1-31
55. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.91
56. Norman Pittenger, *The Divine Trinity* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977) p.6-8
57. Randolph C. Miller, *This We Can Believe* (NY: Hawthorn Books, 1976) p.62
58. Norman Pittenger, *Cosmic Love and Human Wrong* (NY: Paulist Press, 1976) p.35
59. Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 2nd ed. (NY Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1968)
60. Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy* (Boston: Mifflin Co., 1961)
61. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.7-8
62. John Powell, *The Secret of Staying In Love* (Allen, Texas: Argus Communications, 1974) p.130
63. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.34
64. Randolph C. Miller, *Live Until You Die* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1973) p.71
65. Pittenger, *The Divine Trinity* p.77 and Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.15-17
66. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.25
67. Pittenger, *Divine Trinity* p.77
68. Birch, p.101. Birch refers to Ariga, T. *An Enquiry Into the Basic Structure of Christian Thought* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1959) and Tanaka, T. (1984) and "Hyatology and Whitehead's process thought" in *Process and Reality East and West* (pp.7-21). Unpublished collection of papers of the Japanese Society for Process Studies.
69. Pittenger, *Divine Trinity* p.77
70. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.44
71. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964) p.89-90

American philosopher Charles Hartshorne, with whom the concept of panentheism is most often identified, writes:

If "pantheism" is a historically and etymologically appropriate term for the view that deity is the all of relative or interdependent items, with nothing wholly independent or in any clear sense nonrelative, the "panentheism" is an appropriate term for the view that deity is in some real aspect distinguishable from and independent of any and all relative items, and yet, taken as an actual whole, includes all relative items. [Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity* p.89]

Thus panentheism is the view that God is not simply the cosmos, but that God is the sum or system of dependent things or effects such that God is both this system and something independent of it.

72. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.64
73. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.351
74. *Ibid.*, p.344; also Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* pp.156-161; Miller, *This We Can Believe* p.32; Henry N. Wieman, *Seeking A Faith For a New Age* ed. C.L.Hepler (NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975) p.71 & 110
75. Pittenger, *Unbounded Love* p.1
76. Pittenger, *Divine Triunity* p.114
77. *Ibid.*
78. Ray S. Anderson, Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary (USA), lecture series presented at the University of South Africa August 1986
79. Whitehead, *Religion In the Making* p.49
80. Slife & Lanyon, p. 145-67
81. *Ibid.*, p.146
82. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* pp. 150, 176, 274-5
83. *Ibid.*, p.112
84. Randolph Miller, *American Spirit* p.130
85. Slife & Lanyon, p.155-6
86. *Ibid.*, p.157
87. *Ibid.*
88. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.7-8; and Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* pp.41-56
89. Dorothy Emmet, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism* (London: Macmillan, 1966) p.74
90. Firet, p.136
91. Slife & Lanyon, p.153
92. *Ibid.*, p.154
93. Irvin Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (NY: Basic Books, 1980) p.161. Quoted in Slife & Lanyon, p.154
94. attributed to Fromm-Reichman in Rollo May, *The Discovery of Being* (NY: Norton, 1983) p.158. Quoted in Slife & Lanyon, p.149
95. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* pp.28-32
96. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* p.176
97. Slife & Lanyon, p.158-9
98. *Ibid.*, p.160
99. *Ibid.*, p.147
100. *Ibid.*, p.149

## Chapter Five:

*There are only two or three known stories,  
and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely  
as if they had never happened before.*

-- Willa Cather<sup>1</sup>

*Einstein was once asked if he carried a notebook in  
which to write down new ideas.  
He replied that he didn't get many new ideas.  
And it appears that no one else does, either.*

-- Dr. George Sheehan<sup>2</sup>

### Spirit-Psyche-Body Interplay

Professor Don Browning asserts that

the desire to care for another person, whether it comes from a minister or a secular therapist, presupposes certain attitudes of a religious kind. Deciding to care for another person assumes certain convictions that person is worth valuing and caring for, not just for certain instrumental purposes, but intrinsically and with regard to some wider, if not ultimate, standard of value and worth.<sup>3</sup>

According to Jacob Firet, pastoral role-fulfilment is intermediary of God's coming in his word as dynamic reality. This does not mean

that humans function as "loudspeakers" through which God's words resound, or as commentators who explain God's words, or as applicators who make them relevant to people and their situations. In pastoral role-fulfilment the word of God must come to pass--must realise itself in relation to the people to whom God seeks to come. So pastoral role-fulfilment is the field in which

God and man are brought together in a relationship of tension in which the word occurs which brings people to understanding and change.<sup>4</sup>

When we bear in mind Browning's point that a pastor is not required to place religious issues before psychodynamic ones,<sup>5</sup> and Firet's insight that "the drums of theology" can safely be beaten less vigorously without a loss of theological meaning when practical theology consults other disciplines,<sup>6</sup> we can comfortably examine group psychotherapy as a vehicle through which pastoral role-fulfilment may occur. As pastoral theologian James Lapsley asserts, "The spirit cannot be separated from the psyche, nor can either be separated from the body."<sup>7</sup> Don Browning further reminds us that "The very essence of pastoral care is found in addressing the religio-ethical dimensions of human problems with an equal consideration for the dynamic-motivational issues as well."<sup>8</sup> Eduard Thurneysen concludes that the task of a theology of pastoral care is to concern itself with the psychological nature of man and thus enter into discussion with the psychology and pathology of human life.<sup>9</sup> I contend that this can be done by examining the interplay of spirit-psyche-body as revealed in the dynamic-motivational issues presented in psychotherapy groups.

Groups have a certain "pull" on people. As the satirist/philosopher Ashleigh Brilliant, who reduces philosophical insights down to witty apophthegms, writes: "I prefer group activity because, even if it's foolish, at least I'm not the only fool."<sup>10</sup>

The process of group psychotherapy begins with scientific observation and inquiry: what actually occurs, under what circumstances, in what sequence, with what results? In this manner a body of empirical research is accumulated. Gathered data gives rise to hypotheses.

American psychiatrist Lewis Wolberg provides us with a lucid description of Freud's historic arrival at precisely this point:

In attempting to hypnotise a young woman, Lucie R., who complained of depression and constant peculiar odours, [Freud] was unable to induce the somnambulistic trance essential for cathartic treatment. Remembering an

experiment by Bernheim, who, by persistent urging, had caused a patient to remember in the waking state her experiences during a somnambulistic trance, Freud placed his hand on the patient's forehead and asked her to repeat everything that came to her mind. Recollections and fantasies that the patient thought too insignificant to mention were by this process of free association brought to the surface. Freud was thus able to recapture important pathogenic experiences without recourse to hypnosis.

Perhaps more significant was Freud's discovery of the motives and resistances involved in the process of forgetting. Because many memories were inaccessible to hypnotic recall even in the somnambulistic state, Freud concluded that there were forces that kept memories from entering consciousness, and he discovered that it was necessary to neutralise the repressing forces before recall was possible. An effective way to overcome this resistance was to permit the patient to relax and to talk freely about any idea or fantasy that entered his mind, no matter how trivial or absurd. Freud could observe in this free association a sequential theme that was somehow related to the traumatic event. Other important ways of discovering traumatic episodes were in the interpretation of the patient's dreams and the irrational attitudes and fantasies the patient developed about the physician, a phenomenon Freud called transference ....

In continuing his psychoanalytic work, Freud laid less and less stress on the repressed emotions of early traumatic experiences as the chief cause of neurosis. He became more and more convinced of the protective nature of the symptoms, and, in 1926, he revised his theory of neurosis drastically, claiming that symptoms were not only manifestations of repressed instinctive strivings but also defences against these strivings. Essentially they were techniques to avert anxiety.<sup>11</sup>

As Australian psychoanalyst Neville Symington points out, however, Freud did not discover the unconscious, rather he was the first to chart its territory and investigate it scientifically.<sup>12</sup>

It is the traditions and norms of group members which are chartered and investigated scientifically in a therapy group. Questions are asked: how came about these traditions and norms, how have they evolved, why do they arise now in this particular setting, etc. In this manner a therapy group examines the habitual ways of interacting by its members and thereby provides the data necessary for constructive change.

American psychologist Sidney Jourard says:

Psychotherapy is the art of promoting self-disclosure and authentic being in patients who withhold their real selves from expression, and clinical experience shows that, when psychotherapy has been effective with psychosomatic patients, the latter change their role-definition, their self-structures, and their behaviour in the direction of greater spontaneity and openness with salutary consequences to their bodies.<sup>13</sup>

This is why, from the perspective of practical theology, Jacob Firet makes the point that the accent is rightly put on the process of interaction between therapist and client:

a process which can be directed, conducted, and afterward analysed. The process of interaction is typically a process between humans; it is necessary, therefore, when all depends on the process, that the therapist perceive and acknowledge the other as an equal.<sup>14</sup>

Practical theology, however, must not be content to confess this "with the mouth" and then do business as usual. It is urgently necessary, says Firet, that practical theological methods be developed with the help of which it will become possible to get to know the other person in her uniqueness and current experience of reality, in order that the real process of

interaction may get under way.<sup>15</sup> Psychotherapy is one such method which, as Thurneyson notes, develops outside the church, yet reaches into it.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ingredients of Group Therapy**

Don Browning avows that "Pastoral theology should be concerned with specifying the logic, timing, and practical strategies for relating theological-ethical and psychodynamic perspectives on human behaviour."<sup>17</sup> These strategies and perspectives can be viewed more closely through an examination of the ingredients of group therapy.

Firet notes that "In the interhuman relationship into which the pastor [or therapist, I would add] ventures when fulfilling his role there arises a field of tension in which God and the person to whom he would come are brought together in mutuality."<sup>18</sup> This "field of tension" can be analysed in terms of the ingredients peculiar to group psychotherapy.

Dr. Lewis Wolberg points out that psychotherapy's ingredients arise in a scientifically investigable manner:

One of the most important contributions made by modern psychology to the understanding of human behaviour is the idea that symptoms are not the product of disorganised forces, but rather that they follow scientific laws of cause and effect. When a person is victimised by fear, tension, and panicky feelings that seem to come from unknown sources, he may not be able to ascertain the meaning of his troubles. Sometimes he will attribute them to unpredictable, perhaps supernatural, forces. If he accepts the idea that nothing in the universe happens by chance, he may be reassured that he is not at the mercy of wicked, inscrutable forces over which he has no control, even though these forces are nightmarish in quality and make him feel that he is being manipulated by demons. If he is told by a person he respects that a matter-of-fact cause is responsible for his agony, he will feel much better.

But accepting this explanation on faith is not enough. It is essential that he

learn exactly how his symptoms become exacerbated in specific situations.<sup>19</sup>

In describing the ingredients of group psychotherapy I construct a conceit: group therapy consists of facts, feelings, fantasies and fears. These rubrics are used as a mnemonic aid to communicate succinctly the constituent elements of group psychotherapy. The point I make is that the following four ingredients are ever present in the course of group therapy.

Facts are the most obvious ingredient. By facts I mean the sheer, concrete, unarguable, circumstances of things (what Whitehead described as "brute experience"<sup>20</sup>), as differentiated from the psychological realities of the subconscious. Psychological realities are, however, equally significant. Many times I have observed psychiatric patients purposely misinterpret the facts surrounding their illness as a means of placing that illnesses outside themselves and thus avoiding dealing with the reality of their illness. Research indicates that necessary conditions within therapy groups for patients to change include the means of thinking differently about problems and provision of a setting that is different from ordinary social interaction.<sup>21</sup> Such settings allow patients to encounter old problems in new ways, and to greet familiar problems with fresh approaches. People may suffer in accordance with fact, as when grief follows bereavement. Yet facts do not fully explain human experience. As Australian scientist Charles Birch points out, facts have to be interpreted.

...a good scientist sees connections between facts others don't see. A theory is valued primarily not for the extra facts it tells us but for the way it connects up the facts we already know. This connecting up is a way of seeing facts. It depends upon the observer. There are no mechanical rules for that.<sup>22</sup>

Feelings are the second factor in the equation. Feelings function as building-blocks for psychological states. Upon feelings are based behavioural responses. Feelings act as physiological indicators pointing to profound psychological activities and processes. Feelings undergird cognitions, beliefs, and general apprehension of one's external circumstances. The

expression of feeling makes possible the discovery of the idea which underlies or is attached to the feeling.<sup>23</sup> Thus group therapy can be likened to a river: the ripples on the surface correspond to the content below.<sup>24</sup>

When feelings are unlinked to external circumstances there can be an affective split. This split may be a dissociation, denial, repression, rationalisation, or a rending of the self. In severe cases schizophrenia may result. The affective disorder in schizophrenia is characterised by thinking disorder, withdrawal from reality, regressive behaviour and impaired interpersonal relationships.<sup>25</sup> The blunting of affect is primarily a symptom rather than a core pathology. The affective disorder in manic-depressive psychosis is characterised by mood swings, ranging from profound depression to acute mania, with periods of relative normality between psychotic episodes.<sup>26</sup> Hence one might observe the splitting of feelings from reality in manic-depressive psychosis as well as in many other psychiatric disorders.<sup>27</sup>

Feelings, however, are not necessarily linked to external circumstances in an obvious or overt way. Two persons may emotionally respond very differently to a shared situation, each in accordance to the logic of their own psyches. The logic of feelings is idiosyncratic. Understanding this idiosyncrasy is the work of group psychotherapy.

Feelings are a neutral phenomena occurring independently of conscious thought. There is frequently found in popular psychology books a false and unfortunate bifurcation of feelings into positive and negative, good and bad. This crude division is neither realistic nor helpful. Feeling sad in mourning is no more bad than feeling glad in great moments of joy is good. Feelings simply occur and in a context which is both conscious and unconscious. Feelings are invaluablely instructive because they reveal the way we genuinely regard the world, and they do this by linking our external circumstances to our unconscious processes.

Feelings have antecedents. They often replicate the past in a current context. It is the manner and context of a feelings expression that may or may not be deemed appropriate, rather than the feeling itself. This replication of feeling and its expression towards persons other than the ones for whom the feelings were originally intended, has been carefully documented in psychiatric literature in studies of transference and counter-transference.<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, feelings result largely from unconscious processes. As Calvin Hall writes

in his summation of Freudian psychology, feelings result from the psychic energy within the id (a psychoanalytic construct representing the unorganised reservoir of energy derived from a person's drives and instincts<sup>29</sup>) which is perpetually present within the individual.<sup>30</sup> The psyche is the fount of psychic energy and has been likened to a deaf and mute person of genius who, through a variety of creative images, pictures, and metaphors, communicates clearly and loudly.<sup>31</sup>

Yet as Sydney psychiatrist Warwick Williams writes,

One does not have to be a committed Freudian to acknowledge the existence of unconscious mental processes, as these are easy enough to demonstrate through such phenomena as dreams and nightmares, hypnosis and acute psychotic illnesses. It is generally accepted that in what we might loosely choose to refer to as our "unconscious mind" there are, amongst other content, all kinds of unpleasant personally and/or socially unacceptable drives, fantasies and memories, this being a completely normal state of affairs. Anxiety can be usefully conceptualised as an individual's emotional response warning of the possibility that some of this unacceptable unconscious material is on the verge of erupting into either consciousness or action.<sup>32</sup>

Hence feelings "leak" out during group psychotherapy (and other times) via interpersonal interactions. Discerning, interpreting the significance of, and "working through" feelings comprises group therapy.

A third ingredient in the mix is fantasy. In psychiatric terms a fantasy is an imagined sequence of events fulfilling a psychological need.<sup>33</sup> Fantasies stem from feelings and usually relate to facts, though not always in a rational or easily perceived way.

For example, a patient might fantasise about attractive male and female group members having sexual liaisons outside the group. In fact, the individuals in question may be physically attractive, but it is the patient's imaginative interpretation of the facts which have psychological import. From this fantasy a therapist might explore the patient's desire to see

other group members in such a manner. The fantasy might be indicative of feelings of sexual frustration, isolation, rejection, etc. Fantasies combine facts and feelings in idiosyncratic ways. But it is not easy to share fantasies with others, and often group members resist voicing them. The reason behind this reluctance is fear.

Fear is the fourth ingredient in the therapeutic mix. Although fear is a type of feeling, it has prime import such that, for didactic purposes I separate it from other feelings.

American psychiatrist Dr. Gerald Jampolsky asserts in his book **Love is Letting Go of Fear**<sup>34</sup> that the two basic emotions of human beings are fear and love. All other feelings stem from these. In therapy groups fear is manifested in obvious ways: fear of being rejected, of being seen as worthless, of being exposed as vulnerable, of being seen as non-coping, and of being non-normal. Implicit in these fears is a diminishment through self-disclosure.

One therapeutic task is to desensitise group members to the expression of unedited emotion and thereby dismantle members fears of self-disclosure. As Sidney Jourard notes: "The crucial break in schizophrenia is with sincerity, not reality."<sup>35</sup>

It is not easy for patients to dismantle their defence mechanisms. Jourard has researched self-disclosure and his studies indicate that "a person will permit himself to be known when he believes his audience is a man of goodwill" and "that no man can come to know himself except as an outcome of disclosing himself to another person."<sup>36</sup> The dismantling of defences occurs by small steps rather than large leaps. Patients test the therapeutic waters before plunging in.

One technique by which the therapeutic water is tested is the editing of responses. Editing poses a problem, however, if the group is to benefit the patients. Group psychotherapy proves effective when it provides for the here-and-now participation of the patient who engages in self-disclosure.<sup>37</sup> A tendency of patients, however, is to present edited, sanitised, censored versions of their thoughts and feelings. As Jourard writes "Man, perhaps alone of all living forms, is capable of being one thing and seeming from his actions and talk to be something else."<sup>38</sup>

Editing is another significant ingredient and process in group therapy. My clinical impression is that every patient enters group with the unspoken thought "if I say what I really think and feel, I will be rejected!" This notion masks the feeling that the unleashing of one's true feelings may cause devastation among the group. Hence the need to emotionally edit since emotional editing maintains control, harmony and safety. This need for control stems from a fear of what might happen without control. The fear fuelling the fantasy is that the expression of one's unexpurgated emotion will result in isolation, ostracism, and loneliness.

Editing is the patient's attempt to minimise fear by controlling thoughts, feelings, and words. Patients censor consciously and unconsciously the material they present to the group. The feelings beneath their words, however, tend to "leak" out through metaphors, allusions, and stories which contain their here-and-now feelings.

Although Gregory Bateson is not accepted by psychiatrists as a credible authority when commenting on schizophrenia,<sup>39</sup> he makes an interesting observation: schizophrenics typically eliminate from their messages everything that refers explicitly or implicitly to the relationship between themselves and the people they are addressing. Schizophrenics, he says, commonly avoid the first and second person pronouns and thus avoid informing the listener what sort of a message is being transmitted; whether it be literal or metaphoric, ironic or direct. The result is that schizophrenics are likely to have difficulty with all messages and meaningful acts which imply intimate contact between the self and some other. Bateson provides a poignant illustration involving one of his patients which occurred when Bateson was to fly away to a conference: "The patient, unable to say 'I will miss you,' simply said, 'that plane flies awfully slowly....'"<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, I have had patients who speak in anger about the Australian Medical Association, rather than to the doctor sitting next to them in the group, or about the deficiencies of the Uniting Church rather than about the deficiencies of me, the Uniting Church chaplain. Hostility is thus depersonalised; removed from the here-and-now. Containing the feeling gives a patient a feeling of control but can prevent exploration of deeper seated beliefs about the world. Yet if it is true that we only know as much of

ourselves as we feel free to disclose to others, then it is in the process of disclosing ourselves that we find ourselves.

Herein lies the significance of the here-and-now approach. As Slife and Lanyon point out,

The difference is that a nonlinear perspective implies that the group need look no further than the conditions contemporaneous with the event being examined. That is, the focus should be on the "here-and-now" relative to that particular event or gestalt of events, even if this "here-and-now" is viewed in retrospect. The group event did not occur because of some linear cause-effect chain working its way inexorably through the group members. The group event occurred because of the contextual and systemic elements in the group, simultaneous with the event itself. This not only includes behavioural elements, but cognitive and emotional elements as well--indeed, whatever makes up the experiences of the group members at the time of the group event.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mining For Meaning**

Therapy groups are a microcosm of its members' macrocosmic world.<sup>42</sup> Group members embody and act out, both literally and metaphorically, their deepest beliefs about life, themselves and other people.<sup>43</sup> Hence my contention that one's religious life is revealed in the quality, depth, and style of one's interpersonal interactions. One's interactions in a therapy group reflect, embody, or epitomise one's deepest beliefs, assumptions, and cognitions about the world. One's interactional style in a therapy group serves as an interface between the psychodynamic internal cosmos of the person's mind and the external world in which a person lives. The interface of the internal and external is the "coal face" at which group psychotherapy mines for meaning.

The ore mined in group psychotherapy comes in three forms of interpersonal

communication: verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal.

Verbal communication is the usage of words. Para-verbal communication is the expressive sounds which, though not actually words, communicate so very much. The curt "harumph!," quizzical "huh?," and suspicious "hmmmmmm," fall into this category of articulations bearing much more meaning than their brevity suggests. Non-verbal communication primarily concerns bodily display. A therapy group's interactions are punctuated and enhanced by crossed arms, avoidance of eye contact, gestures, moving chairs, subtle shiftings, etc. Non-verbal messages are less consciously controlled than verbal messages and thus reveal more of one's innermost thoughts and feelings. Because non-verbal interactions are less susceptible to internal editing and lie outside one's usual range of visual perception, they provide useful data. For example, the movement of patients' (or therapists') feet in therapy group is often an accurate barometer of group anxiety.

In sum therapy groups encourage interactional creativity by offering opportunities for self-disclosure, interaction, acceptance, insight, catharsis, learning, and the instillation of hope.<sup>44</sup>

### **Forms of Group Therapy**

Before a therapy group coheres and functions as a group it tends to resemble a collection of individuals motivated by narcissistic needs. Group therapist Elaine Cooper Longeran likens such patients to children who grab each others toys, not to deprive another but simply to meet their own personal needs. The task of the group leader is to help the group meet its own narcissistic needs.<sup>45</sup>

Psychologist Meyer Williams writes:

It is the therapist's task to weld this group of suffering strangers into a strong cohesive social and therapeutic body by means of purposive catalytic activities and techniques. Such a collective entity, once genuinely established, provides both a vehicle for increasing and deepening examination of individual feelings and conflicts and an experimental ground for interpersonal development. To

be effective, the group's transaction must occur in a relatively unstructured atmosphere in which free verbal and emotional expression is the cardinal rule, yet in which individual integrity and dignity are also safe-guarded.<sup>46</sup>

Group psychotherapy comes in many forms. There are many types of group therapy<sup>47</sup> and approaches<sup>48</sup> to group therapy. Different leadership styles are appropriate to different type groups and are matched best to different types of illness. Moreover, group therapy is not for all patients; what is good for some is not good for others.<sup>49</sup> Psychoanalytic groups are useful for training therapists but actually harmful for acutely psychotic patients.<sup>50</sup> There are several parameters determining the type of group therapy to be used. The group theory and leadership style employed and referred to throughout this thesis stems from the interpersonal theory of psychiatry as found in the works of Harry Stack Sullivan<sup>51</sup> and more recently popularised by Irvin Yalom.<sup>52</sup>

Therapy groups, however, do have certain similarities. First, they occur within an artificial medium. Although membership of a variety of groups is a natural part of human existence, psychiatric patients such as schizophrenics usually suffer a dearth of such memberships.<sup>53</sup> People with healthy social systems usually have an assortment of friends arising naturally within various contexts: church, work, gym, pub, etc. The mentally ill usually lack these enjoyable, positive, reciprocal human relationships,<sup>54</sup> and therefore have difficulty in becoming "meaningfully engaged in a therapeutic endeavour."<sup>55</sup> A therapy group is contrived to partially remedy the absence of healthy relationships by providing an arena in which some basics of human interrelationships can be recovered. Or as Thurneysen describes it, "the goal of healing is the recovering of that inner freedom, the loss of which determines the nature of the neurotic and psychotic attack."<sup>56</sup> Second, therapy groups allow patients to develop their interpersonal skills within a fail-safe environment.<sup>57</sup> Third, therapy groups employ a leader's manipulation. The leader ensures that the groups are challenging enough to be stimulating without being unduly daunting. This is done by encouraging contact with others, allowing limited expression of emotions, helping patients' reality testing, and giving advice about practical matters.<sup>58</sup>

For example, a group leader might typically manipulate group dynamics by "gentling" group anger<sup>59</sup> in order that members may express safely their repressed, volatile feelings. This manipulation genuinely affirms patient participation and allows the patient to have a positive group experience with other people, something many psychiatric patients lack. In my own practice I half-jokingly refer to the task of leading inpatient therapy groups as akin to hosting a television talk show. The task is: make everyone look good! Ensure that everyone comes across well and is perceived positively by others. Enhance their dignity, especially when they make it difficult to do so.

### **Interpersonal Relations in Group Psychotherapy**

Not being heard or understood by others has significant implications for mental health and personality development. Citing depression as an example, British psychiatrist Michael Rutter notes the association between personality and social development:

It remains uncertain just why antisocial disorder is associated with an increased risk of depression, but many studies have shown that it is. One explanation is probably that the deviant behaviour leads to both stressful interpersonal interactions and social disadvantage, both of which in turn predispose to depression.<sup>60</sup>

Jourard suggests that accurate portrayal of the self to others is an identifying criterion of healthy personality, while neurosis is related to inability to know one's "real self" and to make it known to others.<sup>61</sup>

In therapy groups patients operate under various constraints which become increasingly apparent through the group's interactional process. Therefore it is helpful if patients can view their problems in terms of difficulties experienced in relationships with others.<sup>62</sup> In therapy groups people tend unconsciously to try to re-create their original family relationships in the groups to which they belong<sup>63</sup> and therefore replicate in the present their past

patterns of relating. The here-and-now therapeutic approach reveals one's traditional proven patterns of relating. The adage that people prefer "certain misery to the misery of uncertainty" captures a therapeutic fact: in the stressful situations of human interaction, people behave according to the patterns with which they are most familiar. These patterns, whether deemed good or bad, have been acquired and validated through human experience. These patterns are trusted and relied upon because they have successfully guided the person to where s/he is in life now.

Jourard writes that every maladjusted person is a person who has not made himself known to another human being and in consequence, does not know himself. Nor can he be himself. More than that, he struggles actively to avoid becoming known by another human being.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Anthony Ryle writes:

Most therapists...seek a...fundamental alteration in the person's experience of himself and aim to enhance his capacity to relate to others by facilitating psychodynamic change; that is to say, they aim to enable the patient to complete developmental tasks and to diminish the degree to which he is psychologically defended. In this process, in contrast to the treatment of organic illnesses where the patient desires to be better and the body can be seen as self-healing, the sufferer from psychological distress always has to confront a part of himself actively opposing cure and much therapy consists of the battle against this tendency. This battle is fought out and the patient's change is achieved through his experience of the special social setting and range of interpersonal relationships offered by the therapeutic group. The aim of the group therapist is to provide the conditions and leadership that can best facilitate this process.<sup>65</sup>

This is why group therapy is especially useful for patients whose psychodynamic problems lead to maladaptive interpersonal relationships: these interactions can be observed and explored in the group.<sup>66</sup>

Along similar lines, Jourard sees the aim of psychotherapy not so much as remitting salient symptoms but of altering interpersonal behaviour from the range which generates the symptoms (manipulating self and others) to a pattern which generates and maintains healthy personality.<sup>67</sup>

### **Human Transformation Through Self-Disclosure**

According to Sidney Jourard, psychotherapy is the deliberate attempt to modify a person's behaviour from the range which produces and perpetuates symptoms to a pattern that is socially acceptable. He claims, however, that it has not yet been placed on a scientific basis, i.e., no one theory of psychotherapy has been proven right while conflicting theories are proven wrong.<sup>68</sup>

Group psychotherapy does proceed, however, along lines of scientific inquiry. As American psychiatrist Dr. Lewis Wolberg says of psychotherapy and its practitioners:

Psychotherapy is essentially a re-learning experience in which old, maladjustive patterns are discarded, and new, more constructive ones acquired. There are many avenues of learning. We all possess highly selective and preferred modes of acquiring knowledge. Some of us emulate models with whom we identify and follow the example of authorities we respect. Others resist these identifications and launch out on their own personal trial-and-error experiments. Some people learn by carefully thinking things over and then applying their insights to everyday living. A moment of dramatic awareness can spark the beginning of constructive change that can become permanent if properly reinforced. Other individuals learn by doing, entering randomly into situations and activities, often acting impulsively. If the experience is rewarding, they will repeat it; if it is painful, they learn to avoid it. For people in therapy the guiding hand of a skilled therapist is indispensable in all these learning processes. This is because the learner is constantly retreating from

the pain or the fancied threat of his new adjustment. He incessantly seeks to return to the old, destructive yet familiar defences of his past. Sometimes he is unaware of these patterns in his behaviour. This is where the role of the therapist is valuable. He can help the patient understand how he is projecting into his relationships the same unhealthy drives that have caused him distress in the past. In this way, the therapist can help motivate his patient towards the development of healthier attitudes. The therapeutic relationship operates as a prime learning medium....

The personality of the therapist, which can either enhance or minimise results, is probably the most important element in the complex process of [therapy]. Nobody has ever defined exactly what qualities make for a good...psychotherapist....But a number of characteristics have been found to be important and valuable:

1. sensitivity to the patient's needs, with an ability to detect the areas of difficulty that can be expediently handled;
2. flexibility in approach, which will permit the use of selected techniques designed best to help the existing problems;
3. empathy toward the patient and an ability to communicate one's understanding of his struggles and suffering;
4. capacity to handle one's own personal shortcomings and biases without projecting them onto the patient.<sup>69</sup>

When such an environment or relationship is constructed, human transformation is most likely to occur. In its absence, insightful repetition of habitual responses will re-occur.

This is true not only in terms of behaviour, but in terms of thought as well, for without creative, new thought, the insight necessary to fuel personal transformation is missing.

Group psychotherapy is concerned with relationships. Hence this thesis's focus on the interpersonal theory of psychiatry as described by its originator Harry Stack Sullivan.<sup>70</sup>

To him and his school of thought we now turn.

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## Chapter Six:

*By the crowd they have been broken, by the crowd they shall be healed.*

-- Cody Jones, pioneer group therapist<sup>1</sup>

*Human language is the very place where fellowship breaks down.*

-- Eduard Thurneysen<sup>2</sup>

### The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry

Practical theology and group psychotherapy are concerned with relationships. As a group therapist I am impressed and influenced by the interpersonal theory of psychiatry espoused by the eminent American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan<sup>3</sup> as well as the subsequent work of Dr. Irvin Yalom who is also heavily influenced by Sullivan. Consequently, it behoves us to examine not only Sullivan's and Yalom's notions of the true significance of relationships, but also their insights on the significance of the mechanics by which relationships are made manifest.

Harry Stack Sullivan maintained that personality is almost entirely the product of interaction with other significant human beings, that the human need to be closely related to others is as basic as any biological need and, considering the prolonged period of helpless infancy, equally necessary to survival.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, says Sullivan, one achieves mental health to the extent that one becomes aware of one's interpersonal relationships.<sup>5</sup> The psychiatric cure is the expanding of the self to such final effect that the patient as known to himself is much the same person as the patient behaving to others.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that studying the origins of personality and the origins of social relations is one and the same task.<sup>7</sup> Sullivan's basic assertion has been summarised as: it takes people to make people sick, and people to make people well.<sup>8</sup> Indeed prominent group psychotherapist Irvin Yalom cites studies of bereavement showing surviving spouses having suffered increased incidences of physical illness, mental illness, and greater mortality rate.<sup>9</sup>

Yalom notes Sullivan's usage of the term "parataxic distortions"<sup>10</sup> to describe the proclivity to distort one's perceptions of others. This occurs in interpersonal situations when

one person relates to another not on the basis of the realistic attributes of the other, but wholly or chiefly on the basis of a personification existing chiefly in his/her fantasy. This is similar to the concept of transference<sup>11</sup> but broader in scope. It refers not only to therapeutical but all interpersonal relationships.<sup>12</sup>

Relationships can only ever be perceived "semi-accurately." Australian psychiatrist Dr. Michael Williamson says we half create the reality of our experience of others inside our heads which we then experience as outside us.<sup>13</sup> There is always need to constantly check and re-check our perceptions of relationships because they are always in process. Yalom points out, however, that regardless of the conceptual spectacles worn by the group therapist, each group member's interpersonal style eventually shines through their transactions within the group.<sup>14</sup> Thus group members' beliefs, private notions, and premises about the world become manifested (and "parataxically distorted") through their interpersonal relationships.

Yalom sums up the interpersonal theory of psychiatry in eleven basic tenets:<sup>15</sup>

1. The study of human behaviour is the study of interpersonal relationships; psychiatric symptomatology has both origin and expression in disturbed interpersonal relationships.
2. A psychotherapy group, provided its development is unhampered by severe structural restrictions, evolves into a social microcosm and becomes a miniaturised representation of each person's social universe.
3. Group members, through consensual validation and self-observation, become aware of significant aspects of their personal strengths, limitations, parataxic distortions, and maladaptive behaviours, which elicits unwanted responses from others. Therapy groups help individuals distinguish between objectionable aspects of their behaviour and their picture of themselves as "totally objectionable." Therapy groups make this distinction possible through the encouragement of

accurate feedback.

4. A regular interpersonal sequence occurs: members display behaviour, through feedback and self-observation they appreciate the nature of the behaviour, they realise the impact of the behaviour upon the feelings of others and how this informs opinions that others have of them, and finally they realise how this informs the opinion they have of themselves.
5. Once a person is fully aware of this sequence, s/he becomes aware of the fact that they are responsible for it, and are the author of their interpersonal world.
6. When one is fully and deeply aware of their responsibility for their interpersonal world, they may then begin to grapple with the corollary of this discovery: since they created this world, its only they who can and must alter it.
7. The depth and meaningfulness of this awareness is directly proportional to the amount of affect associated with the sequence. The more real and the more emotionally laden the experience, the more potent is the impact; the more objectified and intellectualised the experience, the less effective the learning.
8. As a result of this awareness, one may gradually change or risk new types of behaviour and expression. The likelihood that change will occur is a function of several factors for the person: motivation for change, amount of personal discomfort and dissatisfaction with current modes of behaviour, involvement in group, need for acceptance by

group, respect and appreciation of other members, and rigidity of character structure and interpersonal style.

9. Change in behaviour may generate a new cycle of interpersonal learning via self-observation and feedback from others. The person appreciates that some feared calamity which had hitherto prevented such behaviour was irrational, and that the new behaviour did not result in such calamities as death, destruction, abandonment, derision, or engulfment.
10. The social microcosm concept is bi-directional: not only does outside behaviour become manifest in group, but behaviour learned in group is eventually carried over into the person's social environment. Thus alterations appear in one's interpersonal behaviour outside the group.
11. Gradually an adaptive spiral is set into motion, at first inside and then outside the group. As one's interpersonal distortions diminish, the ability to form rewarding relationships is enhanced, social anxiety decreases, self-esteem rises, and there is less need to conceal oneself. Others then respond positively to this behaviour, show more approval and acceptance, which further increases self-esteem and enhances further change. Eventually the adaptive spiral achieves such autonomy and efficacy that professional therapy is no longer necessary.

It should be noted, however, that much of psychiatric pathology is organically, genetically, congenitally, or environmentally based. For example, schizophrenia, some major depressions, and manic-depressive disorders, are not primarily psychological in origin.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, relationships are so quick to suffer with the onset of mental illness that they can be an accurate gauge or indicator of mental illness. Redressing the symptomatic manifestations of

the illness does much to facilitate the adaptive spiral Yalom describes above.<sup>17</sup>

### Horizontal and Vertical Axes

A premise of the interpersonal theory of psychiatry is that those entering group psychotherapy suffer from a difficulty in maintaining and establishing satisfactory interpersonal relationships.<sup>18</sup> On this level, group therapy is a thoroughly human enterprise. Group therapy deals with human needs, wants, and desires, and attempts to meet these needs, wants and desires via human interaction. On this level group therapy is a horizontal endeavour, situating individual to individual as peers, then finding both the source and solution to the individual's problem through interaction among peers.

Successful group therapy is also a vertical endeavour. It confronts, questions, and generally examines the nature of the Ultimate. This vertical orientation is essentially existential in character, i.e., dealing with the meaning of life, the boundaries of one's responsibilities within life both for one's self and others, and personal mortality.

Practical theologian Jacob Firet makes a similar distinction in describing the church's diaconic forms of churchly praxis (vertical subjects) and the church's functioning and pastoral role-fulfilment in those forms (horizontal cross-section of these subjects).<sup>19</sup>

In sum, group therapy and practical theology possess vertical and horizontal dimensions. Group therapy examines interpersonal (horizontal) relationships, as a means of resolving existential (vertical) issues; whereas practical theology examines the nature of one's (vertical) relationship to God but also the "coming of God in ways other than those of ecclesiastical institutions"<sup>20</sup> (horizontal). One such non-ecclesiastical institution is a psychotherapy group.

The intersection of the horizontal and vertical axes is the junction of group therapy and practical theology. We examine this junction by studying the interplay between experience and the context in which the experience occurs.

The juncture of horizontal and vertical dimensions is seen in psychiatry's quest for experiential elucidation of the human condition. Group psychotherapy reveals its own quest for meaning in its name: *psycho*, derived from psyche and meaning of the human soul,

spirit or mind; and *therapy*, meaning curative, healing or remedial. Hence psychotherapy means the cure of the mind. Group psychotherapy, as a specific mode of treatment employed by psychiatry, strives to improve the coping capacity of the individual. Yalom says,

The goals of therapy have never been stated more succinctly than in Freud's "to be able to love and to work." Some would, today, add a third, "to play," and others would hope, too, that the patient would be able to love himself, to allow others to love him, to be more flexible, and to search for and trust his own values.<sup>21</sup>

Existential curative factors<sup>22</sup> have been frequently ignored in studies on group therapy and deserve far more consideration than they generally receive. Yalom's studies reveal existential factors to be among the stronger curative factors in group therapy.<sup>23</sup>

For example, a study performed by Yalom and colleagues disclosed that important but painful truths about existence are learned by patients in the course of group therapy, and that they value this knowledge. These truths included: awareness of the limits to guidance and support they could receive from others; realisation that the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of their lives was theirs alone; knowledge that they could be close to others, but only up to a certain point, beyond which no one could accompany them; an increased courage in facing the issue of mortality. These therapeutic issues Yalom lumped together as existential factors; non-specific criteria added as an afterthought in the course of the study. Yet existential factors were revealed to be of crucial importance in members' evaluation of the group.<sup>24</sup>

Existential curative factors are important for the pastoral dimension of practical theology as well. Firet writes that the pastoral role can be defined as helping people arrive at clear discernment and is aimed at change in the human condition by the kind of renewal in a person's functioning which leads to his being able to discern God's will.<sup>25</sup>

We may also say: pastoral role-fulfilment, as intermediary of God's coming in his word, serves the revelation of the truth, in order that we may live and walk in it. People often live in a dream world; they have an image of themselves, of others, of situations and relationships, which is not true....For that reason their self-determinations are inadequate, out of accord with reality and "the object." They allow so many irrelevant factors to blur their judgements: fear, self-protection, the desire to dominate. It is the pastor's job to join with the other-in-the-pastoral-relationship in a search...in which [the other person] can determine himself with objective realism....In this activity the pastor's focus is *agogic*, i.e., aimed at the other person's self-based functioning.<sup>26</sup>

## Self-Actualisation

Group psychotherapy proffers a process by which one may qualitatively enhance one's life. This process is frequently called "self-actualisation," a phrase attributed to psychologist Abraham Maslow.<sup>27</sup> Maslow described self-actualising people succinctly: They are involved in a cause outside their skin, devoted to and working at something; and commingle work with joy in service of a cause.<sup>28</sup>

There are, says Maslow, eight steps towards self-actualisation:<sup>29</sup>

1. experiencing fully, with absorption
2. thinking of life as a procession of choices; self-actualisation is an ongoing process
3. realising that there is a self to be actualised, and letting it emerge
4. when in doubt, be honest rather than not

5. experiencing fully and with self-awareness; thus allowing one's tastes to emerge and be reflective of one, i.e., being courageously expressive of one's self rather than afraid
6. viewing self-actualisation not as an end in itself but a process; i.e., being as good at something as one can be
7. peak experiences (moments of ecstasy and liberation) are transient and uncontrollable, i.e., one cannot dictate their occurrence, but one can set up and maximise their occurrence
8. finding out who one is entails the painful process of giving up defences; repression is no way of solving problems.

Finally, says Maslow, the process of self-actualisation entails the process of "resacralising," i.e., a willingness to see a person under the aspect of eternity (from Spinoza). Maslow gives the poignant illustration of the young medical student who, dissecting a brain, appreciates it only as an organ and fails to appreciate it as the source of song, poetry, and words, and thus misses the inter-connectedness of things.<sup>30</sup>

Self-actualisation is less a great moment or feat; and more a process of little accessions accumulated in time. Self-actualisation is something all people experience at some time in life, but what sets veteran self-actualisers apart from neophytes? The two most important variables are, according to Maslow, intensity and frequency in attaining self-actualising experiences.<sup>31</sup>

It ought to be remembered that self-actualisation is not a target to be aimed at and hit through diligent effort. As Victor Frankl says, self-actualisation is not man's ultimate destination, nor even his primary intention:

Like happiness, self-actualisation is an effect. Only to the extent to which

man fulfils a meaning out there in the world does he fulfil himself. If he sets out to actualise himself rather than fulfil a meaning, self-actualisation immediately loses its justification.<sup>32</sup>

Self-actualisation is the unintentional effect of life's intentionality. In accordance with Maslow's view, Frankl contends that one loses any ground for self actualisation if one cares for it.<sup>33</sup> Frankl links excessive concern with self-actualisation to a frustration of the will to meaning: "As the boomerang comes back to the hunter who has thrown it only if it has missed its target, man, too, returns to himself and is intent upon self-actualisation only if he has missed his mission."<sup>34</sup>

Group psychotherapy patients often exhibit an obsessive introspection or teeth-gritting effort to actualise themselves. Irvin Yalom echoes Frankl that self-actualisation must ensue and cannot be successfully pursued, i.e., it is a derived phenomenon occurring only when we transcend ourselves; when we forget ourselves through being absorbed in someone or something outside ourselves. Says Yalom, therapy groups implicitly teach members this lesson and provide an experience to counter their solipsistic perspectives.<sup>35</sup>

### **Being There and In-Between**

In group psychotherapy the solution to the patient's problem lies largely in the therapist's being with the patient. Presence is the hidden agent of help in all forms of group therapy. Yalom cites the poignant words of a patient, in which she likened herself to a lonely ship in the dark, who knows that even though no physical mooring can be made, nonetheless finds it enormously comforting to see lights of other ships sailing the same water.<sup>36</sup>

Firet stresses a similar point in asserting that

*equihuman* treatment of another implies the recognition of her as an agent and of the concomitant responsibility she bears for the management of her life.

It is precisely this recognition-in-fact which is so important in the kind of

nurture which is directly related to the process of humanization, the process in which a person begins to function independently as a spiritual being.<sup>37</sup>

Psychoanalyst Neville Symington emphasises therapy's process. To him there is no doubt that the psychoanalytic process occurs within an interpersonal interaction, in the absence of which there is substituted an empty ritual.<sup>38</sup> He says:

Psychoanalysis is a method of investigating the unconscious mind, and its particular focus is on the inner world. There are other ways of understanding the individual's manifest or external behaviour. A sociologist would account for it in terms of the social system of which the individual is a part. An economist would understand it in terms of the economic structure in which the person is situated. A theologian would stress the person's values, ideals and so on. The psychoanalyst attempts to understand manifest behaviour and communications, too, but in terms of the individual's inner conflicts and phantasies. Yet psychoanalysis does not have possession of the whole truth, so now let me dwell a little on the nature of truth....Truth is a reality....It cannot be measured but it does exist; the fact that it is difficult to define does not detract from this. Truth does not exist though as some eternal idea, as Plato thought, but as a reality that exists *in between* [Symington's italics]; in between two persons seeking it, in between psychoanalysis, sociology, psychology, economics and religion....the individual is always in relation to truth and is in a state of *potentia*. By *potentia* I mean a state of movement towards.<sup>39</sup>

Firet says that in the pastoral role it is the truth which must persuade but that the truth becomes manifest in words spoken by a human being whose words constitute a "selection" from the world.<sup>40</sup> Symington says this truth is not to be identified with insight:

...truth is grasped in dialogue with another or others: it emerges in between....Truth in psychoanalysis emerges between the analyst and the patient, and in the moment of understanding there is a change in both....This truth between analyst and process thought is arrived at by mutual discovery....Psychoanalysis does not have the truth, but rather tries to repair the capacity to arrive at truth.<sup>41</sup>

Truth, and its reality, exists in a processional in-between state, and that which is in-between can never be possessed.<sup>42</sup> Jacob Furet makes a similar point in asserting that perfect equals have nothing to share with each other:

There is a typical asymmetry in relationships like that between nurturer and nurturee, teacher and student, pastor and parishioner. But this does not mean that the person who is the growth promoter in each of these relationships does not appear as equal in the qualities which express and make for humanity. If this equality were not present and presupposed, there would be no sense in speaking of asymmetry. The term refers to a disparity which exists on the basis of a fundamental and essential equality.<sup>43</sup>

Thus in a typically asymmetrical, growth promoting relationship the growth promoter will

experience and express his equality in accord with the nature of the relationship. But always the idea is this: the nurturer in a nurturing relationship or the pastor in a pastoring relationship will be present as equal and not as the representative of perfect knowledge, an inviolable order, or the absolute truth.<sup>44</sup>

Firet sums up by saying:

A robot cannot be pastorally or psychotherapeutically active. In these relationships the humanity of the growth promoter serves the healing or the reorientation of the humanity of the other. The growth promoter who does not enter the relationship as equal, does not enter the relationship; he not only does not come close to the other; he cannot even maintain distance; he is simply not there.<sup>45</sup>

Whitehead's assertion that the process is the reality, is no less true of group psychotherapy than theology. It is interesting to note the overlap among Yalom's findings on existential curative factors, Symington's description of psychoanalysis, and process theologian Randolph Miller's following reflections on religious experience:<sup>46</sup>

As we reflect on religious experience we may interpret the process working through us as creativity or the creative order. To verify this, there are certain results to look for:

1. A new perspective comes from interrelations with other individuals and groups that leads to an increase of qualitative meaning and new values in our lives, so that our range of knowing and valuing is expanded.
2. Our various perspectives are brought together, resulting in an expanding range and depth of mutually sustaining activities, as our values are modified and then integrated into our existing value structure.
3. Our appreciable world is seen in a broader perspective, especially when there is a moment of new disclosure in an extraordinary

experience.

4. We experience a growth of the sense of community as interpersonal relationships are transformed and deepened. These four events are so locked together that they are seen as a single process of creativity.

Or as Fierst points out, when a person has heard a word and gained some new understanding, however trivial, that person is no longer exactly the same as before.<sup>47</sup> Through group psychotherapy one's existential situation may be reinterpreted through the re-shaping of one's existential values, thoughts, and attitudes. In such a way one comes to grip with life. The transition can be, in Whitehead's words, "from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion."<sup>48</sup>

### **Bases of Practical Theology and Group Psychotherapy**

A task of both religion and group psychotherapy is to help people cope with the mundane, everyday, typical, stresses which, because of their chronic nature, impair human functioning. Daily human functioning is a touchstone for practical theology and psychotherapy. When either practical theology or psychotherapy fails to deal adequately with daily human functioning, it flounders as a discipline. Given the dwindling church attendances in Western societies such as Australia<sup>49</sup> and the abundance of psychotherapies,<sup>50</sup> it is easy to see which best serves the market of human need. As sociologist Peter Kaldor, the research officer for the Uniting Church in Australia, says, "The Protestant Church [in Australia] is not addressing the realities of people's lives."<sup>51</sup>

For practical theology to be relevant it must respond to deep human need on the level at which that need emerges. For practical theology to have integrity it must possess a scientific method for obtaining and gauging results. As an operational science, practical theology becomes a methodological study of humanity which remains open to receiving insights from other disciplines.

Dutch practical theologian Jacob Furet reminds us:

Theology is not only the study of the knowledge of God; it is also the study of the process of getting to know God, of the events which happen between God and human beings, and between persons, with a view to the process of getting to know, and knowing God. In other words, theology's field of study embraces all factors essential to knowing God, functions of his revelation and his companionship with us human beings, including the functioning of the faith-community, pastoral role-fulfilment, and pastoral communication.<sup>52</sup>

Ensuring the relevance of practical theology requires a vehicle which functions religiously and psychotherapeutically; a vehicle to mediate "the coming of God to man." Group therapy is one such vehicle.

### **Group Therapy And The Four Pastoral Functions**

Practical theology is concerned with "caring as a communicative act."<sup>53</sup> The pastoral function of practical theology is seen in many forms, of which group psychotherapy is but one, and as Van Arkel notes, it is common theological practice to make use of the methods and gains of other sciences.<sup>54</sup> Hence in order for group therapy to be "caring as a communicative act" it must fulfil the four basic pastoral functions.

Psychotherapy groups employ curative factors<sup>55</sup> which accord with the four pastoral functions of healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling.<sup>56</sup>

First, research indicates that group therapy heals.<sup>57</sup> Group therapy aims to overcome impairment and restore to a new wholeness. In healing, the wholeness sought is not simple restoration but an integration on a higher spiritual level than previously experienced.<sup>58</sup>

Second, group therapy sustains people. It constructs a safe environment in which risk-taking is encouraged.<sup>59</sup> Anxiety is always experienced in personal growth but it needs to be modulated.<sup>60</sup> Group therapy allows participants to doff old ways and don new ways

of interrelating with others.<sup>61</sup>

Departing from the accustomed to the unaccustomed requires courage, often because the process of change initiates grieving. Group therapy sustains people in the midst of this by assisting them to gain contact with their inner hidden resources and to "make friends with their defences."<sup>62</sup>

Group therapy also consoles people. It encourages loss of the false and discovery of the true. It helps explore consciously the meaning of loss.<sup>63</sup> Group therapy allows consolidation by participants by providing a testing ground for reality and a feedback mechanism in which one's view of the world can be re-thought, re-lived and modified.

Third, group therapy guides people. In pastoral terms, guidance assumes that useful wisdom, which edifies and illuminates the meaning and direction of one's life, can be made available within the framework of the helping act. The help itself may come from the client, helper, shared cultural values, etc.<sup>64</sup>

Guidance as a pastoral function does not mean developing ethical principles for their own sake or for a general application to the process of living. Instead, guidance refers specifically to a decision-shaping wisdom forged in the heat of specific moments. Guidance facilitates the use of wisdom in particular situations. The primary focus of guidance is the troublesome choice at hand. Its secondary focus, if necessary, is morality.<sup>65</sup>

Finally group therapy helps redeem people. Redemption is the onwards and upwards aspect of group psychotherapy and in which the sufferer is brought into hopeful living wherein a positive approach to life is recovered. Clebsch and Jaekle point out that redemption entails an embracing of the loss and a regrouping of resources in order to build an ongoing life that once more pursues its fulfilment and destiny on a new basis.<sup>66</sup> The finding of meaning within suffering, or the extraction of hope from suffering, is the redemptive process.

Through this redemptive process decisions are forged and guidance emerges from specific situations. This process is equally important to theology and group psychotherapy. Conventional, traditional theology tends to propagate the notion of a static, immutable God. This notion is contrary to both human knowledge and experience, particularly in science.

For theology to be relevant to humanity, it must incorporate fully both the insights of science and the lessons taught by human experience. Since science and human experience are themselves characterised by the successful incorporation of change, theology must not do less if it is to be useful. The pastoral task of extracting hope from suffering has theological significance. Process theologians John Cobb and David Griffin assert that theology's task is to frame a creative synthesis which includes the complex truth in a larger whole that makes for life.<sup>67</sup> In process theology, suffering is explained by Whitehead's conception of divine creativity in the world as centring around the notion that God provides each actuality with an initial aim.<sup>68</sup> Hence Whitehead's statement that "God is the principle of concretion." This impulse is initially felt by the occasion as the urge to actualise the best possibility open to it, given its concrete situation. But the initial aim does not automatically become the subject's own aim; rather this subjective aim is a product of its own decision. The subject may choose to actualise the initial aim, but it may also choose from among other real possibilities open to it. Although God seeks to sway each occasion toward the possibility which provides maximal fulfilment, inferior possibilities may be selected which can, in turn, result in suffering. God simply cannot control the finite occasion's self-actualisation. Divine creative activity involves risk. Since God is not in complete control of the world's events, the occurrence of genuine evil is not incompatible with God's beneficence toward all creatures, and suffering becomes as real an actuality as joy. This is why the advance into new wholeness is a journey fraught with uncertainty.<sup>69</sup>

The uncertain journey towards wholeness is not a linear progression. It can be seen in group therapy where

Extraordinary interaction does not progress in a linear fashion nor in a circular one. It is characterised by a discontinuous, instantaneous, and all-embracing experience that brings the person in touch with the paradox of change and stability, by transcending it or by getting caught in it. When the group becomes aware of its unity, creativity, and energy (or of lacking these), a truly intense and meaningful communication arises.<sup>70</sup>

Thus a therapy group becomes a metaphor in microcosm. As we have seen in previous chapters, the group is a microcosm for persons within the group. Group members act out (consciously or unconsciously) certain possibilities of behaviour; gain feedback as to the impact these behaviours have upon others; and then experiment with new and initially uncomfortable behaviours. In this manner the process of self-actualisation is seen unfolding in a therapy group. One's initial aim --that way of being which provides a person with maximal benefits-- can be pursued actively within a therapy group. Hence a therapy group facilitates and provides for non-linear, discontinuous, extraordinary interaction by revealing the "costs and benefits" of interactional possibilities.

The self-reflective loop found in therapy groups has particular significance for both group psychotherapy and practical theology. We continue our examination of the self-reflective process in the following chapter through the metaphors of film, music and mythology.

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1. quoted by Mansell Pattison, *Pastor and Parish: a systems approach* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p.16. No reference provided.
  2. Thurneysen, p.116
  3. Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry and The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*
  4. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* p.20 and Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry; The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*
  5. Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* p.207
  6. *Ibid.*, p.237
  7. Michael Rutter, "Temperament, Personality and Personality Disorder" *British Journal of Psychiatry* v.150 (1987) p.449
  8. J.S.Rutan & W.N.Stone, *Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy* (Lexington, MA: Collamore Press, 1984). Similar thoughts are expressed by family therapist J.C.Wynn: "By the family you were broken: by the family you will be healed." In J.C.Wynn, *Family Therapy in Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) p.30
  9. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.22
  10. *Ibid.*, p.21 and Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* p.92 and Sullivan, *Interpersonal Theory* pp.28-9, 304-5
  11. O. Fenichel offers the following definition of the transference process:  
  
The patient misunderstands the present in terms of the past; and then instead of remembering the past, he strives, without recognising the nature of his action, to relive the past and to live it more satisfactorily than he did in childhood. He "transfers" past attitudes to the present.  
  
From *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (NY: W.W.Norton & Co. 1943) p.29. Quoted in Wilson & Kniesl, p.150
  12. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.20

13. private correspondence with Dr. Michael Williamson, Consulting Psychiatrist to Westmead Hospital, Sydney, Australia July 1990.
14. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.30
15. *Ibid.*, p.39-41
16. This point was confirmed afresh to me via private correspondence and through working with Dr. Michael Williamson, Consulting Psychiatrist to Westmead Hospital, Sydney, Australia July 1990.
17. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.39-41
18. *Ibid.*, p.290-1
19. Firet, p.12
20. *Ibid.*, p.xi
21. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.368
22. E.g., recognition that life is sometimes unjust and unfair, that there is no escape from some of life's pain and death; that ultimately one faces life alone; facing the basic issues of life and death; learning that one has to take ultimate responsibility for one's life regardless of how much support and guidance is provided by others. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p. 85
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p.87
25. Firet, p.221
26. *Ibid.*, p.221-2. Firet derives *agogy* from the Greek word referring to the concrete activity of guidance (p.100) which, he says, is itself is a creative process. (pp.99 & 225-30)
27. Abraham H.Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books 1976) pps.40-51
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* p.97
32. Victor Frankl, *The Will to Meaning* (London: Souvenir Press, 1969) p.38
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.14
36. *Ibid.*, p.91
37. Firet, p.255
38. Symington, p.11
39. *Ibid.*, p.16-17
40. Firet, p.279

41. Symington, p.18-23
42. Ibid., p.24
43. Firet, p.162
44. Ibid., p.163
45. Ibid., p.164
46. Miller, *This We Can Believe* p.49-50
47. Firet, p.94
48. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* p.6
49. In Australia, for example, the number of people who claim no religion has climbed from 6.7% in 1971 to 12.7% in 1986. By its own statistics\* the Uniting Church in Australia has dropped in membership by 19% (from 402,188 in 1982 to 323,947 in 1990). The Anglican Church in Australia has lost to the Roman Catholic Church its traditional lead as the nominal denomination of preference for most Australians. The Catholic Church now claims the allegiance of 26.1% of Australia's population compared to 23.9% for the Anglican Church.  
  
Statistical sources: *1986 Census*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Australia; *1989 National Social Science Survey* conducted by the Research Centre for Social Science at the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; \*as reported by L.Boylan "Many Votes but a Uniting Cause" *Financial Review* Dec.19, 1991, p.11
50. Robert A. Harper counted 36 in his *Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy: 36 Systems* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959)
51. Helen Pit, "Changing of the god" *The Bulletin* (Sydney: Consolidated Press, 1992) p.40
52. Firet, p.5
53. Jan T. de Jongh van Arkel, in Pieterse, De Jongh van Arkel, Ackermann, *Practical Theology PTA301-4* (Unisa 1986) p.28
54. Jan T. de Jongh van Arkel, *Practical Theology PTB302-A: "Pastoral care for specific situations"* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1983) p.97
55. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.87
56. Clebsch & Jaekle, p.32-65
57. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" pp.259-78 and Lieberman, "Understanding How Groups Work" pp.31-52
58. Clebsch & Jaekle, p.33
59. Vannicelli, p.308
60. Matano & Yalom, p.276
61. Lipsius, p.318
62. Ibid., p.320
63. Fyfe Bahrey, Mary McCallum, William Piper, "Emergent Themes and Roles in Short-Term Loss Groups" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.3 (1991) p.329-345
64. Clebsch & Jaekle, p.50
65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., p.48
67. John Cobb, & David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) p.143
68. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* pps.105, 224, 244.
69. Cobb & Griffin, p.53; Whitehead, *Process and Reality* pps.108, 224, 244-5
70. Bert Overlaet, "Interaction Analysis: meaningless in the face of relevance" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.3 (1991) p.350

## Chapter Seven:

*Vocatus, sive non vocatus, Deus aderit.*  
(*"God will be present whether called in or not."*)

-- inscription over Carl Jung's door at Kussnacht<sup>1</sup>

### Janus And Jazz

What Dr. Marsha Vannicelli of the Harvard Medical School says of therapists can also be said of practical theologians/pastors:

the most effective therapist will be the one who can maintain a continuously self-reflective stance, examining his or her own feelings and attitudes in response to the patient. In the interaction between the patient and therapist it is essential continuously to monitor the dynamic process--what the patient projects, what belongs to the therapist, and what is the interface or interaction between the two.<sup>2</sup>

Remaining self-reflective is essential for success in both group psychotherapy (for patients and therapists) and practical theology. This issue is addressed in this chapter through the metaphors of film, music, and mythology. I turn to art for analogies to human experience because I believe art rather than science best represents the whole of the human spirit. Science is necessary for a full and proper understanding of the human situation, as practical theology attests, but it is no accident that Alfred North Whitehead described God as the "poet of the world"<sup>3</sup> rather than the scientist of the world. This, incidentally, accords with Ephesians 2:10 which attests that we are created as God's "poems" (in the original Greek) or "workmanship" or "handiwork" (Ephesians 2:10, RSV and NEB respectively). A more conventional, scientific approach to group therapy and theology is pursued in the subsequent chapter.

Whitehead said that the aim of science is to seek the simplest explanation of complex facts, but that we ought not err by thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is

the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher, he said, should be: seek simplicity and distrust it.<sup>4</sup>

Psychotherapist Irvin Yalom reminds us that, as in any philosophical system, psychological constructs are created for our semantic convenience. Constructs justify their existence only by virtue of their explanatory powers. The explanation gives us a feeling of mastery over something previously unknown.<sup>5</sup>

In the spirit of Whitehead's and Yalom's comments, and because life is deeper than the logic of science alone, I turn to mythology, film and music in order to illustrate the self-reflective process found in practical theology, and group therapy.

### **Janus-Style Theology: beginnings, endings...**

According to systematic theologian John Burkhart, Schleiermacher's writings suggest that theological reflections upon thought and action are not finally separable. The "theoretical" and the "practical" are simply distinguishable "sides" of a single reality.<sup>6</sup>

Jacob Firet writes that

In its references to interaction social psychology has in mind that back-and-forth movement which is present in almost all behaviour. Of the process in general one cannot say that it goes anywhere or that it can fail or succeed. There are various situations, however, in which people do seek interaction for specific reasons. They simply want to establish a relationship or they have in mind a goal they wish to reach by means of mutual activity. In such a concrete situation it may happen that the interaction process moves in the intended direction and the actions of the partners are appropriate both for each other and for their aim. In that case, one could speak of convergent interaction. It may also happen that in the course of the process the two actors drift apart or away from their common aim; then the interaction process is divergent. These phenomena of convergence and divergence occur over

and over in the situation of interaction around pastoral role-fulfilment.<sup>7</sup>

In order to better illustrate this important point, I employ the following imagery of the ancient Roman god Janus as expounded upon by practical theologian Laurence J. O'Connell.<sup>8</sup>

Janus presided over doors and gates, or over beginnings and endings. He was commonly represented with two faces looking in opposite directions, and from him is derived the name for the month of January. To be Janus-faced therefore means to be two-faced, but without the present-day connotation of deceit. Overlooking beginnings and endings allows Janus to serve as an appropriate symbol for both practical theology and group therapy. Janus embodies the self-reflective stance.<sup>9</sup>

Janus is two-faced. He sees beginnings, the past from whence we come; and endings, the future towards which we head. Janus sees where we have been and where we are going, and is therefore in the best position to see how the past (beginning) influences the future (ending). From his distinct perspective Janus sees how the past contributes to the present and future; how beginnings link to endings. Janus is like a hinge: operating in the here-and-now but swinging open to both the past and the future.<sup>10</sup>

.....and in between.

Janus functions as a theological intermediary. O'Connell juxtaposes pastoral theology Janus-like between ecclesial and systematic theology. O'Connell sees ecclesial theology as activity born of "pew people," i.e., the practising Christians whose religious faith informs and influences their everyday actions. This includes the ordained minister who becomes a steward of ecclesial theology because s/he is an active participant in the faith community giving birth to it.<sup>11</sup> Thus action and thought, in reciprocal relation, are both generative of meaning and truth.<sup>12</sup>

Pastoral theology's twin functions, according to O'Connell, are to reflect and regulate. Pastoral theology takes the data provided by ecclesial theology, then organises, describes and

interprets it. Pastoral theology then links with systematic theology. Systematic theology's task is to articulate the experience mediated to it from the pew people (i.e., the ecclesia) through pastoral theology, in coherent terms consistent with Scripture. To complete the cycle, pastoral theology receives back from systematic theology its structured articulation of human experience in context of the divine, and engages in its other function of communicating the insights gained to the ecclesia.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, according to O'Connell, to maintain the self-reflective stance pastoral theology operates as a Janus-like hinge opening up to both the people in the pews who create practical ecclesial theology, and the academicians who devise systematic theology. Pastoral theology keeps one Janus-like face on grass roots theology evolving in local parishes, and the other face on the codification of that experience. One limitation of O'Connell's model, however, is that it appears to lapse into Schleiermacher's error of viewing practical theology as a set of techniques or a mechanism by which real theology is implemented, and is therefore less worthy of scientific study. Bearing this objection to O'Connell in mind, I would simply emphasise the essence of O'Connell's model: practical theology captures the processional and evolutionary nature of theology, specifically as it relates to the average, "everyday person."

### **Janus and Practical Theology: a film in process**

Life contains not only beginnings and endings, but also a "to and fro" rhythm, a "coming-ness" and "going-ness." Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker's contention that death, the ultimate perishing, elicits within us an anxiety so powerful that it fuels the process of becoming,<sup>14</sup> accords with Whitehead's philosophy. To defend against the notion of death is to marshal one's psychic resources in a different way. Thus fear of perishing may indirectly spark the drive to actualise human potential.

A practical theology that does not capture the "to-ness" and "fro-ness" of life fails to recognise or take seriously the essence of reality: change. Hence any practical theology not incorporating beginnings and endings, *'a la* Janus, renders itself partially irrelevant by

focusing on snapshot pictures of existence, rather than the context of the ever-evolving whole. It is like selecting a single frame from a reel of motion picture film and deducing from it the plot, language, and meaning of the entire film.

For this reason it is helpful to conceive of therapy groups as organisms in which one can observe and modify the "becomings" and "perishings" of its constituent parts. In a therapy group one may observe how one's beginnings (the past) influence one's appropriation of the here-and-now.

To understand a cinema film one must examine it as a totality. Each frame contributes to the film's meaning. Renowned films are often noted for the economy they possess: each scene, line of dialogue, and frame contributes to the film's development in an efficient, constructive manner. This attribute is also shared by viable practical theology. A viable practical theology is like a fine film in that it is composed of constituent elements (frames) which contribute to it by linking the beginning to the ending in such a way as to preserve and develop continuity between the two. Similarly, a Janus-style practical theology combines human experience with systematic theology and provides continuity between the two. This combining, however, ought not reduce practical theology to a mere appliance of systematic theology, for this would be to repeat Schleiermacher's error. Instead practical theology scientifically investigates the entire process of the linkage in such a way that incorporates both human experience and systematic theology. The simple linkage of human experience to systematic theology by practical theology is but one small and necessary aspect of practical theology's larger function and purpose.

A beginning and ending inform each other because they are inextricably linked. If beginning and ending stand independently without having their meanings diminished, then they are precisely that: independent entities loosely joined by a slight connecting thread which, if severed, does not negate them. A viable practical theology, like a well crafted film, functions as a whole rather than a series of aligned, independent entities. A viable practical theology is not composed of vignettes.

Neither is a therapy group composed simply of discrete interactions linked sequentially. Rather it is the evaluation of the interaction which reveals the theological dimension of

group members. This is the essential similarity of group therapy to practical theology.

Neither practical theology nor a cinema film is static. Films develop according to the internal logic of the script,<sup>15</sup> yet there is much in making cinema that is uncontrolled. As famous director Orson Welles is reputed to have said, directing a film consists largely of presiding over accidents.<sup>16</sup>

Practical theology also incorporates diverse influences (e.g., episodes of human experience, reflections and interpretations of that experience, input from religious thinkers and writings, etc.) which are in and of themselves not definite but mutable. A practical theology is an open system because the input to the system changes constantly. That change is limited only by the height, depth, width and breadth of Christ's love and human experience. Hence the internal logic of a practical theology must incorporate the changing nature of the input.

### **Janus-Style Group Therapy: through hinged doors**

Group therapy also operates Janus-style. Group interactions of patients form the therapeutic equivalent of ecclesial theology's pew people activity. In both practical theology and group therapy these activities originate among people on the "grass roots" level and result from a belief system which influences a person's everyday actions. I contend that in all human behaviour contains underlying philosophic/theologic notions about God, the world, other humans, and one's self are constantly at work and can be revealed. The process of revelation is, I believe, the substance of both practical theology and group therapy.

In group therapy a collection of behaviours and words provides the data which an individual organises into a way of relating in the here-and-now. This here-and-now method of group psychotherapy focuses on those reactions that transpire within the therapy session itself and provides two major justification for its use: valid data collection and personal awareness and engagement.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Michael Ferencik of the Duke University Medical Center (USA) concludes:

In sum, the here-and-now attempts to make group members more fully aware

of the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional dimensions of their responses as they occur in a social context, more fully to understand and accept the reactions of others, and then actually to engage in a more meaningful way with them. This method demands coming to a greater awareness of encounters with others and then examining those responses that are often ignored, denied, or rationalised.<sup>18</sup>

In therapy groups there is an interpersonal component in all symptomatology.<sup>19</sup> Group members instinctively re-enact past patterns and then, with the therapist's aid, reflect on these patterns in order to gain insight into their significance.<sup>20</sup> Such insight, in turn, prompts new behaviours. Group therapy operates Janus-like: linking beginnings to endings, locating causal connections between the two, and functioning in the here-and-now as a hinge joining the past to the future.

Representations of the god Janus were usually found over doorways in ancient Rome, to symbolise his watching over comings and goings.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it is the "comings" and "goings" which comprise group therapy. A patient "comes" into new life through new ways of interrelating and "goes" from the former ways of interrelating. The therapy treats not only the manifesting symptom but the underlying interpersonal pathology.<sup>22</sup> Through group therapy patients can leave behind familiar but dissatisfying ways of interrelating and enter the "door" of untried ways of interrelating.

Perhaps the core of group psychotherapy consists of alerting a person to the choices they have, as distinguished from the choices they perceive themselves as having. As Firet writes, "Making a personal choice is a more existential experience for a person in process of becoming than conforming himself to the choices of another."<sup>23</sup> Group therapy helps reveal how a person's past contributes to the way they interact here-and-now, while reflecting back to them the results of that style of interrelating. The therapy group is an arena in which intrapsychic conflicts and issues are acted out via interpersonal means.<sup>24</sup>

Thus a self-reflective loop operates within therapy groups: intrapsychic issues are manifested in interpersonal relations, which stimulates various responses from other members

in the group, who in turn reflect back to the individual the effects of his/her behaviour. The symptomatology present through group interaction is acquired from an early age and made more sophisticated over the years. Psychiatrist Lewis Wolberg writes:

Childhood experiences, particularly relationships with parents and siblings, have a formative influence and prejudice the attitudes, values, feelings and behaviour of the individual as an adult. The imprints can be indelible and affect the way a person responds not only to other people but the way he feels about himself. Because the most important formative experiences occur in very early childhood, they may be forgotten, or remain hazy, or be dissociated from the fears and anxieties with which they were originally linked. Yet they continue to influence faulty ways of thinking and acting in later life.<sup>25</sup>

When the simple repetition of past behavioural patterns no longer works, i.e., when the repeated behaviour is now somehow inappropriate and in fact penalises the person from attaining greater satisfaction in life, a person may seek group therapy.

Based on my clinical experience, this is true of therapy group members whether they be psychiatric inpatients or individuals with no history of mental illness. Though the latter individuals may not require hospitalisation, their successful personas can mask deep senses of insufficiency. Sadly, the first public hint that there is a damaged inner self may be a failed--or successful--suicide.

Members of both inpatient clinical groups and non-clinical populations often complain of feeling stuck (i.e., fixed unhappily in a way of being, style of living, or way of interrelating) with no perceived alternative for change. Patients often have difficulty explaining this stuck feeling but from my observations, a fitting analogy is that of an actor fighting against typecasting and stereotyping.

## Acting the Part

Through frequent casting in similar roles actors acquire a particular image (e.g., John Wayne's frequent portrayal of larger-than-life heroes). Likewise people acquire particular images based on their interactions with others. Like actors, people become typecast and stereotyped into playing the same role however unrewarding. To counter this, actors select different roles which tax the depth and breadth of their acting ability. Similarly, adults are required to play different life roles (e.g., parent, spouse, business executive, company spokesperson, sports figure, etc.). Like actors, people have power to accept or reject these roles, though this may not be self-evident. Pointing out the power to accept or reject roles, and encouraging experimentation with new roles, occurs in group therapy. As Dr. Steven Lipsius points out

The essence and advantage of group psychotherapy includes interaction with others and with therapist in the group in a contained environment, with systematic analysis and encouragement of change in the direction deemed therapeutic for each patient.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of the acting analogy is that despite the contrived nature of a therapy group, people do indeed act out their life roles in group.<sup>27</sup>

In group, one's roles can be enlarged or even rejected. As acting students learn to shake off pre- and misconceived notions about themselves, so too do therapy groups help patients shake of the fetters of typecasting by providing an atmosphere of trust in which newer, more desirable roles can be assumed.<sup>28</sup> Facilitating the ability to trust is an important dimension of practical theology. Leander Keck, former Dean of the Yale Divinity School, points out that

Trust is more than assent of the mind; it is also allegiance of the self; it involves the affections and passions no less than the reasoning of the mind.

The ultimate ground of what and whom we deem trustworthy is what we call "God," the Ground of being and value.<sup>29</sup>

Group psychotherapy is a medium which develops one's capacity for trust and facilitates patients' integration into a community through interpersonal learning and reality testing.<sup>30</sup>

### **Practical Theology and Jazz**

The following section is a personal essay on the similarities between jazz music, practical theology and group psychotherapy. I am neither a musicologist nor a professional musician. The analogies which follow are purely for purposes of explanation and illustration only.

There are several parallels between jazz and practical theology. Neither are strictly hybrids but rather creative syntheses. Both study and are products of the shuttling interplay between theory and practice. For example, in jazz the actual playing continually reshapes and extends the nature of jazz's theory, just as in practical theology the theological practice shapes the theory behind that practice. As a discipline jazz has its own style, method, and theory which, as with practical theology, was not recognised immediately by other disciplines. Both jazz and practical theology have an integrity and an independence which allow them to stand apart from their respective sources of origin and yet still be open to influence by other disciplines. Firet himself analogises the agogic (i.e., aimed at the other person's self-based functioning<sup>31</sup>) with polyphonic music wherein the "tone of the countermelody, though directly related to the primary melody, do form an independent melody of their own."<sup>32</sup> A similar point is made by Princeton University's Professor of Pastoral Theology Donald Capps who finds musical terminology appropriate for describing interpersonal interaction.<sup>33</sup> Firet's point, however, is that God wants to enter human existence in reality, and the pastor as practical theologian cannot "compose the countermelody" without first knowing the "primary melody," i.e., listening intensely to the patient.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps another similarity shared with practical theology is that jazz is much easier to recognise than to define.

In reply to the sweet old lady's question, "What is jazz, Mr. Waller?" the late and great Fats is supposed to have sighed: "Madam, if you don't know by now, **don't MESS with it!!!**"<sup>35</sup>

Jazz is a music type marked by frequent improvisation and syncopated rhythms.<sup>36</sup> It features the spontaneous generation of sounds wrapped around a purposely bare bass or melody line. The very bareness of the bass/melody line provides the "room to manoeuvre" which makes jazz unique. By definition it gives tremendous leeway for the musicians to create in accordance with their feeling of and for the music. As jazz historian Rudi Blesh observes, "More than in any other musical field the recording is vital in jazz, a spontaneous, improvised--though systematic--music, composed in the playing."<sup>37</sup> More than other music types, jazz is open to extraneous variables: atmosphere in the room at the time, audience response, the players' feelings for the music, etc. No piece of jazz music sounds the same when replayed because notes are not carefully arranged as in an orchestral work. The essence of jazz is its spontaneity and looseness, which in turn allows creativity to emerge. Hence the being of jazz is in its becoming.

One definition of jazz found in *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary*<sup>38</sup> refers to the verb jazz as meaning to act or proceed with great energy or liveliness. The images evoked are of a vigorous music that "grasps" its listeners in an active way. Certainly all music type are capable of engaging some listeners, but jazz's appeal is linked to its "grass roots" origin.

Jazz historian Marshall Stearns describes jazz as "the result of a 300-year-old blending in the United States of two great musical traditions, the European and the West African."<sup>39</sup> Jazz arose from American Negro slaves who, cut off from their indigenous musical traditions, devised a distinctive type of music. Jazz is a fusion of the Negro folk musics already present in America at the time; no musical hybrid but a creative synthesis.<sup>40</sup>

Jazz is vernacular, i.e., originating in the place of its occurrence as distinguished from a

literary or learned language which is imported into a culture. Jazz is also an idiom. It has a distinct style and character, notably its spontaneity. As jazz historian Rudi Blesh observes, "A music of vital and forward motion, jazz is a symbol of that improvisational process, guided by the instinct for freedom, which all social progress essentially is."<sup>41</sup>

### **Process Theology and Jazz**

Jazz also serves as a metaphor for process theology's, primordial and consequent natures of God. Jazz has, or rather is, a structure from which emerges a reality of created sound. The structure itself is more a loose confederation of boundaries which contain potential sounds than a tight arrangement of musical notes and dynamics. Thus one can successfully reproduce the sounds of a particular jazz work without replicating the exact notes within that particular jazz work. Jazz's inherent freedom allows this. In this sense jazz possesses what Whitehead ascribed to God, a primordial nature.<sup>42</sup>

In the language of process thought God's primordial nature is the totality of possibility, and God is infinite in the conceptual ordering of all possibilities.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, jazz's emphasis on spontaneity, variety, and feeling, suggests a primordial nature encompassing a total possibility of sounds. From the total possible sounds available to the jazz musician, only some are played to create music. Some possibilities are selected; others are not. This selection process is intuitive rather than cognitive, subconscious rather than conscious. This process provides the unfettered and impassioned sound characteristic of jazz. Jazz music is structured, but in a way that highlights the process of creating music rather than the content of created music.

Blesh observes:

In our [Western] music, formalisation forced out improvisation, led to the growing importance of the composer and the scored composition, and led, likewise, to the growth of a professional body devoted to the practice of an increasingly esoteric art. In our culture, dancing and music were separated

centuries ago in the religious and serious secular pursuits of the art; folk music was split from the main musical trunk; music as a fine-art form began to develop. But the vitality of a music is to be found in its communal aspect and in constant invention in performance. Our composers inevitably have had to turn to folk music for melodic ideas and rhythmic life. As the split between the people and music has widened, this process has become increasingly eclectic and artificial.<sup>44</sup>

There are multitudinous possibilities within the structure of jazz, all of which may be correct and proper if played. This is not so with orchestrated music where to deviate from the composed structure is to deviate from the music *per se*. Again Blesh observes,

Essentially, Western music is one of structure; African, one of free, continuous, creative energy. The European concept is one of building from contrasted moods; the Negroid is one of complete and exhaustive exposition of a particular mood.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover says Blesh,

So deeply ingrained is the idea of collective creation that, in the street band, the ensemble inevitably and eagerly succeeds the solo....There is no lack of showmanship in the players of classic jazz but personal display never interferes with the rigorous formal requirements of this cooperative music.<sup>46</sup>

The primordial nature is like a pool of possibilities from which emerges a particular actuality. The jazz musician dips into the primordial pool of sounds and emerges with specific actualities called music. The music created in jazz thus derives from the pool of sounds available.

In like manner God's primordial nature acts as a pool from which are drawn particular consequences, be they interpersonal styles or igneous stones. Process theology decrees that if God abounds everywhere then God must actively participate in creation on every level. Process theologian Schubert Ogden puts it this way:

God is now conceived as precisely the unique or in all ways perfect instance of creative becoming, and so as the one reality which is eminently social and temporal. Instead of being merely the barren Absolute, which by definition can be really related to nothing, God is in truth related to everything, and that through an immediate sympathetic participation of which our own relation to our bodies is but an image. Similarly, God is no longer thought of as utterly unchangeable and empty of all temporal distinctions. Rather, he, too, is understood to be continually in process of self-creation, synthesizing in each new moment of his experience the whole of achieved actuality with the plenitude of possibility as yet unrealised.<sup>47</sup>

This does not guarantee that consequences emerging from the primordial pool will necessarily be good. Inherently good possibilities can be arranged in an inherently bad manner; bad sounding jazz can emerge from the same pool of possibilities from which good sounding jazz emerges. The primordial nature refers to the value free possibilities which exist; the consequent nature refers to the value laden manifestations of those possibilities. With both God and jazz, it is the process by which values are translated into concrete terms that tells the story.

Process theology holds that God also has a consequent nature.<sup>48</sup> This nature refers to the concrete manifestations deriving from abstract possibilities. Or as Pittenger puts it, the consequent nature is Whitehead's term for God-as-affected-by-the-world.<sup>49</sup> The consequent nature is composed of actual occasions and real entities rather than conceptions or notions. The primordial nature of jazz, for example, funds the consequent nature just as the vast pool of potential sounds funds the actual sounds produced. In like manner God's primordial

nature funds the consequent nature because actualities are funded by, and thus a consequence of, the primordial nature.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, both jazz and God (in process theological terms) possess an abstract primordial nature consisting of innumerable possibilities, and a concrete consequent nature consisting of actualities. A shared and constant characteristic of both God and jazz is the capacity to change creatively in a harmonious manner. The primordial natures of both God and jazz are conceptual unities in that they are united as a concept, by concepts rather than by actual occasions or entities. The primordial nature is like a conceptual plan: abstract and not yet real. The consequent nature is like the edifice resulting from the plan: concrete, tangible, and fully real. The primordial nature thus funds the consequent nature and partially defines it.

### **Group Psychotherapy As Jazz**

A musical jam session occurs when musicians meet for the improvisatory performance of music, usually for their own enjoyment. A jam session is the musical process wherein participants attain satisfaction for and by themselves via their creativity. Jam sessions involve no formal piece and possess minimal structure. The musical play is dictated by the emotions and feelings of the participants. The accent is on spontaneity and reacting complementally to what other musicians play. Because of this, the resulting music is more created than played. It is a "happening" rather than a replication of previous efforts. It is unorchestrated and unrehearsed and therefore stretches the creative capabilities of the artists. In this artistic stretching lies the player's satisfaction. In terms of process thought, it is the injection of novelty (i.e., emphasising improvisation) which brings forth the creative advance and which, in turn, satisfies the musicians. A jam session then, is a process of forgetting constraints and letting creativity flow unhampered, as the mood dictates, as the muse strikes.

A therapy group operates somewhat similarly. By reducing constraints and allowing interactions to flow unhampered as the mood dictates, therapy groups foster creative self-expression. In a sense, both therapy groups and jam sessions involve the same "jazzing

up" process. The similarity between therapy groups and jazz jam sessions is that the members' contribution to the group occurs within a particular psychological context. In therapy groups, that context is often the primary group of the family in which one fashions the first fears and fantasies about one's self, life, and others. As American psychiatrist Michael Ferencik points out,

The therapy group is, in many ways, like other groups in a person's life, whether it be the group of the family, the group of the work place, or the recreation group. The strains that are experienced in those groups are often brought to the therapy group itself. They often manifest themselves as one of the dimensions of the here-and-now.<sup>51</sup>

No person enters a therapy group as a *tabula rasa* any more than a musician enters a jam session totally devoid of a personal style, musical preference, or habitual style of playing. A group member, be it jam session or therapy, enters that group with a history of self-expression. Both therapy groups and jam sessions attempt to enlarge the members' self-expressive ability. In short, both therapy groups and jam sessions foster the creative advance.

In conclusion, Janus and Jazz are suitable images to represent the way that practical theology and group therapy function because both Janus and Jazz describe analogically but accurately the complex intra-relationships of the constituent ingredients of practical theology and group therapy. Janus represents the linkage of beginnings and endings; of becomings and perishings. Janus' linkage preserves the individual integrity of beginnings and endings as discrete activities, while recognising the new order emerging from their combination. Jazz also focuses on new emerging order, namely the creative advance emerging from novelty. Linking beginnings and endings, recognising becomings and perishings, identifying the creativity which emerges from the injection of novelty, all are characteristic of practical theology and process thought. All are essential for therapy.

If the disciplines of group psychotherapy and practical theology seek to better grasp the

dynamism that is the very substance of human reality, I feel they must continually focus on the eternal significance of the here-and-now moment. Through images such as Janus and Jazz practical theology can better capture the "to-ness and fro-ness" of life as it is actually lived and therefore function more effectively. In life, to quote Whitehead, the process is the actuality. To this I would add that in life the purpose is the process. The inscription above Jung's door at Kussnacht ("God will be present whether called in or not.") has practical-theological significance only when we understand and can appropriate the presence of God in the here-and-now. This inscription captures the continual here-and-now nature of God's presence. Therefore, I would argue that anything which takes us closer to truly, fully understanding the here-and-now, can take us ever closer to experiencing the reality of God. This is the significance of the here-and-now relative to practical theology and group psychotherapy.

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1. quoted in Roberto Assigioli, *The Act of Will* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Turnstone Press, 1984) p.114
  2. Vannicelli, p.296
  3. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.346
  4. Whitehead, *Concept of Nature* p.163
  5. Yalom, *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy* p.161
  6. Burkhart, p.54-5
  7. Firet, p.258
  8. Laurence J.O'Connell, "Pastoral Theology: Janus of the Theological Enterprise" in *Practical Theology and Theological Reflection* v.2, ed.s Beiswenger, Hommes, & McCarty (published by Association for Theological Field Education, 1984) p.3-8
  9. Ibid.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Burkhart, p.55
  13. O'Connell
  14. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (NY: Free Press, 1974) p.ix
  15. cinema screenwriter William Goldman discusses this wittily and at length in his *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (London: Futura Publications, 1983)
  16. Nancy Griffin, "Bonfire of the Vanities" *The Australian Magazine* Dec. 15-16, 1990, p.18

17. Ferencik, p.171
18. Ibid., p.172-3
19. Yalom, *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy* p.174
20. Ibid., pp.174-6
21. O'Connell
22. Yalom, *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy* p.174
23. Firet, p.280
24. Lieberman, "A Group Therapist Perspective on Self-Help Groups" p.265
25. Wolberg, p.147
26. Lipsius, p.318
27. Ferencik, p.182
28. Ibid., p.173-4
29. Keck, "Toward a Theology of Rhetoric/Preaching" p.142
30. De Bosset, p.76
31. Firet, p.221-2
32. Ibid., p.272
33. Donald Capps, *Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) p.22  
Capps, citing Robert Coles, says that  

the interaction between the two poles [a person's positive "strengths" and negative "weaknesses"] is similar to "trying to weave melodies, some that work and make good music, some that don't and in fact are noise or worse." [Coles] concludes that this interaction could be called contrapuntal. [Erik] Erikson himself uses the term "syntonic" to refer to the positive pole and "dystonic" to describe the negative one. (p.22)
34. Firet, p.273
35. Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1958) p.3
36. *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary* (Sydney: Macquarie Library Pty.Ltd., 1982)
37. Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: a history of jazz* 2d ed. (NY: Da Capo Press, 1958; reprint 1975) p.vii
38. *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary* (Sydney: Macquarie Library Pty.Ltd., 1982)
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45. Ibid., p.31
46. Ibid., p.163
47. from Schubert Ogden, "The Reality of God" in *Process Theology* ed. E. Cousins (NY: Newman Press, 1971) p.123
48. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* pp.343-51
49. Norman Pittenger, *Cosmic Love and Human Wrong* (NY: Paulist Press, 1978) p.38
50. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* pp.343-51
51. Ferencik, p.184

## Chapter Eight:

*Truth is regulatory rather than absolute.  
We never know it fully because it's beyond  
our capacity. We only form hypotheses,  
testing and modifying repeatedly.  
Each cycle brings us closer to truth,  
and this is the function of science.*

-- Karl Popper<sup>1</sup>

*Those who are enamoured of practice without science  
are like a pilot who goes onto a ship without a  
rudder or compass and never has any certainty about  
where he is going. Practice should always be based  
upon a sound knowledge of theory.*

-- Leonardo da Vinci<sup>2</sup>

### Practical Theology And Group Psychotherapy

In chapter seven we approached group therapy and theology through a range of artistic images in order to gain a better understanding of the non-scientific, yet equally important, dimension of the interrelation between practical theology and group psychotherapy. In this chapter we view group therapy and theology through the lens of science, focusing particularly on the notion and role of creativity.

A fundamental task of practical theology, according to Firet, is to study the questions which lead people to understanding.<sup>3</sup> Practical theology must therefore consult with other disciplines and "formulate its questions in a way which makes them operational for those other disciplines."<sup>4</sup> One discipline with which practical theology may consort and from which it may benefit is group psychotherapy.

Practical theology and group psychotherapy enjoy certain similarities as disciplines. Both practical theology and group psychotherapy are academic disciplines and scientific endeavours. Both link studious observation of that which actually occurs to a practical theory about occurrences. Both combine the raw data of experience with an insightful awareness of that experience. Both offer conjectures based on observations of experience in order to gain a rich praxis not obtainable by other means. Both may be pursued through

a hermeneutical model in which it is the interpretation of the data observed and gathered that is the actual science. In short, both employ the scientific method.

Henry Nelson Wieman asks, in his philosophical theology, one basic question in life:

how can we interpret what operates in human existence to create, sustain, save and transform toward the greatest good, so that scientific research and scientific technology can be applied to searching out and providing the conditions--physical, biological, psychological and social--which must be present for its most effective operation?<sup>5</sup>

Recasting the question in practical theological terms, we might ask: how can practical theology verify, in order to maximise, the life enhancing process--the coming of God to man--which operates inherently in life? This operative principle can be called God (in terms of process theology) because God has universal meanings no matter how it is understood. Wieman is unconcerned with conforming to a traditional idea of God save one essential, traditional element, namely, that which operates in human existence to create, save and transform toward greatest good.<sup>6</sup> The means to do this is science.

### **Scientific Method in Practical Theology and Group Psychotherapy**

I maintain that there are parallel functions and principles at work among group psychotherapy and practical theology; namely, usage of the scientific method to produce a heightened awareness with subsequent construction of hypotheses deduced from that awareness.

Yet the application of scientific research principles to group psychotherapy and practical theology can only ever be partially successful. South African practical theologians J.P. Theron and Louis Heyns remind us that scientific studies from a practical-theological point of view are still rare<sup>7</sup> and scientific substantiation about God is not feasible because premises about God are made in faith.<sup>8</sup> Along similar lines, group therapist Irvin Yalom

writes that methodological problems which arise in researching the efficacy of inpatient psychotherapy groups force us to settle for less than definitive results<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately for both practical theology and group therapy, the scientific quest for certainty does not eliminate ambiguity.

Process theologian Norman Pittenger points out that we live in a world which does not explain itself.<sup>10</sup> Or as Whitehead put it, modern physics does not disclose a simple world.<sup>11</sup>

This fact can stifle our interaction with the world. For many of the mentally ill, for example, interacting successfully with other people is extremely difficult. Indeed a characteristic of a schizophrenia is withdrawal from the outer, shared, real world to an internal, secure, fantasy world.<sup>12</sup> For many chronically ill psychiatric patients, maladaptation to another safer world is preferred. Yet mental disease, as renowned group therapist Elaine C. Longeran, reminds us, should be seen not only as a lack of ego strength or the absence of normality but also as a positive expression of an organism's efforts to survive, however inept or costly.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Persistent Fact of Religion**

The difficulty of explaining the world is one stimulus which can lead to religion. This stimulus may be negative, such as a cognitive deficiency, or positive, such as the capacity to love, feel mystery, experience the numinous and so on.

According to Norman Pittenger, Whitehead<sup>14</sup> considered the fact of religious experience to be so persistent in history that it must be regarded as an inescapable datum with which any responsible philosopher must deal, though that philosopher may not personally be religious in any marked degree or have had particular religious experience.<sup>15</sup>

Religion is not lost on psychiatric patients. Though occurring in various and maladapted forms, religion begs recognition in group therapy, for it is indicative of a patient's existential situation.<sup>16</sup>

The ever present danger, however, is that the practice of religion becomes the ingestion

of "religious barbiturates" wherein God becomes a purveyor to transient appetites rather than deep seated needs. Persons addicted to religious barbiturates pursue healing without insight and avoid self-confrontation. Even so, the mentally ill use religion for help, consolation, and to provide an emotional and cognitive structure by which to make sense out of the chaos of mental illness.<sup>17</sup>

The concepts of religion and dependence are often linked.<sup>18</sup> My simple contention is that all people need some special relationships to provide some degree of support, coherence and stability in life. This special relationship may be found through religion, group psychotherapy, family life, or profound friendship.

Psychotherapist Heinz Kohut also asserts that people need special relationships to provide some degree of support, coherence and stability in life.<sup>19</sup> In a review of Kohut's school of thought, Self-Psychology, researchers H.S.Baker and M.N.Baker found that:

[Kohut] thought that developmental arrests which inevitably resulted from parental shortcomings most comprehensively and helpfully explained psychopathology....Repeated empathic failures by the parents, and the child's responses to them, are at the root of almost all psychopathology.<sup>20</sup>

Baker and Baker observe that Kohut labelled the internal needs of an individual and distinguished these needs from object needs wherein the individual functions as an autonomous object and an independent centre of initiative. The simple difference is that objects are valued for who they are whereas self-objects are valued for the internal functions and the emotional stability they provide. The self-object need being met is more important than who meets it.<sup>21</sup>

Self-object needs can be met through religion. For the mentally ill person religion can act as a bridge stretching across from psychic chaos, isolation, and loneliness to reality, stability, and community. This bridge carries two-way traffic: it assists patients in making sense of their world and assists therapists in making sense of the patient's world. Like dreams, religion is a "royal road" into the unconscious.<sup>22</sup>

The meeting of self-object needs in terms of practical theology, can be met through pastoral role-fulfilment wherein it is less important what is done but what happens.<sup>23</sup> Fierst describes this as a situation wherein pastor and client (or therapist and patient) are so related to each other that the church member experiences a change in spiritual functioning in virtue of his being an active participant in the relationship.<sup>24</sup> This accords with Professor of Theological Ethics Thomas Ogletree's observation that "all theology evolves out of practical involvements with the world, has practical aims, and attempts to deal in thought and action with the basic issues of human existence."<sup>25</sup>

### **The Creative Event**

Science entails not mere observation and interpretation of data but creative activity. This creative activity is, according to philosophical theologian Henry Nelson Wieman, essentially religious.<sup>26</sup>

Process theologian Randolph Miller says that the important fact for religious living is that the creative process is a continuing one; it is the working of God in the here-and-now. If we are to live religiously and significantly we must ally ourselves with the creative processes of God.<sup>27</sup>

Allying with the creative processes of God is an important part of group therapy. In my clinical experience, however, religious concerns are usually masked. The religious dimension of a psychotherapy group is usually expressed covertly. This does not diminish the significance of the religious dimension for it is the manner in which the religious dimension is expressed that provides the data from which we may deduce one's theology and world view.

The relation of the individual self to the whole (other selves) is a major theme in both group psychotherapy and religion. People behave as if they wish to belong to a whole, to be part of a group or community at large. Herein lies a creative tension, the wants of the individual vs. the wants of the group, or as Matano and Yalom put it, "A continual tension exists in groups between uniformity and differentiation."<sup>28</sup>

The tension existing between group and individual can be interpreted religiously. In Randolph Miller's view, Wieman sees God functioning not as a name for some activities or relationships but as a name pointing to a process of creativity that operates to transform human beings.<sup>29</sup> Firet reminds us that the word of God aims to create understanding and change.<sup>30</sup> Wieman identifies God with creative interaction in interpersonal relationships, but his perception remains a religious one.<sup>31</sup> This has particular significance in group therapy wherein creative interaction via interpersonal relationships can, in Wieman's sense, be godly.

What Miller says of creativity can also be applied to group psychotherapy: Creativity is an ongoing process which can be viewed in terms of creative communication, creative interchange, creative transformation, or creative event.<sup>32</sup> Quoting Wieman, Miller asserts that

Creativity "creates the human mind and personality...sustains life at the human level...saves man from the worst which can happen to him on condition of faith...[and] transforms, that is to say, saves unto the best that man can ever attain." But it does this only when man fulfils the proper conditions.<sup>33</sup>

In like manner, group psychotherapy also sustains life and "saves unto the best that man can ever be" when proper conditions<sup>34</sup> are fulfilled within a specific environment in which occurs creative communication, interchange, transformation, etc. Firet writes that it is openness to experience, i.e., the opposite of psychological defensiveness, which can lead to the kind of new experiences which force a person to revise their self-concept.<sup>35</sup> He cites Rollo May's explicit statement:

We cannot speak of a "creative person;" we can only speak of a creative act. For what is occurring is always a process, a doing; specifically, a process interrelating the person and his world.<sup>36</sup>

Firet also cites Beets' comment that "If creativity originates anywhere, it begins not in the slumbering creative powers that lie hidden in me, but in the face-to-face relationships."<sup>37</sup>

Miller cites Wieman's view of the creative event as composed of four sub-events:

- 1) One is given a new perspective whereby, through interrelations with other individuals and groups, there is an increased awareness of qualitative meaning resulting in an expanded range of knowing and valuing.
- 2) There is an integration of various perspectives; an expanding range and depth of mutually sustaining activities as one's values are modified and integrated into what one already has. This may be a lonely experience resulting in a painful working through of alternatives.
- 3) An expansion of the appreciable world as one seeks to carry on the evolutionary process at all levels. This expanding of valuing consciousness is not a steady development but comes as a result of extraordinary experiences.
- 4) There is growth of community as interrelationships are transformed and deepened.<sup>38</sup>

These four sub-events describe group therapy. First, one gains a new perspective through various interrelationships. This results in increased awareness which gives rise to increased insight, a particular type of knowing and value. Second, as insight is gained, an educative integration occurs within group members. Third, the personal growth which develops in a therapy group happens spasmodically rather than gradually, and frequently results from extraordinary experiences occurring within the group. Fourth, intragroup relationships are transformed and deepened as intragroup projections, distortions and transferences are worked

through. The therapeutic process is itself a creative event. This is why therapeutic results are a manifestation of practical theology: They are created and creative events, not simply an "uncritical immersion in the flux of immediate experience."<sup>39</sup>

Wieman's emphasis that the four sub-events ought be seen in the active mode is likewise true for group therapy. The four sub-events need to be seen as emergings, integratings, expandings, and dependings; in other words, as a process. Hence Miller insists on the unity and universality of the creative event, while allowing that not all new developments are necessarily outcroppings of this creative process.<sup>40</sup>

Participating in group therapy is an act in and of faith. As Miller notes, religious persons commit to the reality of God without fully knowing what it is. They give themselves to the reality of creativity and not to their ideas about it. This is the element of risk ever present in acts of faith. Whatever sustains and transforms the life that has been created is worthy of our absolute devotion, for this is the source of our greater good.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Inertia of Tradition**

The creative event is hindered by the inertia of tradition. Psychotherapy groups employ the scientific method to confront the inertia of tradition. Patients in group have often described their lives to me in terms of ruts, vicious cycles, unproductive but habitual responses, narrow and confined existences, etc. Patients frequently depict life as a dilemma: becoming a self that is more attractive yet unknown or remaining in the familiar self which provides psychological security. The perceived choice is between the misery of uncertainty or the certainty of misery. Treading the path from the old self to the new self, from the old habit to the new habit, requires a courage and creativity which many people lack.

Wilfrid Bion, a British psychoanalyst and pioneer group theorist, remarked that groups hate learning from experience:<sup>42</sup>

In every group it will be common at some time or another to find patients complaining that treatment is long; that they always forget what happened in

the previous group; that they do not seem to have learnt anything; and that they do not see, not only what the interpretations have to do with their case, but what the emotional experiences to which I am trying to draw attention can matter to them. They also show, as in psycho-analysis, that they do not have much belief in their capacity for learning by experience--what we learn from history is that we do not learn from history.

Now all this, and more like it, really boils down to the hatred of a process of development. Even the complaint about time, which seems reasonable enough, is only to complain of one of the essentials of the process of development. There is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all, and lack of faith in the worth of such a kind of learning. A little experience of groups soon shows that this is not simply a negative attitude; the process of development is really being compared with some other state, the nature of which is not immediately apparent. The belief in this other state often shows itself in everyday life, perhaps most clearly in the schoolboy belief in the hero who never does any work and yet is always top of the form--the opposite of the "swot," in fact.

In the group it becomes very clear that this longed for alternative to the group procedure is really something like arriving fully equipped as an adult fitted by instinct to know without training or development exactly how to live and move and have his being in a group.<sup>43</sup>

This describes, I think, the inertia of tradition which overwhelms members of a therapy group. Individuals, groups, and institutions have traditions or norms which are clung to in the face of change. Yet these traditions and norms need to be re-examined periodically in order to achieve growth and progress. As Wieman writes, we must periodically be lifted out of our ruts but we must make new ruts if we are to travel at all.<sup>44</sup>

Theology has its own inertia of tradition. Professor Ray Anderson notes that theology informs and defines pastoral practice, and that a viable theology of pastoral care needs to be as flexible as the actual practice of that pastoral care.<sup>45</sup>

## **Religion as Creative Activity**

According to Wieman:

There is an essentially creative nature to religion. This creative dimension is more than the sustainment of the status-quo. Early Christianity was not a practical religion in that it did not sustain values which were socially recognised by the prevailing civilisation. Nor did Christianity promote social solidarity under Roman government. This resulted in Christianity's persecution. Early Christianity was quickly recognised for what it was: revolutionary, a ferment that disintegrated the prevailing social order in favour of a totally different manner of life.<sup>46</sup>

To Firet,

To create means that lines are being drawn and a design takes shape; a perspective grows; a way opens up, and the world becomes traversable and inhabitable; life becomes livable. It is this ordering perspective which is also the perspective of human creativity.<sup>47</sup>

In order for practical theology to remain in accordance with its philosophical roots and traditions, it must remain constructively critical of society while remaining creatively open to society. Like a "loyal opposition" in the Westminster parliamentary system, practical theology questions the prevailing social order without becoming a reactionary ideology or a pro-establishment caricature. In order to do this practical theology needs to be creative.

Wieman says religion at its best is always creative:

Being creative means running counter in some respects to the established practices of the day; it means hindering instead of promoting the recognised practical and social requirements. To be creative means to introduce new values beyond those which men have heretofore recognised, and to devise new forms of conduct different from those which the established social order and prevailing arts and sciences prescribe. To be creative means to be sovereign, not merely servant, to the prevailing civilisation. To be creative means to lead, not merely to follow.<sup>48</sup>

Running counter to prevailing norms may be a creative religious activity, but it also a source of tension. Leading instead of following is often fraught with difficulty.

Yet this tensile relationship between theory and practice, between religious values and established norms, is precisely the point toward which Wieman drives his argument. Here, he says, is the correct adjustment between morals and worship:

Religion should promote the welfare of humanity, not merely by conserving socially recognised values and inspiring humanity to achieve or conform as secular leaders determine. Religion must do more in order to preserve itself and not be sucked down into the stream of tradition where it becomes another established institution, where it becomes another system of customs. Religion's chief social function is not to support the establishment but to take the place of leadership itself from time to time.<sup>49</sup>

How does religion, in the form of practical theology, assume the mantle of leadership? According to Wieman the correct adjustment between morals (sets of theoretical hypotheses) and worship (a form of actual religious conduct) is to promote human welfare by means other than mere conservation of values.<sup>50</sup> Just as Wieman emphasises the creative aspect

of religion in general; I wish to emphasise the creative aspect of practical theology in particular. Creativity emerges from the perpetual tension existing between theory (morals) and practice (worship). In group psychotherapy we see an actual manifestation through human interaction of individual's thought worlds. The individual's theory of the way the world works and how their life fits into it, is projected onto the microcosm of the therapy group thereby paving the road by which the theory can be modified and corrected. In short, the interpersonal practice reveals the theory, and allows for the correction of the theory which in turn modifies the interpersonal practice.

### **The Role of Creativity**

Creativity is an essential ingredient to both group therapy and practical theology. Dr. Morton Lieberman, points out several conditions necessary for psychotherapeutic change, which I consider also to be ingredients for creativity, including: a group setting that is different from ordinary social interaction, provision of new ways of thinking about problems, and diversity of experiences presented to group.<sup>51</sup> Practical theologian Jacob Firet talks at length about the "agogic moment" (the motive power generating change) and how *agogy* [derived from the Greek word referring to the concrete activity of guidance<sup>52</sup>] itself is a creative process.<sup>53</sup> The specifically agogic, says Firet, is "the change in the mental functioning of persons in virtue of their active involvement in a relationship which is directed toward producing this change."<sup>54</sup>

Moreover says Firet,

Agogy is life-oriented; it aims at the fullness, the multiplicity, the breadth, and the depth of human life--the full functioning of a human being in all the situations which make up a human life. In the final analysis this means that all agogic intervention aims at the activation of humans as "creators on the eighth day," people who are underway and find a home in a traversable and inhabitable world.

Thus viewed, agogy--life help--is itself a creative process. This means that agogy itself is what it aims at in the end. Agogy can be described with the same words we used to describe what it means to be human: Agogy is the act of functioning, with objective realism, in pure receptivity, discernment, and creativity; of one person in relation to another for whose humanisation the agogue bears responsibility, in order that the other may learn to function humanly in a similar way. The core of all agogy is life that begets life; being a concrete and relevant human being serving the concretization and actualisation of the humanness of another.<sup>55</sup>

Much psychology<sup>56</sup> extols creativity as the *raison detre* or *summum bonum* of the human enterprise; that to create and be creative is to be operating religiously within the created order. What does it mean to be creative? Scriptural passages like the creation stories in Genesis which give humans dominion over all the earth, are often seized as proof of a divine impetus to advance human creativity. Creativity thus becomes more a goal of human enterprise than a process; more an end than a means.

This gives rise to criticism. American psychologist Paul Vitz says in his book **Psychology As Religion: The Cult of Self Worship**,<sup>57</sup> that creativity is conceived as personal growth through self-expression, and hence as an achievement. It is the way the individual self gains value, very often in comparison to others. In a sense wealth, intelligence, and integrity all take a back seat today to this truly middle-class value of creativity. As a result, real creativity is subsumed by middle-class bourgeois values of success.<sup>58</sup>

The christian emphasis, Vitz says, is on developing one's abilities in the service of God and others. He cites C.S.Lewis's comment that the Christian's destiny lies "in acquiring a fragrance that is not our own but borrowed, in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours, but borrowed."<sup>59</sup> Vitz observes that creativity is a "universal hallmark of the ideal person among self-theorists,"<sup>60</sup> and he quotes Abraham Maslow in a revealing passage:

A few centuries ago these [self-actualised, fulfilled people] would have all been described as men who walk in the path of God or as godly men. A few say that they believe in God, but describe this God more as a metaphysical concept than as a personal figure. If religion is defined only in social-behavioural terms, then these are all religious people, the atheist included. But if more conservatively we use the term religion so as to include and stress the supernatural element and institutional orthodoxy (certainly the more common usage) then our answer must be quite different, for then almost none of them is religious.<sup>61</sup>

Vitz's essential criticism is that this undue devotion to the self, with its rationale for self-expression and creativity, is actually a modern pseudo-religion, which he labels "selfism." Vitz says this pseudo-religion misrepresents itself as both a science and an ethic and he asks, how does one demonstrate scientifically the intrinsic goodness of the self, or the moral desirability of an "actualising experience?" In fact, says Vitz, there is no satisfactory evidence that science can verify any value.<sup>62</sup>

Henry Nelson Wieman argues, however, that religious experience is experience of an object and is able to be investigated scientifically. The object of religious experience, however undefined, is as external to the individual as any experience of a tree or stone, and thus signifies something extending beyond the space-time occupied by the individual undergoing the experience.<sup>63</sup> In other words, religious experience is as subject to scientific investigation as anything else, and the purpose of such investigation is verification. The scientific investigation of religious experience--the encounter of God-to-person--is a focus of practical theology. As Jacob Firet writes,

This relationship is open to research, for it is between people: God comes in his word through the intermediary of pastoral role-fulfilment....pastoral role-fulfilment is the field in which God and man are brought together in a relationship of tension in which the word occurs which brings people to an understanding and change.<sup>64</sup>

Resolving this tension is a task of science. Wieman claims that we depend ultimately upon science, for science is nothing else than the refined process of knowing. All knowledge is scientific except in so far as it has not developed a method for discriminating accurately between the false and the true; and the discrimination between the false and the true is the purpose of science.<sup>65</sup>

Hence it is insufficient for Vitz to claim that science cannot verify a value. Without some sort of scientific verification process, however crude, we are left with a mindless relativity of values and no method to prove their utility or worth.

Vitz speaks of aligning the self with God's will,<sup>66</sup> as if this were a mechanical process instigated by simple choices. He fails to distinguish between the various shades of authenticity in aligning one's self with God's will.

Thurneysen errs similarly in thinking that the pastoral task is to simply "bring the whole problem into the light of the Word of God"<sup>67</sup> without fully understanding the practicable mechanisms by which individuals might do so. For example, from my clinical experience I know many psychotic persons who genuinely believe their bizarre behaviours are aligned to God's will. In a very real but extremely limited sense, they are, to the best of their impaired capacity, cooperating with God. Who is to judge the proper alignment of the self with God's will? The traditional Christian judge and standard has been community.

American philosopher Charles Pierce suggested that the way to eliminate illusions and fantasy from theology based on experience is to have a community of mutual support as part of the operation.<sup>68</sup> The results are then relativised in terms of consequences which promote values of mutual support and enhancement.

While creativity may originate with God, it is mediated and manifested through people.

A humanly functioning person initially enters a relationship by opening herself receptively to "that other;" she chooses her position in the relationship with discernment and she performs in and fulfils the relationship in creativity....When a person enters a relationship, he does not fully experience his humanity--the freedom and the responsibility of his existence as spirit or mind; this occurs when he comes to the kind of action which can be called "creating."<sup>69</sup>

If creativity comes from God alone as Vitz argues, then the human reception of that creativity must constitute a religious experience. If so, it is able to be investigated scientifically. Without such investigation we are left without means to discern truth from falseness, good from evil, heavenly from demonic. The question of how to judge and evaluate religious experience is dealt with adequately in Wieman's writings. Suffice it to say that a proper evaluation of religious experience necessarily considers the interrelationships which provide an individual with the feedback and information by which s/he composes a framework of beliefs. The source of validation rests not with God alone but in the God-human interplay. The God-human interplay is the subject of practical theology and can be examined through relationship. As Firet notes, "when a person is there for the other and gives the other a chance to be what she is, the creative process begins--the process that leads to order, to the passable road, and to the inhabitable world."<sup>70</sup> In this sense, says Firet, we can speak of "human creativity in which [one's] functioning as spirit or mind attains the apex of [one's] human-creaturely responsibility and freedom."<sup>71</sup>

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  2. in Wilson & Kneisl, p.vi
  3. Firet, p.99
  4. Ibid.
  5. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.1

6. Ibid.
7. Theron, "Diakonia: The Serving Church" p.50
8. Heyns, p.11
9. Yalom, *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy* p.27. See also pp.314f.
10. Pittenger, *The Divine Trinity* p.71
11. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* p.64
12. Kanas, "Group Therapy with Schizophrenic Patients: A Short-Term, Homogeneous Approach" p.33 and Kanas "Inpatient and Outpatient Group Therapy for Schizophrenic Patients" p.434
13. Elaine C. Longeran, *Group Intervention* (NY: Jason Aronson, 1982)
14. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* p.15-16 contains a brief overview of how Whitehead saw philosophy's relation to religion.
15. Pittenger, *Divine Trinity* p.73
16. Draper, et.al., "On the Diagnostic Value of Religious Ideation"
17. Oates, *Religious Factors in Mental Illness*
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22. the diagnostic value of religious ideation is discussed in Draper, et.al., "On the Diagnostic Value of Religious Ideation"
23. Firet, p.233
24. Ibid., p.234
25. Ogletree, p.6
26. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* pps.197, 219, 256-8
27. Miller, *American Spirit* p.61
28. Matano & Yalom, p.275
29. Miller, *American Spirit* p.80. No reference supplied.
30. Firet, p.94
31. Henry Nelson Wieman, *Religious Inquiry* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) pp.202-18
32. Miller, *American Spirit* p.86

33. Ibid., p.87. Miller quotes from H.N.Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1958) p.29-30
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40. Miller, *American Spirit* p.91
41. Ibid.
42. quoted by Neville Symington in *The Analytic Experience* p.282
43. Wilfrid Bion, *Experience in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publication, Great Britain, 1961) p.88-89
44. Wieman, *Religious Experience* p.234
45. Prof. Ray Anderson, from a series of untitled lectures given at the University of South Africa, to the Depts of Practical and Systematic Theology, August 1986. Dr.Anderson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California.
46. Wieman, *Religious Experience* p.256
47. Firt, p.226
48. Wieman, *Religious Experience* p.256
49. Ibid., p.258
50. Ibid.
51. Lieberman, "Understanding How Groups Work: a study of homogeneous peer group failures" p.32-3
52. Firt, p.100
53. Ibid., pp.99 & 225-30
54. Ibid., p.203
55. Ibid., p.230
56. Ibid., p.226. Although Firt points out that "creativity has not been a subject of significance in psychology for very long and that it has become so due to a mixture of technological and economic demands."
57. Paul Vitz, *Psychology As Religion: the cult of self-worship* (Sutherland, Australia: Albatross Books, 1981)
58. Ibid., pp.100-102

59. Vitz, p.100, citing C.S.Lewis, "Christianity and Literature" in *Christian Reflections* ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) pp.6f
60. Ibid., p.21
61. Ibid., p.22. Vitz cites Abraham Maslow, *Motivation & Personality* 2nd ed. (NY: Harper, 1970) ch.11, p.169f.
62. Ibid., p.53-4
63. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.5
64. Firet, pp.116 & 133
65. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.23
66. Vitz, pp.89-103
67. Thurneysen, p.126. Thurneysen does however, admit (p.133) that pastoral conversations are "doomed to failure" unless cognisance is taken of inherent psychological implications.
68. Miller, *American Spirit* p.79. No reference supplied.
69. Firet, p.225
70. Ibid., p.229
71. Firet, p.226

## Chapter Nine:

*The fox gazed at the little prince, for a long time.*

*Please tame me! he said....*

*What must I do, to tame you? asked the little prince.*

*You must be very patient, replied the fox.*

*First you will sit down at a little distance from me--*

*like that-- in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstanding. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day....*

-- Antoine de Saint-Exupery<sup>1</sup>

*He who avoids the daily, profane meeting*

*with his neighbours will never advance*

*to a genuine understanding of man.*

-- Eduard Thurneysen<sup>2</sup>

### **Creative Transformation: Awareness and Experience**

Jacob Firet writes that God's coming to a person in his word creates a relationship between God and that person, a mutuality which is intensely dynamic.<sup>3</sup> Firet also states that the God-person relationship is open to research, for it is between people: God comes in his words through the intermediary of pastoral role-fulfilment.<sup>4</sup> Yet "God's coming" can only occur in the here-and-now; God's coming is an eternally contemporaneous experience. This process of "God's coming" may be examined as a combination of experience and awareness of that experience.

In both group psychotherapy and practical theology the interaction of experience with the awareness of that experience yields a rich practice not obtained by other means. Henry Nelson Wieman states that religious experience is experience of an object, however undefined, and that awareness can only be awareness of that which is actually occurring<sup>5</sup>, i.e., awareness of that which is occurring here-and-now.

Alfred North Whitehead wrote that religion

...brings its own contribution of immediate experience. That contribution is in the first place the recognition that our existence is more than a succession of bare facts....There is a quality of life which lies always beyond the mere fact of life....<sup>6</sup>

Enhanced awareness can lead to transformation of one's self. But there is an ever present tension between the desire to transform one's self and resistance to that transformation. Group therapists Matano and Yalom write that "Every psychotherapeutic approach that is ambitious and hopes to make extensive change in the individual has to presume that patients have some responsibility for the genesis and alteration of their condition."<sup>7</sup> The desire for change is often matched in intensity only by one's resistance to it.

Process theologians John Cobb and David Ray Griffin emphasise the fundamental nature of change. To them "creative transformation is the essence of growth and growth is the essence of life."<sup>8</sup> This is not achieved, however, by merely adding together given elements in different combinations. It requires a transformation of those elements through the introduction of novelty.<sup>9</sup>

This transforming process is neither new to Christianity, nor confined to individuals. Process theologian Bernard Meland points out that according to the Gospels, people were changed not just individually but relationally as well: centres of an innovating righteousness appeared within the culture of the early Church; the New Creation became flesh again and again. The Christian witness becomes vivid and impressive when it is seen in its corporate context. The new life becomes a cultural force.<sup>10</sup>

Thus Fret can say

When a pastor in fulfilling his role aims at a certain type of influence, then it cannot be one which tries to get a person to "cross a line," so to speak, but one which tries to help her...arrive at a state of spiritual functioning that is objective and independent, marked by pure receptivity, true discernment, and creativity.<sup>11</sup>

Humanity is capable of radical transformation, but not by itself. It needs help to be transformed in a creative way. A person might be aware of their inner potential, but conventional religious experiences or mere belief in God may not provide the opportunity to tap it. To do this requires involvement in a genuine transforming process.<sup>12</sup> There are at least two processes capable of providing such a transformation. Both are essentially relationships. One is psychotherapy, another is Christianity. Combining the two successfully can produce a pastoral psychotherapy.

Verandering bewust-

### **Pastoral Psychotherapy**

The interface of practical theology and group therapy may be seen in pastoral psychotherapy.<sup>13</sup> Pastoral psychotherapy is both art and science. "Pastoral" refers to the saving and guarding functions of a shepherd, and thus indicates that a pastor's function is to protect and preserve the spiritual welfare of others.

Like any science, group psychotherapy is limited. A scientific concept is an intellectual instrument, an effective tool for illuminating reality, but not to be equated with the reality itself. This is especially true when considering the psyche, for here the scientist is the same kind of reality being studied. The object of study is no longer something outside the scientist and so the scientist is never really removed from the reality.<sup>14</sup>

Successful group psychotherapy dispenses with the naive assumption that human needs which are unexplained by scientific method are somehow inferior to other human needs more accessible to investigation. Denying significance to concepts because they are past the bounds of logical proof/disproof ignores human psychological considerations.<sup>15</sup>

Successful group psychotherapy entails that the therapist protect and preserve the spiritual welfare of the patient. As Thurneysen says,

If there were no psychology as the knowledge about man's inner being, and no psychotherapy as the attempt to help him, they would have to be called for and developed by the forgiveness of sins.... True pastoral counselors have always been true psychologists.<sup>16</sup>

Or, as Matano and Yalom write that

The responsible psychotherapist never attempts to question or remove a patient's working, satisfying religious belief system. The polemics around psychotherapy and antireligiosity dwell almost entirely in the professional theoretical literature, not in the clinician's office.<sup>17</sup>

The therapist necessarily adopts the pastoral function, perhaps covertly. The therapist, like the pastor, enables the patient (or parishioner) to define their relationship with God (the Ultimate) through various techniques, rituals and self-expressions. Whereas the pastor employs the resources of the Church (e.g., fellowship, prayer, Scripture and counselling); the psychotherapist focuses primarily on the patient-therapist interrelationship. In either case the spiritual welfare of the patient is addressed, either in the religious language of the pastor, or the psychological language of the psychotherapist.

For example, in a study on chemical dependency, Matano and Yalom note that

Recovering individuals who relinquish this pathological relationship [e.g., dependence on alcohol] need something to replace it. They urgently see a new source of soothing, nurturance, and hope. A higher power may be one such source; a significant, rewarding interpersonal relationship may be another.<sup>18</sup>

Group psychotherapy must deal with the patient's God however it is presented. In this sense group psychotherapy is necessarily pastoral.

Religion and group psychotherapy are essentially quests for unity, wholeness, meaning, and value. The feelings which give rise to religion and the behaviours which constitute religious worship are also present in psychotherapy.

Theologian Don Browning points out that:

Pastoral theology should be understood as philosophical reflection on the major themes of the Judeo-Christian tradition with special regard for the implication of these themes for a normative vision of the human life cycle. ...to understand it in this way will have great clarifying consequences for a variety of pastoral care ministries, especially those ministries such as institutional chaplains or pastoral psychotherapists who must articulate their role before various professions and constituencies within the public world.<sup>19</sup>

## Ultimate and Penultimate Concerns

What concerns, we may ask, are pastoral theologians or therapists required to articulate?

Browning answers that practical theology

has the job of both stating our ultimate goals and then expressing them in more proximate terms (along with the appropriate means of attaining them) in light of the social, cultural, and psychological factors that constrain and channel the action possibilities of the people involved.<sup>20</sup>

He argues that "every specific attitude of therapeutic acceptance presuppose[s] a deeper judgment about the ultimate acceptability of the person, not just to the therapist, but to some ultimate ground that bestows all value and assigns all acceptability."<sup>21</sup>

Carroll Wise writes that pastoral psychotherapy is done by one with a professional identity and commitment within a religious group, and that religious symbols involve the dynamic relationship between the penultimate and the ultimate; between the human and the divine. Wise asserts that traditional psychotherapy centres on penultimate meanings and overlooks or omits ultimate meanings, whereas religion sees both.<sup>22</sup>

If so, it is difficult to explain the historical rise of psychotherapy against the stiff opposition it has faced. Despite having few defenders, despite the eccentricities of its proponents, despite being attacked by the medical profession in which it originated and to whom it was intended to appeal, and despite the ease with which it lends itself to caricature even to this day, psychotherapy survives and flourishes. I believe this partly due to psychotherapy "stealing the thunder" of religion, and that psychotherapy's popularity is directly related to its capacity to address a person's existential/religious concerns, a capacity formerly reserved to religion. Browning declares that "the fuller task of pastoral theology is to give philosophical expression to the norms for the human life cycle explicitly found in the major themes of the Judeo-Christian tradition."<sup>23</sup> If so, then surely it is precisely theology's failure to do this which provides the vacuum filled by psychotherapy.

Wise acknowledges that religious ideas are a symbolic communication. Religion has a communal nature. Socially validated religious ideas are a yardstick by which one can compare one's psychodynamics and human relationships. Religious ideas are to a pastor or therapist what anatomy is to a surgeon: schematised concepts useful in understanding deviation and adaptation.<sup>24</sup>

I extend this analogy further and liken group psychotherapy to comparative anatomy, wherein the processes of deviation and adaptation are revealed and understood through the study of interrelationships.

The basic problem remains however: religious and existential concerns rarely present themselves clearly. Like twins who don each others garb, it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. Only a discerning, practised eye can distinguish each one's individuality. Wise's differentiation between the realms of ultimate and penultimate concerns (and prior to him, Thurneysen's antiquated distinction between pastoral care and psychotherapy) is unhelpful for this reason. On all levels of pastoral and psychotherapeutic work, penultimate and ultimate concerns are inextricably linked. Identifying and addressing concerns as penultimate or ultimate depends more on the therapist's ability or willingness to distinguish between the two. In the end it matters more what the patient regards as ultimate and penultimate. My clinical experience clearly reveals that group psychotherapy simply cannot avoid the ultimate values of the patient.

I believe there to be two key reasons for the power of group psychotherapy. First, it works.<sup>25</sup> It is based on actual tested knowledge of how the psyche and personality function. This is not accessible to religion, or if the knowledge is there, it is diffuse, arcane, esoteric, and non-systematic. Psychology has a systematic and tested understanding of both human development (from infancy to death and all stages in between) and intrapsychic structures.<sup>26</sup> These are limited of course, but far in advance of the technical knowledge available in religion. Religion is simply not about dopamine receptors, intelligence quotients, pharmacology and other things psychiatric.

Second, based on my own intimate experience of both the church and group psychotherapy, I am struck by the degree of commitment and devotion demanded by group psychotherapy from the patient. In many cases it surprisingly surpasses the commitment which many pastors typically encounter. Analytic therapy can only succeed by the therapist's "religious devotion" to the patient, him/herself, and the existential truth.<sup>27</sup>

The truth here at stake, theologian Thomas Ogletree reminds us, concerns a disclosure of the meaning of being and our placement in it.<sup>28</sup> The therapist and patient interact to create the bond of the relationship and the therapy itself becomes a journey in close presence with another. Relationship then, thus becomes the key to both the therapeutic and the theological endeavour.

### **Relationship: The key to the kingdom**

Relationship is the foundation of both Christianity and group psychotherapy. The primary relationship in Christianity is that of a person-to-Christ. In group psychotherapy the primary relationship is that of person-to-therapist. Firet says that in pastoral role-fulfilment at least two people enter a relationship, one bearing responsibility for<sup>29</sup> the other.<sup>30</sup> The relationships of group psychotherapy and practical theology (through pastoral role-fulfilment) serve to unlock the potential within a person. Relationship is the arena in which one's existential questions are answered and issues are worked through. Firet writes that

The person who cannot come to clarity alone is looking for another person -  
- not an agency; not a wall to bounce her voice against; not a mirror to see a reflection of her own problem situation. She is looking for a human being like herself; one who does not understand everything, perhaps, but who knows enough about life and herself to know that sometimes it is chaotic.<sup>31</sup>

A relationship forms the parameters in which changes occur and develop. If the domain of unfulfilled potential within us all is represented as a kingdom, then relationship is the key to this kingdom, and no one may enter and enjoy the latter without first possessing the former.

Psychiatrist Lewis Wolberg states outright that:

The importance of the relationship factor [in group therapy] is too frequently minimised, and credit for cure is often incorrectly attributed to the particular techniques and methods used by the therapist. Yet it should be stressed that in some cases improvement is sustained for an indefinite period only because of the relationship and not because of the type or depth or real worth of the psychotherapy being practised. It must be remembered, however, that the benefits gained from the relationship are only the forerunners of therapy, not the end-all.<sup>32</sup>

Without relationship there is estrangement. Dr. Michael Rutter writes:

Estrangement may contribute to psychiatric problems such as antisocial disorders. For example, many studies have shown that antisocial disorders are associated with an increased risk of depression, although it is uncertain as to why this is so. One possible explanation is that the deviant behaviour of the antisocial individual leads to both stressful interpersonal interactions and social disadvantage, both of which in turn predispose to depression.<sup>33</sup>

The benefits of group psychotherapy evolve within and derive from the patient-therapist relationship. It is the working through of various transferences, distortions, and projections, within the confines of the relationship which constitutes the essence of psychotherapy.<sup>34</sup>

Brammer and Shostrom define the basic aims of psychotherapy as to:

assist the client to gain perceptual reorganisation, to integrate consequent insights into his everyday behaviour, and to live with intense feelings originating in past hurtful experiences. Existing defences are modified so that readjustment is obtained. Thus, psychotherapy emphasises intensity and length of involvement and is more concerned with alleviating pathological conditions.<sup>35</sup>

Self-awareness grows through relationships. Perhaps more than any other social institution, the church has catalogued the human condition's various depths of estrangement, alienation, and fragmentation.<sup>36</sup> I assert that Christianity is one of few genuine transforming processes; group psychotherapy is another. Both are essentially relationships. For example, in the case of Christianity, Jesus criticises those who fail to enter into relationship with him: "You study the scriptures diligently supposing that in them you have eternal life; yet although their testimony points to me, you refuse to come to me for that life." (John 5:39 NEB) The Jews are chastised for not recognising Jesus who, in the context of the passage, advances his credentials as the incarnation of the Father. The Jews err by relating to a text rather than to the one who embodies it. Christianity is thus distinguished from the simple and less complex monotheisms of its day, as the New Testament is distinguished from the Old Testament, by insisting on the quintessential importance of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus' words, "No man comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6 RSV) again underscores the importance of the person-to-Christ relationship.

Significantly, the person-to-Christ and the person-to-pastor relationship is subject to the same transferences, distortions, and projections found in group psychotherapy.<sup>37</sup> When religious transferences, distortions and projections are not worked through adequately, religion becomes sick.<sup>38</sup>

An advantage of the psychotherapeutic relationship is that the object of the transference (the therapist) is another living, thinking, feeling person who provides feedback to the patient. Yet a striking characteristic of the psychotherapeutic relationship is the therapist's objectivity.

This objectivity is essential. Carl Jung said:

We can get into touch with another person only by an attitude of unprejudiced objectivity...a kind of deep respect for facts and events, and for the person who suffers from them....The truly religious person has this attitude.<sup>39</sup>

Along similar lines, Jacob Firet describes the basic pastoral posture as marked by the preservation of distance which is necessary because the pastor must be able to enter into the problem situation but also to analyse it.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, says Firet, this is necessary because the pastor deals not merely with concepts but very human and personal realities.<sup>41</sup> Such objectivity has a practical theological dimension as well. Thomas Ogletree notes that the theoretical

arises as a moment within practical theology itself, a moment in which, relatively speaking, we distance ourselves from the immediacies of experience. We distance ourselves from experience in order to see more clearly what is given to us, or what is going on around us or in us. The seeing is not an end in itself. It is a movement that permits us to incorporate the various facets of experience more fully into our knowing, doing and being. The possibility of objectifying what is given to experience is a peculiarity of self-

consciousness, our power not only to relate to our world consciously, but to do so with a consciousness of the manner of relating itself. A theoretical orientation is not intrinsically opposed to practicality; it is an attitude we take up for quite practical reasons.<sup>42</sup>

The quite practical *raison d'être* of group psychotherapy is that it increases the domain of the conscious. Victor White combines the religious and therapeutic elements in quoting from the Codex Bezae of St. Luke's Gospel a saying attributed to Christ: "if thou knowest what thou art doing thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not what thou art doing, thou art accursed."<sup>43</sup> Similarly we can say, "If you have the relationship(s) by which to experience yourself fully you are blessed, but if you have no such relationship(s) you are accursed."

Gaining awareness of unconscious thoughts and feelings is like entering a kingdom of knowledge. To lack awareness is to lack the passkey with which to enter the kingdom. One subsequently becomes continually subject to unidentified powers operating from within. Without the key, one becomes estranged.

### **The Estranged Stranger**

Estrangement is the feeling of being distant, or foreign, and is an ingredient common to both the psychotherapeutic and religious relationships. Estrangement takes myriad forms: separation from others and/or God, failure of coping techniques, inadequacy of cherished beliefs about life, etc. Such things can drive a person into group psychotherapy, church, or both.

Process theologian Norman Pittenger cites four aspects of estrangement. First, we feel estranged from ourselves, i.e., we are conscious of a rift within Self. Second, we feel estranged from our neighbours, our human brethren, those with whom we would be intimate. Third, we feel estranged from God (or Ultimate), the reality upon whom we depend for existence, and, I would add, against whom our existence is relativised and from whom we draw meaning. The net effect of this estrangement is the loss of meaning in our existence.

Fourth, estrangement from the creativity of the natural order, from the actual world that is our environment. Now it seems to threaten us, we are not at home there, the creative process appears careless of us and we are obliged to fight it rather than work with it.<sup>44</sup>

This process of estrangement results in what I call (for allegorical purposes) the estranged stranger: a stranger to one's self and estranged from others. Like a stranger in a foreign land the estranged person trips over the local customs of which s/he is ignorant. The estranged do not understand why things are. They suffer because they are perpetually at odds with their environment. Social mores and norms baffle them and they cannot fathom the sheerest of social convention. Their ignorance and inability to adapt sentences them to remain estranged strangers in a kingdom of plenty. Unable to communicate their wants and desires successfully or get their needs met adequately, they stumble from encounter to encounter unable to relate successfully with others whom they meet. They engender fear, anger, pity, and sympathy in others, and know not why. They are governed by laws they neither understand nor influence, in a land where they are as misunderstood as they misunderstand.

Ending estrangement requires transformation. Henry Nelson Wieman points out that creation of new and more satisfactory ways of living is one of the noblest of all the arts. It requires more courage, insight and artistry than any of the fine arts. The great originator of moral forms of conduct, he says, is the artist who has not been forced to shrink back to the handling of such unresisting materials as paint, sound and stone, but has gone straight to the hearts of people and wrought new creations directly into their flesh and mental habits. This artist/originator is the prophet who has had the religious experience which dissolves old habits and views and makes possible the rise of new outlooks, purposes, and values. These artists/originators "transform human ways and come after spending forty days and nights in worship saying, you have heard an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say...."<sup>45</sup>

There are two historically documented ways to end estrangement: first, via religious mysticism; second, via psychotherapy. Mysticism is as old as humanity and is the pursuit of mind and mood altering experiences through the immediate spiritual intuition of truths believed to transcend ordinary understanding. Mystical experiences come through the

mystics relationship to the Divine. Group psychotherapy is also the pursuit of mind and mood altering experiences through the insight of truths about one's self and the world. Therapeutic experiences come through the individual's relationship to the therapist. Such relational experiences offer an intimacy which supplants estrangement.

Wieman asserts that deepest drive of human life is to render itself more abundant, i.e., to have access to wider ranges of experience for use and enjoyment. The one supreme and indispensable means to this increase of life is meaning: the more meaning we possess in life, the more likely we are to describe ours as an abundant life.<sup>46</sup> Or, as Firet reminds us,

In the entire phenomenon of God's coming in his word through the ministry of pastoral role-fulfilment there is a power which moves people. God's coming to a person means: to bring that person to life. That life is real life; not a life which is static, complacent, arrived; but a life which is in movement, underway, in a process of being renewed every day (II Cor. 4:16).<sup>47</sup>

The purpose of God's coming is to make people authentic, human as God intended.<sup>48</sup>

The quest for abundant life may lead a person into group psychotherapy and/or church. Pittenger argues that human life requires for its authentic development a person's engagement by some cause or value, some over-arching purpose, which brings about their increasing integration.<sup>49</sup>

Group psychotherapy does this by transforming relationally and thereby becoming a small but potent centre of change. As in Christianity, the new creation (i.e., the personal growth within the group member) becomes flesh again and again as group member's shed their unproductive ways of interrelating and adopt more productive ways. In this way life's meaning is increased.

Meaning is a source of power in the corporate context of both Christianity and group psychotherapy. Psychoanalyst Neville Symington states that meaning is achieved when one isolated phenomenon is located in relation to others and thus brought within the structure of a system.<sup>50</sup> Meaning occurs in situations where the dual psychodynamic urges to conceal and reveal have opportunity to be adequately expressed and resolved.

The thrusts to conceal and reveal are seen in Christianity too. Says process theologian Bernard Meland,

In one's self-assurance, bolstered by indifference to humankind, and by a studied effort not to become involved in their sensibilities and needs, one may escape the anguish of relationships, though one will hardly escape the hell of isolation and of alienation, for these are of a piece with the life of security in its egotistic extremes.<sup>51</sup>

According to Wieman, "History can be defined as the creation, accumulation, and integration of meanings in all their dimensions."<sup>52</sup> We have created a civilisation, developed the capacity to live according to values, learned to use technology, and now face problems that each of these developments has led to both evil and good. Unless we are able to find ways to commit ourselves to creative interchange, further steps cannot be taken.<sup>53</sup>

What stops one from taking such steps? Why do we, to echo Wilfrid Bion, fight a hard battle against coming to know what we think and feel?<sup>54</sup> Can we dismantle our self-created estrangement? Or must one always be like the estranged stranger, forever lost within the friendly kingdom, forever at the mercy of drives and impulses which we neither understand nor face?

Part of the answer lies, I believe, in the way we view our reality. In the next chapter I contrast linear perspective vs. the nonlinear; the concrete vs. the contemporaneous. The choice we make will progress or regress our quest for psychic integration.

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1. Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943) p.83-4

2. Thurneysen, p.203
3. Firet, p.113
4. Ibid., p.116
5. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.5
6. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* p.67-8
7. Matano & Yalom, p.277
8. John Cobb & David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: an introductory exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) p.100
9. Ibid.
10. Bernard Meland, "The New Creation" in *Process Theology* ed. E. Cousins (NY: Newman Press, 1971) p.196
11. Firet, p.233
12. Miller, *American Spirit* p.77
13. a more detailed and precise definition of this term can be found in Carroll Wise's *Pastoral Psychotherapy* (NY: Jason Aronson, 1983)
14. Philip Mairet, "Presuppositions of Psychological Analysis" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. P.Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) p.47
15. Douglas Stafford-Clark, "The Nature of the Problem" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. P. Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) pp.13-28
16. Thurneysen, p.202
17. Matano & Yalom, p.281
18. Ibid., p.284
19. Browning, p.191
20. Ibid., p.13
21. Ibid., p.193
22. Carroll Wise, *Pastoral Psychotherapy* (NY: Jason Aronson, 1983)
23. Browning, p.194
24. Wise, *Pastoral Psychotherapy*
25. for a sample of diverse confirmations see Lieberman, "Self-Help Groups" p.255-6; Ronald Toseland, Charles Rossiter, Terry Peak, Priscilla Hill, "Therapeutic Processes in Peer Led and Professionally Led Support Groups for Caregivers" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.40, no.3 (1990) pp.279-304; Coche, Dies, & Goettelmann, "Process Variables Mediating Change in Intensive Group Therapy Training" pp.379-398; L.Braaten, "The Different Patterns of Group Climate Critical Incidents in High and Low Cohesion Sessions of Group Psychotherapy" pp.477-493; Michael Free, Tian Oei, & Matthew Sanders, "Treatment Outcome of a Group Cognitive Therapy Program for Depression" *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* v.41, no.4 (1991) pp.533-548; N.Kanas, "Group Therapy with Schizophrenic Patients" pp.33-48
26. one example is the "Developmental Epochs" outlined by Harry S. Sullivan in *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (NY: W.W.Norton, 1953)

27. These thoughts stem from private correspondence with Dr. Michael Williamson in July 1990. Dr. Williamson is a former Marist brother who now works as a psychiatrist in private practice in Sydney.
28. Ogletree, p.87
29. I would argue, however, that it is more accurate and helpful to say that a therapist or pastor has a responsibility to rather than for the other person in the relationship.
30. Firet, p.233
31. Ibid., p.256
32. Wolberg, p.134-6
33. Michael Rutter, "Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life" *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* v.30, no.1 (1989) p.39
34. Wolberg, p.321-33
35. Lawrence Brammer & Everett Shostrom, *Therapeutic Psychology* 3rd ed. (NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1977) p.8
36. Clebsch & Jaekle provide an overview in their *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*. See also Murray Janson, *Practical Theology 405-B "Pastoral Care"* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984) pp.1-96
37. for elaboration on this theme see Draper, et.al., "On the Diagnostic Value of Religious Ideation" *Archives of General Psychiatry* v.18 (Sept. 1985) and W. Oates, *Religious Factors in Mental Illness* (London: G. Allan & Unwin Ltd. 1957)
38. Oates points out that demonic imagery and the Bible can function as projective and diagnostic devices similar to psychological tools such as the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception tests (pp.86, 95-98) and that the basic attitude of the psychiatric resident, psychologist, or nurse toward religion tends to shape their reactions to the religious ideas of the patient.(p.65) Oates, *Religious Factors in Mental Illness*
39. in Russell, p.137. No reference provided.
40. Firet, p.254-5
41. Ibid.
42. Ogletree, p.85
43. Victor White, "Guilt: Theological and Psychological" in *Christian Essays in Psychiatry* ed. P.Mairet (NY: Philosophical Library, 1956) p.167
44. Pittenger, *Cosmic Love and Human Wrong* p.65
45. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.257
46. Ibid., p.339
47. Firet, p.113
48. Ibid., p.114
49. Norman Pittenger, "Process Thought: a contemporary trend in theology" in *Process Theology* ed. E. Cousins (NY: Newman Press, 1971) p.33
50. Symington, p.40
51. Bernard Meland, "The New Creation" in *Process Theology* ed. E.Cousins (NY: Newman Press, 1971) p.197
52. H.N. Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* p.299. Quoted in Miller, *American Spirit* p.88

53. Miller, *American Spirit* p.88.

54. Symington, p.283

## Chapter Ten:

*Why do American tourists speak so loudly?*

*So you can hear them over their clothes!!*

-- Australian joke

### Creative Transformation: Concreteness vs. Contemporaneity

In group psychotherapy the awareness sought is of what one is actually doing, saying, thinking, and feeling in the here-and-now; awareness of how one is manifesting one's self in the here-and-now.

Slife and Lanyon cite Kurt Lewin,<sup>1</sup> a seminal thinker in group therapy:

...effects cannot be caused by abstractions, only concrete factors can produce concrete effects. Lewin defined "concrete" as "something that has the position of an individual fact which exists at a certain moment." In other words, concrete factors are those that are literally "here" existing and present. In this sense, past and future states are not concrete because they are not "here" existing and present, and thus are not being experienced.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of linear causation (i.e., this caused that) violates the principle of concreteness

...because it contends that the abstract events of the past--which can only be represented in the past--are causally linked with the concreteness of the present. Linear causation cannot subsume experiential therapies, because they also emphasise the concreteness of the present, rather than the abstractness of the past.<sup>3</sup>

In the place of linear causation, Slife and Lanyon offer Lewin's "principle of contemporaneity"<sup>4</sup> which suggests that

...only the holistic interaction of concrete factors that are contemporaneous with the effect can produce the effect....Only events that are contemporaneous can be causal, and past and future events only exist contemporaneously as abstractions in the mind of the observers (through memories and anticipations).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, this principle of contemporaneity does not abide by the usual notion of time as a continuous flow. According to Slife and Lanyon:

Lewin contended that the course of events must be represented by a series of momentary sections or slices of time that are discrete and separate. This means that each moment is a *gestalt*<sup>6</sup> with all of the "causal" factors concretely existent within that moment. The next moment is a reorganisation of the first moment, and a potentially different *gestalt*. Sometimes, Lewin noted, the reorganisation of the event and its context is so slight that the discontinuity of change is hardly noticeable, appearing as continuity. Nevertheless the discontinuity of discreteness of the two moments is the basic reality, since at any moment discontinuous change is possible...<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, such linear explanations automatically rule out the influence of simultaneous (or contemporaneous) events. If these events are truly simultaneous--and not merely faster paced sequences--then no causal force has time to act between them. In point of fact, the simultaneity of events is considered a sign that the events are not causally related; their relation is instead a coincidence and therefore not a meaningful relation. Causes and effects can only occur across time--in sequences of events--and cannot occur at the same time. From this linear perspective, here-and-now events have no causal relation to contemporaneous patient problems, by definition. Thus, here-and-now group therapy approaches have no special significance for understanding or treating present psychological phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

But the therapeutic approach of the here-and-now does work and does have special significance for treating psychological phenomena. While mainstream psychology has historically relied upon the past for explanatory power, it is much more the "corrective" emotional experiences undergone in group therapy which provide the impetus for change and/or improvement. Hence the here-and-now approach to group psychotherapy proves efficacious in the pursuit of psychic integration and the ending of emotional estrangement.

### **The Pursuit of Psychic Integration**

To end emotional estrangement is to pursue psychic integration. Yet this integration is not an object to be pursued as a hound pursues a hare, but a process which must be undergone and experienced.

Psychological resistance to psychic integration is well documented, perhaps most eloquently by the Apostle Paul:

I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do, but what I detest....The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will....I discover this principle, then: that when I want to do the right, only the wrong is within my reach. (Romans 7:15-22 NEB)

His question is ours: what prevents us from attaining psychic unity? Dr. Michael Rutter points out that there are some environmentally determined discontinuities in the development of one's personality about which one can do very little:

Luck is a real phenomenon and necessarily its operation introduces an essential degree of unpredictability to the process of development....although psychology cannot explain the occurrence of fortuitous events, it has much to say on the impact of such events on people's behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

Symington points out that the human entity appears to be a single piece, a unity, but is in fact a mass of bits. He quotes Carl Jung:

In the psychology of our unconscious there are typical figures that have a definite life of their own. All this is explained by the fact that the so-called unity of consciousness is an illusion. It is really a wish-dream. We like to think that we are one; but we are not, most decidedly not.<sup>10</sup>

*Substantial  
Chaos*

Symington's point is that the unity is a pretence, an illusion contrived as a psychological defence against the real chaos which infuses our psyche. Acknowledgment and realisation of this chaos is, as a rule, far too painful and traumatic to bear, hence the elaborate defences to guard against this insight. Such defences include the personality theories which posit a structure instead of a process.

Rutter writes,

Psychoanalytic theories of development propose a developing structure of personality based on a systematic progress through various psychosexual stages....The personality is supposed to be made up of three major systems--the id, ego and superego-- with the dynamics of personality determined by the ways in which psychic energy is distributed across and is used by the systems. The theory postulates that development is largely concerned with the laying down of this basic personality structure, a process that mainly takes place during the preschool years. Changes in personality can take place later but such changes are thought to be heavily influenced by the structure already established during the early years. This traditional psychoanalytic model of personality is so out of keeping with the empirical evidence that, even within psychoanalytic circles, it no longer receives general acceptance....On the other hand, the concepts of personality "structure" and of hierarchical development through psychosexual stages continue as theoretical cornerstones....<sup>11</sup>

Along similar lines, Wayne Oates cites Prescott Lecky's<sup>12</sup> rejection of the "hydraulic analogies" of psychoanalysis:

...i.e., that human feelings are not fluids whose pressures are created by the lack of emotional outlets, drainages, etc. [Lecky] assumed instead that behaviour is motivated by need for the unity of one's personal values in life, [and] saw personality as an organization of values which are felt to be consistent with one another. Behaviour expresses the effort to maintain the integrity and unity of the organization. Conflict arises when a value enters the system which is inconsistent with the individual's personal integrity. Such entry may precipitate depression, because the person cannot assimilate experience contradictory to his/her values. This is usually thought of as neurotic depression [and is] characterised by indecision. The person knows what to do to maintain integrity, but is either at a loss to bring it off, or lacks the courage to do so.<sup>13</sup>

Symington states that there are two ways in which one can feel a psychic unity:

cling to a unified system outside oneself or unite something inside oneself. In the first case the disunity within remains, but one is protected from nameless dread by hanging on to a religion, political ideology, cultural value system, etc. This method can work well in a traditional society or one with a single value system. Given the pluralistic value system of modern large conurbation, however, it does not work as well and is likely to fail.<sup>14</sup>

The other way is to investigate the self and forge one's different components into a cohesive whole. A person may achieve this without professional help but many find the assistance of a professional therapist to be invaluable in this process. By giving more meaning to the patient's utterances the psychic bits come together, slowly and hesitatingly,

and form a cohesive unity.<sup>15</sup>

Psychic integration occurs in three steps: first, by acknowledging that psychic unity is an illusion; second, by surrendering the defence of that false and contrived unity; third, by understanding fully and grasping the significance of the fact that we are all involved in an ongoing process of integration, of which enhanced awareness sharply increases the chances of occurrence.<sup>16</sup>

This acknowledgment is a different type of thinking, for it incorporates novelty. Wieman said most thinking is but clever manipulation of old meanings, defence of established positions, or deduction of implications. Original thinking is the struggle to escape from the self with all its limitations and prejudices. The profound effort to open one's mind to total fact is, says Wieman, closely akin to worship. They share somewhat the same motive, earnestness, profundity, and method.<sup>17</sup>

Original thinking is difficult. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: "I was impelled to think. God, was it difficult! The moving about of great secret trunks."<sup>18</sup> Yet the goal of original thinking is, according to Wieman, growth into ever more abundant life, obtainable only by a method of alternation between mystic experience and the life of organised habit.<sup>19</sup>

To grow into more abundant life we must discard the old self from time to time and take on a new self; cast aside old systems of habits and enter into new systems; break the old, ever hardening shell of habit and for a brief time live without a shell, palpitating and throbbing with the flood of experience flowing over us. But then in order to deal with experience at all we must develop another shell of habits; develop an perfect it for a time until we have grown to its limit. Then we must again break through and expose our sensitivity to the full stream of experience. Out of the innumerable new impulses thus aroused form another and better system of habits. Only so can we be lifted out of the ruts. But forthwith we must make new ruts if we are to travel at all. These new ruts should enable us to travel further than the old ones. We must escape from ourselves from time to time, in the experience

of God, but we must come back to ourselves if we are to have any selves at all. But the self we come back to should be a richer greater self, because of this experience of God. Only in this way can the panorama widen forever about us. Only thus can the spirit of the little child, which grows eternally, retain the freshness and vitality which God has given it. To experience God is to turn and become as a little child. Hypnosis and auto-suggestion are the fine technique of old age; but experience of God is the rebirth of eternal youth.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, original thinking leads to the abundant life in which we become ourselves through a perpetual process of becoming and perishing. Or, putting it in terms consistent with my description of psychotherapy: original thinking consists largely of living in the here-and-now, and taking the discrete experiences occurring in the here-and-now and combining them in creative and useful ways. This is, I believe, the path to psychic unity.

Psychic unity is actually a configuration of habits, many of which are uncriticised<sup>21</sup> and unjustified. The discarding of hardened habits through enduring a flood of "palpitating and throbbing" new experiences is, I think, an active and essential ingredient for both group psychotherapy and practical theology. Yet this flood of new experience is resisted because it is difficult.

The working through of emotional resistance in group psychotherapy takes time, effort, courage and energy. It is taxing emotionally and psychologically. The working through of resistance is the most time consuming aspect in group psychotherapy.<sup>22</sup> Pathologies mutate and reappear in diverse forms. Working through resistance is recognising repeatedly these mutations and saying "there it is again!"<sup>23</sup> Yet working through resistance is necessary in order to obtain psychic integration.

### **Ascending The Adaptive Spiral**

In a previous chapter I referred to what group psychotherapist Irvin Yalom describes as

the adaptive spiral,<sup>24</sup> i.e., the process by which persons undergoing group therapy slowly diminish their interpersonal distortions and gradually acclimatise themselves to interpersonal change. The result is that a positive and spiraling change in interpersonal behaviour is effected first within the group among its members, then without the group in one's larger field of everyday interactions.

This spiral is essentially a series of ongoing emotional experiences which, in and of themselves, can have religious significance. The fact is psychotherapeutic experience can enhance one's life by adding meaning. This experience may not be labelled religious, yet abundant life becomes possible through the therapy group's process of becoming and perishing.

The adaptive spiral is a process of growth and change. Albert Camus<sup>25</sup> once described Hell as a place where one's identity is eternally fixed and on display; to have no way of explaining oneself, to be classified once and for all. To escape this hell one must ascend the adaptive spiral, through the steps of relationship. Group psychotherapy can facilitate this ascension, as can religion. Group psychotherapy does so by providing the patient-therapist relationship wherein the therapist becomes the living personification of the patient's parental images, teacher/authority figures, and established traditions.<sup>26</sup> Religion facilitates the ascension by providing a "system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended."<sup>27</sup> This is why Alfred North Whitehead can say that, "In the long run your character and your conduct of life depend upon your intimate convictions" and "Your character is developed according to your faith."<sup>28</sup>

### **The Tourist's Clothes**

In the Australian joke heading this chapter, the tourist's clothes make a statement about the wearer that precedes and perhaps overrides subsequent statements coming from the tourist's mouth. The actions of donning and wearing the loud clothes are actions which speak louder than words. These actions reveal the way that the tourist chooses to disclose

him/herself. And that self-disclosure is patently obvious.

A senior psychologist colleague of mine once opined that good psychology simply "explained the bloody obvious!" i.e., provided useful, rational explanations for the processes we perform unthinkingly everyday and therefore take for granted but fail to understand fully. For example, falling in love is a phenomenon which befalls many. But we might well ask what is the psychological process inherent in falling in love?<sup>29</sup> A parallel in group psychotherapy is that good therapy makes clear and precise what was already apparent to other people. Symington illustrates with an anecdote:

At the end of a long analysis a patient said to me that he had not heard me say anything which he could not have heard from his mates in the local pub. When I heard this I thought perhaps I had at last begun to become an analyst.<sup>30</sup>

We can also say that good practical theology makes clear and precise what is obvious but unexplained. As with the phenomenon of "falling in love" what is obvious may not be easily explained or readily understood. Explaining and understanding such human phenomena does much to lead individuals to the true and away from the false.

Leading to the truth and steering away from the false is an inherent goal for any practical theology. An arena in which one can pursue the truth is group psychotherapy. I have argued that group psychotherapy can be a manifestation of practical theology. I would add that, as in a smithy, one's personal and practical theology gets forged through the here-and-now hammering process of interpersonal interaction. The result is a crafting and fashioning of personal theological beliefs. This happens largely because in a therapy group people articulate their religious assumptions and beliefs through interpersonal interactions, though without necessarily using religious language or terminology.

In advancing my arguments I have employed concepts from process theology because, in my opinion, they match closest the therapeutic concept of the here-and-now and provide a philosophical basis for why the here-and-now approach is therapeutically effective. This too

is, I believe, part of explaining an obvious fact: life, human experience, and religious experience do not unfold linearly.

Henry Nelson Wieman said that although religious experience is one of most ancient and widespread of all experiences, experience of God by itself does not constitute religion.<sup>31</sup> We must interpret our experience before religion occurs. Moreover, we must focus on the here-and-now nature of that experience in order to gain maximal benefit from it. This is the point upon which process thinkers, psychotherapists and practical theologians may agree: the path to abundant life is made by both experiencing and understanding life in the here-and-now.

As pastoral theologian Carroll Wise notes, religion concerns any experience which acts as an impetus or threat to a person. Religion assists one to find one's inner resources relative to a disease, and though religion may have little to say about any given disease, it has lots to say about the person who has the disease and the quality of that person's relationship to others and God.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, health and disease may result largely from one's decisions regarding relationships.

To sum up: the interpretation of the experience of God constitutes religion; the application of that interpretation concerns practical theology; and the examination of the interpersonal manifestations of that interpretation comprises group psychotherapy. Psychiatrist and navy chaplain James Knight cites Carl Jung's earthy advice to those seeking knowledge of the human psyche:

He would be better advised to put away his scholar's gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums, and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling-halls, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, Socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text-books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with real knowledge of the human soul.<sup>33</sup>

Such advice is well directed to both practical theologians and psychotherapists. And if we, like Jung, are asked, "when you have such an opportunity to see the seamy side of human nature, how is it that you still like folks?" we might well answer as he did, "Because I have no illusions about them!"<sup>34</sup>

Ridding ourselves of illusions about ourselves is, I believe, a goal shared by group psychotherapy and practical theology.

### **Summation:**

I commenced this thesis with the adage "actions speak louder than words" because I believe it has special significance for practical theology. In the preceding chapters I have tried to show that a person's interpersonal interactions in a therapy group are a "royal road" to a person's unconscious, and therefore that those interpersonal interactions can be used diagnostically to help determine how that person conceives of God, humanity and religion. Moreover, I have tried to show that one's interpersonal interactions indicate how one practices religion and how one functions religiously. Eduard Thurneysen's point that the way we conceive of humanity determines the way we pastor may be put another way: the way we interact with others reveals how we conceive or perceive others from the "aspect of eternity" (Spinoza).

In making my case I have sought to confirm theologian Thomas Ogletree's assertion that theology is bound to the practical rhythms of life, and I have asserted that these rhythms are discernible in a psychotherapy group. I have paid particular attention to the nonlinear, here-and-now approach of group psychotherapy because I believe it reflects the actual pulsations of human life. Above all I have borne in mind Firet's two observations: 1) when God comes to humanity, it is through human intermediary and for purposes of changing psycho-spiritual functioning and 2) society does not exist, it happens. I would tie his observation to those of the process theologians I have cited, and extend the point to say that: practical theology itself does not so much exist, as happen, and therefore requires a theological/philosophical vehicle by which to (re-)conceive of the dynamism inherent within

the human condition. To underscore this dynamism and capture the "occurring truth" (Thurneysen), I have employed terminology from process thought and emphasised the here-and-now approach to group psychotherapy.

I have used terms from psychiatry and described the extremes of mental illness in order to depict the importance of human interaction and the diagnostic value of religious ideation. By examining extraordinary human experiences such as those occurring with the onset of mental illness, I believe we are better prepared to understand ordinary experience.

When viewed in this manner practical theology conforms to David Tracy's definition of it as an enterprise for the development of models of human transformation through collaboration with such disciplines as group psychotherapy. The practical theological endeavour, what Tracy called the "transformation of human brokenness," may be seen and experienced, in some circumstances, in group psychotherapy. In short, the coming of God to humanity through human intermediary can actually occur through the vehicle of group psychotherapy, and group therapy therefore transforms human beings by changing their psycho-spiritual functioning.

### **Conclusion: Speaking Louder Than Words**

In conclusion, I submit that practical theologians will increasingly look for "nonlinear explanations" for endeavours such as theology, philosophy and (group) psychotherapy. The practical theological task is, and will be increasingly, to determine how the past influences the present, here-and-now, on a moment to moment basis. To this end I have directed this thesis and I hope that it contributes an alternative and novel approach to the discipline of practical theology. I hope too that this thesis is an example of what Thurneysen would describe as a Christian usage of psychology: relevant, practicable and practical. My desire is that this thesis might reveal to a pastor or therapist how s/he can gain insight into another person's spiritual state by examining that person's interpersonal interactions in the here-and-now. I also hope that this thesis is an example of a successful collaboration between the disciplines of practical theology and group psychotherapy. Finally and perhaps more

importantly, I hope that this thesis, like the tourist's clothes, is in and of itself an example of an action speaking louder than words.

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1. Kurt Lewin, *Principles of Topological Psychology* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1936) p.34-5
  2. in Slife & Lanyon, p.150
  3. *Ibid.*, p.151
  4. Lewin, p.33
  5. Slife & Lanyon, p.151
  6. *Gestalt*: an organised psychological configuration or pattern of experiences or acts
  7. Slife and Lanyon, p.152
  8. *Ibid.*, p.153
  9. Michael Rutter, "Psychopathology and Development: II. Childhood Experiences and Personality Development" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (1984) v.13: p.321
  10. Symington, p.45 ["The Tavistock Lectures" in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* ed.s H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, v.18 (Routledge, 1935) p.72-3]
  11. Michael Rutter, "Psychopathology and Development: I. Childhood Antecedents of Adult Psychiatric Disorder" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (1984) v.18: p.315
  12. Prescott Lecky, *Self-Consistency* (NY: Island Press Cooperative Inc., 1951) p.152
  13. Oates, *The Religious Care of the Psychiatric Patient* p.127
  14. Symington, p.46-7
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. *Ibid.*, p.47-8
  17. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.347-8
  18. quoted in Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.152. No further reference supplied.
  19. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.234
  20. *Ibid.*
  21. Edward de Bono makes a similar point in his landmark book *Lateral Thinking* (England: Ward Lock Education, 1970; reprinted, Penguin Books, 1983): it is "historical continuity that maintains most assumptions-- not a repeated assessment of their validity." (p.82) Therefore the means to generate creativity and produce solutions to problems is the think laterally by the critical and periodic examination of assumptions. Says De Bono, "Perceptual choice is the natural patterning behaviour of mind" (p.54) but instead of accepting the packages provided by perceptual choice, one may process the packages themselves and gain new insight into familiar situations. [page numbers are for reprint edition]
  22. Symington, p.47, cites Freud's contention that analysis consisted not of the uncovering of memories but of the overcoming of resistance.
  23. J.S.Rutan & W.N.Stone, *Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy* (Lexington, MA: Collamore Press, 1984)

24. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* pp.39-41
25. Albert Camus, *The Fall* (NY: Alfred Knopf, 1956)
26. Yalom, *Theory and Practice* p.41
27. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* p.5
28. *Ibid.*, p.5-6
29. for further information see William J. Goode, "The Theoretical Importance of Love;" Elaine Walster, "Passionate Love;" and Zick Rubin, "Liking and Loving;" in *Doing Unto Others* ed. Zick Rubin (NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974)
30. Symington, p.331
31. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* p.31, 45
32. Carroll Wise, *Psychiatry and the Bible* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1956) p.5-6
33. James Knight, *A Psychiatrist Looks at Religion and Health* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964) p.51. Knight refers to Carl Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, tr. R.F.C.Hull (NY: Meridian Books, 1956) p.258
34. Knight, p.51. Knight refers to Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938) p.3

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