







Psychotherapy and Counseling in the New Creation

Secular Models of Psychotherapy & Counseling Dominate Our Culture

-  The Christian community has a remarkable set of intellectual and practical resources that could enable it to develop distinctive models of Christian psychotherapy and counseling.
-  Today, however, the Christian community mostly looks to secular psychotherapy to get its therapy.
-  Christian therapists, therefore, need to develop their own therapy vocabulary, theory, and strategies.
-  We can do this by retrieving the therapy-relevant resources from our own soulcare traditions and practices. Let's try.

Psychotherapy and Salvation

Today, these two words are believed to have no relation

However, in Christianity, they are very closely related

- Christian salvation consists, in part, of God's rescue from the harmful psychospiritual effects of one's sin, suffering, and biopsychosocial damage
- Christian psychotherapy consists, in part, of human participation in that salvation, most often, in dyadic relationships

Let's figure out how Christian psychotherapy might promote Christian salvation

What is the new creation?

When Christ was raised from the death, he became “the beginning, the first-born from the dead” (Col 1:16), because he initiated the new creation. Now, he is calling the rest of humanity to be raised from the dead, just as he did Lazarus



Psychotherapy in the New Creation

Christians are in the new creation because of their union with Christ in his resurrection

“If anyone is in Christ, *new creation!* The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!” (2Co 5:17)

“If we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Ro 6:5)

“God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...made us alive together with Christ—and raised us up with him...” (Eph 2:6)

Psychotherapy in the New Creation

When working with Christian counselees, we have the opportunity to collaborate with them and Christ and the Holy Spirit in their experiential resurrection and bring about a little more of the new creation

One way to think about salvation

God now invites us to collaborate with him in bringing in the new creation in our brain/souls by faith, or what Balthasar called “active receptivity” and what Kierkegaard called “inward deepening.”

Four Stages of Salvation

- Declarative salvation
 - Our salvation begins with God's speech in Christ, the Word
 - Experiential salvation
 - We have to experience salvation to be changed
 - Christiformative salvation
 - Lasting change involves changes in our neural structure and the form of our soul (thoughts, emotions, desires, actions)
 - Ecclesial salvation
 - It is realized most fully in community
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Salvation and the Spread of the New Creation



■ Declarative salvation

- A declarative speech act makes something so upon being spoken
- Just as in the original creation, the new creation begins with God speaking. In this case, the Father speaks “over” all who believe into Jesus and are baptized (Jn 3:16; Ro 6:1-4; 2Co 4:6)
- At that moment God declares believers/the baptized to be forgiven, righteous, holy, children of God, beloved, and morally and spiritually perfect *in Christ* (Ro 3:24; 5:1; 8:1, 15; Col 3:12)

Salvation and the Spread of the New Creation

- Catechesis/Discipleship
 - Understanding who we are in Christ because of Declarative Salvation is foundational to the Christian life
 - Limitations: this just results in factual learning, but not *deep* neural reorganization and change of habit and life; and some people get stuck here



Salvation and the Spread of the New Creation



■ Experiential Salvation

- Believers are enabled to experience the 1st fruits of the new creation: new desires, emotions, motives, imaginings, actions
- This occurs in worship, in personal and communal “soul-work” (e.g., *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer), and other embodied activities, like liturgy, relational time, work and play
- Limitations: By itself this results in emotion activation and pleasant memories, but not necessarily anything more; and some people also get stuck here

What is the importance of Christian psychotherapy originating in God?

- People outside Christ tend to be strongly oriented to themselves and their desires, wants, and feelings (Kierkegaard termed this the “aesthetic stage of life”)
- Declarative salvation reflects Christianity’s God-centered orientation—*extra nos*—so it helps direct believers outside themselves for the existential-motivational ground of their life
- Ongoing struggles with sin, suffering, and biopsychosocial damage point Christians back to God and to *disidentify* with their feelings and *differentiate* reality from those feelings
- That, in turn, enables believers to learn how to focus on their emotions again *in God* (now, accepting the negative and seeking the positive), without getting stuck there

Salvation and the Spread of the New Creation



■ Christiformative Salvation

- The more believers experience salvation, the more they can appropriate and internalize the new creation in their brain/souls through contemplative prayer, liturgy, and deeds of love
- This aspect of salvation changes core beliefs, resolves negative emotion schemes, reduces defenses, replaces old desires with new, and develops a new ethical and spiritual character, becoming more conformed to the image of Christ
- This gradually results in neural reorganization and eventually a modification of one's positive/negative emotion ratio, which is relatively permanent and can be “built upon”



Salvation and the Spread of the New Creation

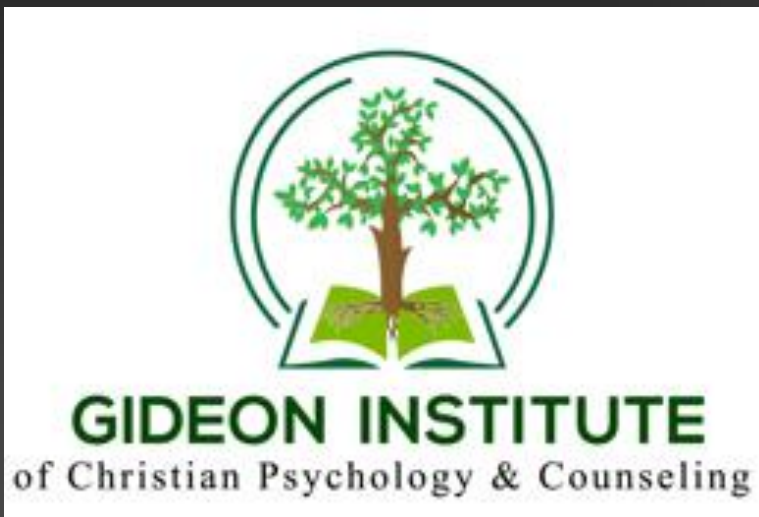
- The New-Creation Word and Communal/Ecclesial Salvation
 - The creation of a fellowship/communion of believers in local churches, where they practice the new creation *together* and are building each other up in love (Eph 4:11-16)
 - Sadly, this is relatively rare in our day
 - Skilled therapy provides one site for this salvation to occur

What does psychotherapy look like in the New Creation?

- It requires a basic understanding of God and the blessings of salvation and some teaching
- It promotes repeated experiences of God/Christ that enable them to modify their negative emotion schemes in Christ
 - Guided imagery with Jesus
 - Empty-chair technique with Jesus
 - Two-chair strategy with Jesus and a “part” in conversation

What does psychotherapy look like in the New Creation?

- Trains counselees how to have a meaningful “soul-work” time (30-60 minutes a day)
 - Meditation
 - *Lectio divina*
 - Therapeutic prayer
- Promotes repeated experiences of the therapist as an image of God who reflects God and their perfection and belovedness in Christ



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