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# BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR CORRECTIVE EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN GROUP WORK

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Groups offer multiple opportunities for *corrective emotional relationships* that promote growth, healing and spiritual formation. The benefits of mutual exchange and emotional nurturance found in interpersonal support reflect human beings as *imago dei* with intentional fulfillment being found in the community of Jesus Christ. The construct of a *corrective emotional relationship* will be introduced in terms of the value and dynamics for healing as well as for spiritual refreshment and formation. Drawing on biblical metaphors from the Gospel of John, the relational benefits of interpersonal support are placed within a Christian framework. Group approaches offer specific advantages as a helping modality in Christian settings.

Group interventions for people-helping and health-enhancement are alive, well, and proliferating. Group work may be touted as valuable because it is *efficient* (Spitz, 1996). It can be inviting due to its *experiential* appeal (Hart, 2001). The strongest argument for helping groups rests on evidence that they are *effective* (Riva, 2004). The empirical weight is so substantial that Irvin Yalom opens the revision of his classic text with a remarkable and unambiguous declaration. "A persuasive body of outcome research has demonstrated unequivocally that group therapy is a highly effective form of psychotherapy and that it is at least equal to

individual psychotherapy in its power to provide meaningful benefit" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 1).

Self-help and psychoeducational groups with a pastoral care emphasis are gaining popularity within ministry contexts (Christian Recovery International, 2007; Crabb, 1997; Wuthnow, 1994). Robert Wuthnow (2004) contends that faith-based groups not only increase awareness of social issues but provide participants with "social capital in the form of close friends and reassurance that one can depend on these friends during times of illness, bereavement, or trouble" (p. 95). Faith-based support networks are easing suffering and creating evangelistic opportunities (i.e. Celebrate Recovery, 2007; Willow Creek Community Church, 2007).

Consider the impact of Trinity Episcopal Church in Hoboken, NJ as featured in a *NY Times* article (Applebome, 2004). Its location near the World Trade Center site and its soothing traditional sanctuary positioned it in a remarkable way to offer support groups for family and friends who lost loved ones on 9/11. Participants were filled with gratitude for the explorations surrounding their faith and spirituality in the midst of their great loss. So, following their experience, support group members raised funds for a new church bell. Now in Hoboken, NJ, the wonders of group work for recovery and spiritual formation ring out like 'clockwork.'

Despite the establishment of group as a significant helping modality, there are a few provocative questions to ponder. Has the Christian counseling movement made any unique contribution to this growing group phenomenon? When Christian helpers offer or recommend individual services over group approaches, is the motivation based upon our theology, best clinical practices, or pragmatic preferences? What service modality might a Christian worldview favor: a) the individual/professional dyadic model common in the medical clinic; or

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b) the group-oriented approach associated with grass roots movements that grapple with messy addictions, broken guides and recovery rhetoric?

In this context a *corrective emotional relationship* (CER) will refer to a redemptive interpersonal experience that reflects a range of curative and nurturing connections indicative of the relational provisions offered by Jesus Christ himself (i.e. Word, Light, Bread, etc.). The intention will be to explore a biblical basis for experience within group work that aligns the group phenomena and its restorative mental health potential with the work of the Holy Spirit who promotes more effective ways of relating to God and others.

### EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR GROUP WORK

McRoberts, Burlingame and Hoag (1998) designed a meta-analysis to address the effectiveness of group versus individual therapy. Twenty-two studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Groups in these studies all had closed membership with trained therapists as leaders. Thus, these were *not* the member led support groups typical of ministry related settings. Across the studies, the average person in individual therapy had fourteen 60 minute sessions while group participants had fifteen sessions of 90 minutes each. The results demonstrated that clients in either individual or group therapy showed improvement well beyond that of wait-list controls with no statistical difference in effect size between group and individual treatment.

Burlingame, Fuhriman and Mosier (2003) selected 111 studies from the past 20 years where group was the *primary* treatment modality. Findings from this meta-analysis indicated that the average recipient of group therapy was better off than 72 % of those who did not receive any treatment. Group help is a better tactic for change than allowing time and 'normal' life experience alone to reduce pain or restore functioning. The reviewers report that 75% of the diagnostic clusters identified showed improvement with group therapy. Effectiveness does vary, but it is not limited to particular diagnostic categories. Those with depression and eating disorders appeared to benefit the most from group treatment, while those in groups for substance abuse, thought disorders, criminal behavior or outpatients with a mixture of symptoms demonstrated the least amount of gain following treatment.

Reasonable structure contributes to positive results in group work. More than 50% of the groups represented in this analysis utilized a time-limited,

cognitive behavioral approach and such groups have an imbedded structure. Treatment was most helpful to outpatients who participated in homogeneous groups with mixed genders. Reviewers speculated that a *diversity of clients* gathering with a *common focus* may produce conditions optimal for a group experience (Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Mosier, 2003).

Group research can be complex due to the member to member, member to leader, member to group, and group to leader variables. Furthermore, in the real world of mental health services, group is rarely the sole treatment modality for it is often used in conjunction with pharmacological and individual therapy. Despite these hurdles, a comprehensive review by Barlow, Fuhriman and Burlingame (2004) suggests that the following practices contribute to positive outcomes in group work: 1) the use of skilled leaders or explicit facilitator training accompanied by detailed session guidelines; 2) the placement of group members appropriately and strategically; and 3) the definition of realistic and explicit goals for the group intervention.

### ARE OTHERS GOOD FOR THE SOUL?

Does the empirical effectiveness of group interventions reflect any corresponding theological premises? In his article *How God is Good for the Soul*, Eric Johnson (2003) portrayed the renewing clinical benefits of a relationship with God in reference to God's nature and revealed characteristics. Frequent and deep reflection upon the good, personal and benevolent God of the universe can redeem, revitalize, and re-create the human soul. By design, human beings as creatures are incomplete selves until they enter into a loving relationship with their Creator. Once this essential human-divine bond is formed, God's traits address the weaknesses in human souls that frequently require soothing or surgery. The impact of this bond is reflected in the following statement by Johnson (2003):

Knowing and being loved by God strangely transforms one's sense of worthlessness and inferiority. The self-importance of narcissism is relativized in God's presence. His sovereignty soothes anxiety and fear. His righteousness and justice helps to put into perspective experiences of injustice and so reduce bitterness. It would seem that whatever one's psychospiritual difficulties, they can be fundamentally improved by looking to God. By focusing increased attention and affection on the beauty of God (and so more and more "bringing" the beauty of God into one's internal world), it would seem likely to lead gradually to a fundamental reconfiguration of one's self-other relational context: one's narrative, one's feelings of security,

hope and belongingness, and one's sense of meaning and purpose. (p. 86)

By reviewing God's essential attributes, the soul restorative benefits of meditating on and relating to the Creator are revealed. In a closing footnote, Johnson (2003) places his discussion within the context of three poles of relationality: self, God, and others (cf. Nouwen, 1975). The premise is that the self, or to use the more comprehensive and holistic term, soul, is not constructed, maintained or transformed outside the framework of a dependency upon God and others (Greggo, 2005). These relationality poles correspond to the enhancement experiences utilized in mental health and spiritual formation endeavors targeted to deepen intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal awareness (Oden, 1972). An intimate connection with the Creator is His design and a transpersonal encounter with Him is in essence the ultimate CER.

Human interactions, impacted by the fall and resulting state of sin, may produce distortions within the self that can have a reduced benefit or an adverse impact (Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 3:10-18). Relating to the Creator is exclusively a soul nourishing experience. Human relationality may be for better or worse. Despite this limitation, interpersonal relationships can and do contribute to one's well-being and wholeness (i.e., Rom. 15:1-7; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 5:13-16; 1 John 4:7-8). Therefore, increased or more intimate relational contact may be utilized within a variety of helping ministries to facilitate re-formation. Sin may still be a hindrance, but in helping groups there is an attempt to control the rampant and destructive effects of sin through the use of explicit purpose statements, facilitated communication and the monitoring of process.

A brief, unifying conceptual explanation of how these relationality poles intersect may be possible through the appropriation of a construct central to attachment theory known as the *internal working model* (IWM). This references an inner, multi-level, relational template or schema comprised of highly stable sets of expectations regarding others and the self (e.g. Bowlby, 1979; Dozier & Bates, 2004; Klohnen & John, 1998, Kobak & Esposito, 2004). The IWM governs core processes such as emotional regulation, sense of security, well-being and worth. The poles of relationality converge in one's internal working model as ongoing relational experience provokes maintenance or modification. Transpersonal and interpersonal encounters *both* impact the intrapersonal via the IWM. Succinctly stated, CER is a phrase offered to indicate a positive relational impact

on the internal working model. Consideration of the similarities between Divine and human relationships can be found in Beck (2006) and Olthuis (2006).

### PROVISIONS OF RELATIONAL SUPPORT

There are numerous conceptualizations of the provisions of social networks and close relationships to the self (i.e., Badr, Acitelli, Duck, & Carl, 2001; Heller & Rook, 2001; Weiss, 1974). It is common to list three general functions of interpersonal support (Sarason & Duck, 2001). *Informational support* is communication offering guidance, direction, perspective and/or useful resources. *Emotional support* is any behavior that communicates care and love for another. *Instrumental support* refers to any behavior that offers assistance in task completion or increases coping skills and/or resources. It is no coincidence that these broad external support areas can be linked to the common depiction for one's internal personality, namely, how one thinks, feels, and acts. External social supports nurture the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains central to the individual's internal world.

The social science literature asserts that close relationships and social support networks have implications for health, wellness and overall quality of life (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 2001) Social psychologist Robert Weiss (1974) described the social provisions of relationships in a model that has become useful both to further understanding as well as for measurement and research (Heller & Rook, 2001; Vanzetti & Duck, 1996). Relationships offer an *attachment* bond that yields a palpable sense of security, stability, and closeness. *Social integration* is the provision of belonging to a network of like-minded others. *Altruism* is the opportunity to serve and nurture others that returns a benefit to the self. The *reassurance of worth* is a feeling of esteem, value, and affirmation. *Reliable alliances* suggest the availability of dependable resources for mutual support and assistance. *Guidance* is a means for obtaining help when addressing stressful events or threats. Note that while the provision of guidance might be considered as a function tied most nearly to the cognitive domain, the other five provisions identified here are logically associated with the affective domain. Having categories for these social provisions is useful for those who venture into group work as recognition of these underlying relational phenomena adds depth to the generic term 'social support.'

Might these social provisions reflect spiritual priorities and processes? When Jesus summarizes the law in the great commandment, it is evident that he greatly values human relationships. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31, New International Version). The expression of love here refers to ongoing, vibrant relationships between and within the divine and human planes. There is an implicit statement within this command referencing the reflective relationship a human has with the self that also empowers and guides thinking, feeling, and doing. While the phrase “as yourself” does not ground a self psychology, it does suggest the existence of a self-directed affective relational bond. This self-relationship tends to be manifest in one’s persistent inner narrative. This interior ‘self-view’ is intricately related to one’s external worldview that includes perceived availability of social provisions. ‘Love’ is the New Testament term that encompasses the activities and relational affective experiences associated with the contemporary therapeutic term ‘social support.’

### A FEW WORDS FROM C.S. LEWIS

A wonderful work by C.S. Lewis (1960) unpacks human relationships through an examination of *Four Loves*. Although his titles highlight the four Greek words for love found in the New Testament, his effort is not an exegetical word study. Instead, he offers a literary rich, well-needed reminder that ‘love’ is experienced at a variety of levels and in a number of contexts. Affection (*storge*) captures the general warmth and connection contained within the web of social networks. A person’s inner circle of close relationships or friendships (*philia*) is where humans work side by side to pursue and support common interests. Love between the sexes (*eros*) provides special benefits for it offers a unique and intense bond. Lewis’ wit and wisdom are evident as he works through the complexity of how these loves not only mix and mingle but how they can help or harm. Take for example his picture of affection as “an affair of old clothes” (p.67). He conveys the social network where one is recognized, known by name and valued as a source of comfort, ease, cozy familiarity and freedom to be expressive. Yet, he goes on to point out that enjoying ‘old clothes’ is not identical to wearing the same shirt till it ‘stinks’ or showing up at a formal gathering with garments that

may feel “right” but convey disrespect for the host and others. In Lewis’ work it is clear that these variations of love can soften the blows of life, provide deep satisfaction or reveal the sharp edges of sin.

Charity, or self-giving love (*agape*), moves beyond the previous three natural loves in the way that a tended garden exceeds the wonder of a wilderness or a meadow. Similar live elements are present, but in *agape*, a gardener directs the form and balance. The rich analogies and insights offered by Lewis capture how these types of love sustain the person’s self while giving life purpose and depth. People helpers may utilize any combination of these ‘four loves’ to create opportunities for CER when composing a treatment or spiritual formation plan to stabilize symptoms or stimulate character development.

An important contribution of *Four Loves* is the distinction made between ‘gift’ love and ‘need’ love. Lewis argues that God himself is the decisive example of gift love. The assumption may follow that human beings love most purely when imitating God. That is, in the expression of love that is not motivated by the expectation of receiving anything in return. Lewis teases out the critical flaw in this logic. He states that a man’s love for God is at its best always a “need love.” Therefore, as created creatures, human beings will never be able to return to the Creator a pure ‘gift’ love since our entire existence is dependent upon Him. “Man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God. For what can be more unlike than fullness and need, sovereignty and humility, righteousness and penitence, limitless power and a cry for help” (Lewis, 1960, p.12). Lewis’ insights regarding the underlying motivations for these loves would suggest that relationships can be both functional and healthy when mutual yet asymmetrical. When a human bond involves a combination of ‘gift’ and ‘need’ love, it can be relationally rich even if it appears one-sided to the unenlightened human eye. Lewis’ *gifts* to us bring out the complexity of human-to-human and human-to-divine poles of relationality.

There is one further application from Lewis’ insights for group work. In individual therapy, the intent is that a therapist who is ‘congruent,’ objective, knowledgeable, and/or strong will offer relational stability through the therapeutic alliance to the client who is experiencing ‘incongruence’ or lacks necessary relational supports. This may be linked to the provision of ‘gift love’ with its many benefits. If there is potential benefit in mutual exchanges of gift love and need love, then perhaps the group format is

optimal for facilitating relational nurturance. Groups contain multiple opportunities for a variety of reciprocal relationships.

### IMAGE BEARERS AND GROUP PROCESS

The gospel message from the Genesis prologue to the Revelation epilogue tells the story of creatures made in the *imago dei* (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6), who become estranged from the Source and support essential for the *imago dei* (Genesis 3), who by grace become the bride of Christ with the promise of a renewed *imago dei* (1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph.4:24; Col. 3:10; Revelation 19, 21). Some contemporary theologians assert that the core process for *imago dei* restoration is relational (Grenz, 2001; Shults, 2003). Despite the profound significance of relational process for sanctification and the obvious boost this provides for the importance of group experiences, it may be unwise to entirely collapse the traditional *imago dei* views entirely into relational terms (Beck & Demarest, 2005; Hoekema, 1986; Saucy, 1993). Recall that the ultimate fulfillment of a restored *imago dei* involves the human soul dwelling within a glorified spiritual, incorruptible body with a united pure heart, mind, and soul. Intimate relating on the divine and human level will be enhanced by an entirely fresh context, a perfected new heaven and earth, where creation stewardship will be taken to an entirely new level (Rom. 8:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:12-20, 44). Nonetheless, knowing that this is our eschatological hope, Christian caregivers can place emphasis on community relational experiences in their healing efforts (Pannenberg, 1962).

It is the contention of this author that group work is a method of healing and nurturance that is consistent with *imago dei* renewal for relating transparently, reliably, and wisely with God and others fuels the redemptive restoration of the human soul (Col. 3:5-17). To illustrate how interpersonal support experienced within a group can become the means through which the Holy Spirit renews how one relates to God, others and self, we will now turn to our prime example of holistic, untainted *imago dei*.

### RELATIONSHIPS REVEALED: METAPHORS, PARABLES AND WORD PICTURES

The benefits of human relationality are evident in Jesus Christ without any sin distortion and are included within the biblical record of his words,

ministry and actions. Theological tradition reflected in doctrinal creeds since the Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD, holds that Jesus Christ is complete in deity and humanity without separation, division, confusion or change (Grudem, 1994; Warfield, 1957/1939). The gospel of John gives a theologically rich account of Jesus Christ as the God-man and in doing so furnishes vivid portraits of how authentic relating can bring good to others.

Truth in John's gospel is not communicated exclusively through event recollection and description. His account of the Gospel depicts truth to invite belief. Once belief is born, a living truth emerges in relational encounter with Jesus Christ that nurtures followers wholly into the abundant life that God intended (Card, 1995; Keener, 2003). Through the use of metaphors and potent one-word parables, the apostle John depicts how the God-man offers this life (i.e., Word, Light, Bread, True Vine, etc.). The reality corresponding to these word pictures exemplifies the fullness of relational experience and reflects interpersonal provisions. As a metaphor expresses meaning that surpasses the image itself, the concepts referenced by such language pictures are beyond containment in a single word or simple phrase. John taps the imagination of his readers to instill an appreciation for the sustaining and transforming resources available to those who would relate fully to the Word become flesh. Beyond descriptive traits, these metaphors are active and living declarations regarding the emotional and instrumental support that Jesus Christ provides to his followers. Note that these life sustaining necessities cannot be severed from the informational support centered in the content of his words and teaching.

Two of these relational provisions taken from the opening of the book will serve as examples. Consider how the Word or *logos* captures numerous relationships simultaneously (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1). Weaving 'Word' into phrases that mirror the opening statement in Genesis 1, the Holy Spirit brings together the following extraordinary concepts: Wisdom/Torah to Deity, Wisdom/Torah to humanity, Creator to creation, eternal to temporal, the Greek concept of grand universal rationality to the Jewish God of the Scriptures, Deity to humanity, distinctiveness within Deity to intimacy within the Godhead, transcendent mind to corporal form. This identical Word became flesh to 'camp out' and commune with human beings. The incarnation displays the value that God places on direct relating for revelation purposes.

Does this intensely packed *logos* word picture speak to human relationships? The creative force that unified and structured the universe flows from God into human form to be known and to relate to humanity. The rational ability in the human mind unites and organizes our entire narrative understanding of our life and the world. The human mind as it reflects the *logos* is not a self-generated, internal or autonomous quality, for this capacity emerges from *within* and *in* relationship with others. Just as the Word was there when the chaos of the universe was tamed and transformed into a world good for life, the Word provides wisdom, conceptual categories, and the clarity necessary to empower the human mind through relational experience. Thus, there are implications for people helping. Dwelling in community is a mind-energizing and equipping encounter. For the mind lost in a mix of reality distortions and chaotic contradictions, or mired in repetitive thoughts and confusion, or mesmerized by racing ideas and endless possibilities, there is relief available from others in the dynamic process of drawing upon their rationality and wisdom to add cohesiveness to one's grasp of reality.

Jesus Christ entered time as the 'light of the world' (John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46). The significant theme of light in John is coupled with the theme of life. The Jewish idea of light as Wisdom and Torah is infused into this imagery along with an expanded sense of the term to include power over darkness associated with evil and death. John the Baptist is described as bearing witness to the light (John 1:7-9) and elsewhere in the Scriptures, believers are instructed to provide the light of Christ to others (Matt. 5:14-16). A direct statement by John regarding how believers are to share this light is found in his epistle: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Fellowship facilitates the sanctification process by bringing 'light' to life through the power of the Cross. Human connections and communication under grace provide the eye opening revelation regarding righteous living and the affective motivation to pursue it. As fellowship provides a sharing of light, fears are dispelled, moral actions are illuminated, and shadows of depression are displaced.

A select list of John's word pictures with relational implications is displayed in Table 1. This is *not* a comprehensive list and the richness of these pictures should not be reduced into a simplistic checklist or

mere operational definitions. This would increase the risk of restricting the power of this Scriptural poetry that speaks not only across history and culture but also between the divine and human spheres.

These word pictures are suggestive and are intended to stimulate further contemplation regarding the relational dynamics. For example, the True Vine imagery may depict the provision of sustenance and a consistent supply of necessary interpersonal resources as summarized by the phrase "life in community." There is more to consider for the context suggests the vinedresser's care, correction and 'pruning' (Keener, 2003). Thus, important aspects of the Vine picture are not immediately apparent in the brief relational summary offered in Table 1 such as the links between connection, support, accountability, and social as well as divine control. The tension between the freedom of the individual and life together in Christ is indeed an aspect of the Vine metaphor. There is substantial depth and relational richness in these *imago dei* portraits.

Although these relational provisions may appear unique to the One who was without sin, they do speak to the ways that every human being offers comparable provisions to others. Since the *imago dei* was dampened but not eliminated by the fall, human society still provides these basic relational resources to its members. People can and do bear each other's pain and hurt, they serve as safe retreats from the wider competitive world, and humans do express love and concern for others, particularly to those within their immediate family and social context. When the community surrounding the individual is "in Christ," there is exceptional hope for substantial change and re-creation due to Christ's presence experienced in the operative work of the Holy Spirit (Col. 3:9-11; Eph. 4:22-24). These relational qualities interface with the admonition for believers to love patiently, kindly, without envy or excessive self-interest in a manner that protects and produces trust, and have hope that results in renewed ability to persevere (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Love as relationship in action supplies essential social resources. These biblical metaphors expand our conceptualization of how that love is transmitted to others for they describe *imago dei* nurture. One may experience these provisions via a transpersonal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ *and* within interpersonal exchange as He makes His presence known through the supply of Bread, Light, Truth, etc. Such biblical word pictures may not have the

**Table 1**  
*Relationality Word Pictures from John's Gospel*

Poetic Description	Relationality Component	Implication
Word (1:1, 14; 8:12)	Wisdom/deity within humanity	Support social self/mind
Light (1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5)	Wisdom/righteousness displayed	Inspire hope for holy living
Lamb of God (1:35)	Sacrificial burden bearer	Prevent or bear others' pain
Messiah (4:25-36)	Redeemer and healer	Intercede and cure
Living water (4:13; 7:37)	Refreshment resource	Encourage and refresh
Bread of life (6:35, 48)	Nurturance source	Nurture and support
Gate (10:7)	Watchman/security system	Provide safety
Good Shepherd (10:11)	Attendant, protector, provider	Selflessly serve
Resurrection (11:25-26)	Guide through death	Affirm life and hope
Eternity's pioneer (14:3)	Caretaker for an eternal home	Foster role and place
Way (14:6)	Pathway and guide to eternal life	Inspire wisdom
Truth (14:6)	Ultimate authority for reality	Speak truth in love
True Vine (15:1, 5)	Supply connection and lifeline	Establish life in community
Advocate (16:23)	Intercessor and ally	Communicate alliance

precision of the related psychological terms such as social capital or social support, or the detail of Weiss's (1974) relational provisions. However, they represent in a parallel language the underlying interpersonal process with more direct reference to their Divine source. It is important to tie these provisions to the therapeutic benefits of group work.

### GROUP THERAPEUTIC FACTORS AND CORRECTIVE EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Yalom has done much to further our understanding of the factors within groups that promote change (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Awareness of these curative forces enables a group leader to discern the moods, moments and movements within the subtle process that unfolds in trust formation and cohesion development. His explanation of the classic eleven growth-producing factors and key elements of interpersonal relating in groups has deeply shaped the viewpoints offered here. There is no pretense of improving upon these models. In order to interface his material with a ministry-oriented framework, the construct of CER will be contrasted with that of *corrective emotional experience* (CEE).

As group members experience the tension and relief that flows from interpersonal relating, there is

opportunity for CEE, understood as the liberation of inner affective turmoil stirred by past trauma and relational frustrations. The common affiliated psychological term for the release of repressed emotion is *catharsis*. Such an emotional rise is corrective because of the presence of favorable therapeutic factors, more specifically, the relationships that *are* the group experience. This interior emotional material has not actually been dormant, latent or 'locked away.' Rather, active patterns of interpersonal relating along with prominent ego defenses have served to protect the individual from the uncontrolled release of these unacceptable or relationally risky emotions. The corrective benefit of catharsis is the direct result of the interpersonal 'safety' experienced as the climate of the contemporary group.

The use of the term CEE has a long tradition within dynamic explanations for change (Alexander & French, 1946/1980). Brief psychodynamic approaches apply specific techniques to accelerate a breakthrough in the dominant ego defenses through the active use of the immediate presence of the therapeutic agent. The intent is to reduce surface symptoms related to anxiety, shame, fear or anticipation of loss, helplessness and pain as well by the active removal of ineffective ego defenses at the core of the personality (Davanloo, 1990; Fosha, 2000). In contemporary dynamic portraits of CEE, the language

of intrapsychic experience is maintained with continued emphasis on 'unconscious' experience being brought into immediate awareness. Despite the residual appeal to internal personality structure, there is a bold use of interpersonal immediacy to gain access to core affective and attachment experiences (Fosha, 2000). Resistance and ruptures in the alliance become the central thrust of therapeutic work. This is not merely to reduce symptoms but to intentionally bring about character change that increases access to rewarding relational encounters (Fosha, 2000; Safran, Muran, & Samstag, 1994). The presumed inner change mechanism may be referred to as CEE, but both the method and outcome of such a 'release' is relational. Since the therapeutic activity is primarily interpersonal and the gain is client access to greater intimacy, it makes sense conceptually to describe the major process with a relational rather than intrapersonal term. The shift to CER retains the association with an immediate 'breakthrough' providing relief accompanied by an inner change while more forcefully placing emphasis on the complexity between affective experience and relational attachment fused within the internal working model. The re-setting of the curative center being offered here has similarities to Olthuis' (2001) argument for care over cure, for connection over intervention, and for mutuality over objective isolation.

A human being resting in and reflecting on a redeemed connection with one's Creator will experience a CER. By God's grace and through *imago dei* qualities, human beings provide for the formation and growth of others by replicating his love in genuine human encounters. CER may be described as interpersonal intimacy empowered by the Holy Spirit to make real the presence of Jesus Christ. It is 'corrective' because it reflects the grace of a Holy God transcending human brokenness. It is 'emotional' since human beings do not appear to internalize such experiences through cognition alone. Affective and cognitive systems must both be triggered. It is relational because it is stirred by the creation and formation of intimacy bonds.

There is a threefold rationale for gravitating to the use of CER over CEE in contemporary groups framed within a Christian worldview. First, the emphasis is more firmly on interpersonal process that flows from and to relational patterns rather than on an intrapersonal experience that allows for structural change in underlying personality dynamics. Second, as noted in the earlier research review, many groups

today are time-limited, cognitive behavioral and issue driven. Catharsis may not be a dominant experience. As a broader term, CER may encompass more relational benefits than the favorably supported catharsis of CEE. Third, the relational element of CER fits neatly onto the available theological foundation.

### APPLICATIONS FOR GROUP WORK AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Christ-honoring care, unlike generic mental health care, is not committed to healthy adjustment as an end in itself but pursues holistic growth. Specifically, this means aiding the self to be reconstructed in Christ through the experience of the ecclesial community (Grenz, 2001). Character can be cultivated to manage the discernible personality in the interest of spiritual formation or soul maturation. In this depiction, 'character' is referencing the value-guided and will-directed narrative self as opposed to the natural inclinations of the constructed identity commonly referred to as 'personality.' The Holy Spirit and the resources known as the fruit of the Spirit become active in the ecclesial self to contribute to healthy adjustment and to whole person or soul growth (Gal. 5:22-23). When human beings serve as a vine, light, bread, shepherd or truth for others in love, the ecclesial self is engaged in community. For example, when a person crippled with fear, doubt, and a lack of direction encounters others where the beauty and hope of *light* breaks through, an inspiring moral compass comes to life. When a person captivated by excessive worry senses the protective force of a *gate* in another, optimism and anticipation is renewed as inner security is restored. When a lonely soul is suffering from loss, the relational refreshment of *living water* quenches the thirsty heart.

Christian helpers promote CER in groups where interpersonal process is activated in accordance with a stated purpose to assist members in goal attainment. Resulting adjustments in the internal working model may allow for more intimate interpersonal and transpersonal experience. This thrust is entirely consistent with secular group work. The following ideas model spiritual formation activities that allow for the explicit exploration of Christian themes and pressing heavenward (Phil. 3:12-14).

Group leaders orientate members and demonstrate that potent group work calls for relating authentically while increasing in the skills of intimate relating. It may be useful to build awareness that this



type of relating allows Christ followers to transparently reflect Jesus Christ as *imago dei*. Thus, spiritually enriched relating is reflecting and representing the presence of Jesus Christ in the ways that he promised to provide abundant life. This is more about giving the Holy Spirit freedom to maneuver than it is bringing in a new technique or behavioral template for imitation. Building awareness may facilitate CER as a group norm.

This sample closing group moment was drawn from *The Schopenhauer Cure*:

"We've got to stop," said Julius, "but, Philip, this is exactly what I was fishing for when I asked you about your feelings."

Philip shook his head in puzzlement.

Have you understood that today you were given a gift by both Rebecca and Stuart?"

Philip continued to shake his head. "I don't understand."

"That's your homework assignment, Philip, I want you to meditate on the gifts you were given today." (Yalom, 2005, p.203)

The reference to a *gift* is very natural for group therapists acquainted with Yalom's leadership style. It is through this treasured term that marvelous interpersonal process is highlighted, then shaped. These person to person 'gifts' can be unwrapped by referencing a spiritual provision reflected in John's metaphors. "*Did you really take in the deep confessions that were given to you by your fellow group members? It was as if their brokenness and the redemption they experience daily revealed Jesus in our circle as Messiah.*"

Recognizing the provisions behind these metaphors may be fostered through their use in prayer, summarizing, and in interpreting process. "*Our session today had several of you wrestling with complex decisions. Did any of you sense a moment in our sharing when the Holy Spirit made the presence of Jesus as the Way, our source of wisdom, real in our midst?*" Or, "*Lord, as we open ourselves to one another today, will you come among us as Light, providing the moral direction we crave.*"

Such ideas only have utility in the context of quality group work and recognition of the effects of the movement of the Holy Spirit (John3:8). This intent is not to launch novel Christian group lingo. This is an alternative description and attribution of the process and benefits of interpersonal relating within group work that may facilitate the increased adoption of a group methodology for the Christian counseling and spiritual formation movement.

Group work may have advantages over individual helping approaches. There are increased opportunities for spontaneous CER. The experience of emotional, informational, and instrumental support may appear to be natural to the recipient despite the formal and planned nature of a helping group. There is a reciprocal benefit to both provider and recipient. Furthermore, group participation facilitates a community experience similar to the normal processes available in the body of Christ for the ecclesial self. Given the communal nature of the process of recreating the *imago dei*, group approaches are an important tool for Christian healing and nurture.

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