

## *Hermeneutics: Interpreting Sacred and Living Texts*

Anthony J. Headley

Asbury Theological Seminary

tony.headley@asburyseminary.edu

### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the application of hermeneutical principles espoused in *Inductive Bible Study* by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina to the field of counseling. In approaching this task, the author focused on sections of the Bauer and Traina text that focused on observing and asking, answering and interpreting and evaluating and appropriating. In this article, the author presents the interpretive task as an interpersonal process influenced by the background issues of both writer and interpreter. As an interpersonal process, the interpretive principles apply whether one is seeking to interpret a written text or spoken words. Moreover, the author argues that hermeneutical principles are relevant to the counseling process for two major reasons: First, persons can be considered living texts to be understood through similar interpretive processes used in biblical interpretation. Second, the principles are also relevant because of the common medium of language encountered in written and spoken words.

**Key Terms:** hermeneutics, counseling, living human documents, integration

### **Introduction**

How might insights from the discipline of hermeneutics apply to the field of counseling? Answering this question is the purpose of this article. Specifically, I will seek to demonstrate how the hermeneutical

principles discussed in David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina's book on *Inductive Bible Study* may apply to counseling practices.<sup>1</sup> This expectation appears reasonable for a number of reasons. First, this effort represents the relatively common practice of interdisciplinary integration. This type of integration is often described as theoretical or conceptual integration. It aims to provide meaningful comparisons and contrasts between two considered disciplines. Additionally, it endeavors to apply insights from one discipline to another. However, a fundamental goal is to demonstrate how elements such as a discipline's assumptions, conclusions, and methodology might be meaningfully integrated with another.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, conceptual integration seeks to demonstrate how each discipline might mutually benefit from engagement with the other.

Second, efforts to integrate biblical and theological disciplines to psychology, counseling, and other therapeutic disciplines are not new. For some time, various authors have sought to bring about a rapprochement between psychology and counseling and biblical and theological disciplines. For example, Christian psychologists have expended much effort to demonstrate the relevance of theological and biblical concepts to the field of psychology.<sup>3</sup> Given these efforts, it seems plausible that the therapeutic disciplines might likewise benefit from the insights and methods of biblical hermeneutics.

---

<sup>1</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Steven L. Porter, "Wesleyan Theological Methodology as a Theory of Integration," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32 (2004): 190–99.

<sup>3</sup> Al Dueck and Thomas D. Parsons, "Integration Discourse: Modern and Post-modern," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32 (2004): 232–47; Garzon, Fernando, "Interventions That Apply Scripture in Psychotherapy," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 33 (2005): 113–21; William L. Hathaway, "Scripture and Psychological Science: Integrative Challenges and Callings," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 33 (2005): 89–97; Marcus K. Kilian and Stephen Parker, "A Wesleyan Spirituality: Implications for Clinical Practice," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 29 (2001): 72–80; Porter, "Wesleyan Theological Methodology as a Theory of Integration," 190–99.

Third, attempts to integrate therapeutic disciplines and biblical hermeneutics already exist. These efforts have largely involved the application of therapeutic insights to the field of biblical interpretation. For example, Kamila Blessings has demonstrated how principles from the family therapy field might be meaningfully applied to biblical interpretation. Besides her own efforts, she noted an increased interest in the use of psychological theories in biblical interpretation. She points out that such interests have led psychology and biblical study groups to meet in order to discuss psychologically-based interpretive tools.<sup>4</sup>

## The Nature of Hermeneutics

Before proceeding further, it seems wise to discuss the nature of hermeneutics, and to give particular attention to the Inductive Bible Study (IBS) approach. This appears a necessary step before one can make meaningful application to the field of counseling. Hermeneutics involves the science of interpretation and stems from early work in biblical criticism which was later applied as a method for understanding scripture.<sup>5</sup> Hermeneutics permits the interpreter to enter into another's experience and frame of reference. As such, it involves a way of listening by which one seeks to interpret and make sense of another's words and messages.<sup>6</sup> Given this reality, hermeneutics is inherently interper-

---

<sup>4</sup> Kamila Blessing, "Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory as Bible Hermeneutic," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 19 (2000): 38–46; idem, "Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures," in *From Gospel to Gnostics*, ed. J. Harold Ellen and Wayne G Rollins, 4 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), 3:165–91.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 1; Zoë Boden and Virginia Eatough, "Understanding More Fully: A Multimodal Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Approach," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11 (2014): 160–77; Tom Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 31 (2003): 259–72; Richard Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors: Hermeneutics as a Way of Listening," *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* 11 (2012): 304–20.

<sup>6</sup> Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306, 313.

sonal; it permits interpreters of written or spoken words to engage empathically the author of the text in an I-Thou relationship.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it has been noted that “... the interpreter (I) relives and reenacts empathically the experience, both cognitive and transcognitive, of the writer (Thou).”<sup>8</sup> This means that in any interpretive act, there is an ongoing relationship between the author and the interpreter. Moreover, there is a two-way flow of influence between text and interpreter making for a dialogue rather than a monologue.<sup>9</sup>

The engagement between writer and interpreter incorporates culture and history. In fact, interpreters bring all of their background issues, which are sometimes covert, to the interpretive process.<sup>10</sup> Elements such as the interpreter’s cultural experience, makeup and other background issues come into play.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, an interpreter also brings various espoused values and preferences. In short, while seeking to understand another’s speech, however delivered, an interpreter’s *Sitz im Leben* always comes into play. From this perspective, efforts to understand the meaning of another individual is an act of interpretation influenced by all aspects of the interpreter.<sup>12</sup> However, this is not simply true of interpreters; writers also bring their own makeup, cultural experiences and other background issues to the text. As a result, the interpretive process involves a kind of dance in which writer and interpreter move in sync with each other with the ultimate goal of determining the meaning the writer or speaker intended. Given the con-

---

<sup>7</sup> Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 313.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 370 quoting Wilhelm Dilthey.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Park, “History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin’s Pastoral Theology: Toward an Identity-Embodied and Community-Embedded Pastoral Theology, Part II. Method,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54 (2005): 61–72.

<sup>10</sup> Clara E. Hill, *Helping Skills: Facilitating Exploration, Insight, and Action*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009), 40–44; Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 261.

<sup>11</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 371.

<sup>12</sup> Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 261–62.

tributions of writer or speaker and interpreter to the interpretive process, one might consider the hermeneutical task as involving a kind of negotiated meaning.<sup>13</sup>

These realities generally apply to any written or spoken language. In fact, it is language itself that carries many of the personal truths and cultural dynamics which influence communication and understanding.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it has been noted that language "... transmits a hidden load of shared assumptions, a collective and shared set of interpretations of reality that make up the culture of a particular group."<sup>15</sup> Given this reality of language, it is not surprising that hermeneutical principles have even been applied to fields such as qualitative research which focus on interpreting written language and narratives.<sup>16</sup> Hermeneutics has also been applied to pastoral care and counseling by practitioners such as Charles Gerkin and Donald Capps.<sup>17</sup>

## Approach to Hermeneutics according to Inductive Bible Study

Having discussed the general nature of hermeneutics, it is important to also discuss the interpretive process particularly as it relates to the IBS approach. Bauer and Traina describe this approach to hermeneutics as a "... comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text and that is

---

<sup>13</sup> Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 263.

<sup>14</sup> Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306.

<sup>15</sup> Yusak Tridarmanto, "An Inductive Approach to Paul's Theology: A Methodological Note," *Asia Journal of Theology* 27 (2013): 57–69.

<sup>16</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 161–64; Petra Munro Hendry, "Narrative as Inquiry," *Journal of Educational Research* 103 (2010): 72–80; David L. Rennie, "Qualitative Research as Methodical Hermeneutics," *Psychological Methods* 17 (2012): 385–98.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, Theology and Pastoral Care Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984).

intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us in its own terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation.”<sup>18</sup> This approach emphasizes the need for a first-hand study of the biblical text itself while endeavoring to understand its meaning. In addition, these authors consider the process spiracular, holistic and integrative. The spiracular emphasis means the IBS interpreter knows that just as observation leads to interpretation, the latter can likewise lead one to correct initial observations and make new observations. The emphasis on the holistic and integrative means that the inductive interpreter carefully and comprehensively investigates all of the evidence found in all parts of a written document.<sup>19</sup>

## The Inductive Spirit

An inductive spirit characterizes the IBS approach. Bauer and Traina identify the inductive spirit with a radical openness that takes seriously any evidence presented in the text.<sup>20</sup> This inductive spirit seems analogous to a spirit of inquiry marked by curiosity which follows the narrative wherever it leads. Accordingly, a spirit of curiosity has been highlighted in the interpretation of sacred texts such as the book of Psalms.<sup>21</sup> Curiosity frees the interpreter to follow the text and the multiple meanings that may be present therein. Indeed, curiosity has been described as an attitude that facilitates the generation of “... multiple descriptions and voices.”<sup>22</sup> Consistent with this radical spirit of openness and curi-

---

<sup>18</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 2–6.

<sup>20</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 19; Christine Jones, “Lessons Learned: Applying a Hermeneutic of Curiosity to Psalm 78,” *PRSt* 44 (2017): 173–83.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn Caesar and Marjorie Friday Roberts, “A Conversational Journey with Clients and Helpers: Therapists as Tourist, Not Tour Guide,” *Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies* 10 (1991): 47.

osity, the IBS approach also emphasizes a willingness to accept the conclusions generated by this process. Evidence in the text serves as key in that it becomes the main factor in determining its meaning.<sup>23</sup>

However, although the inductive interpreter comes with a degree of openness and curiosity, this does not mean pure objectivity exists. Given background issues and preunderstandings, the inductive interpreter knows pure objectivity is illusory. Rather, she knows that one approaches the text with objectivity and subjectivity, a reality described as *transjective*.<sup>24</sup> Given these realities, openness means a willingness to temporarily suspend one's worldviews and assumptions in order to understand in an unbiased way the meaning of a given text. One can contrast the openness in IBS with deductive approaches. In a deductive approach, the reader brings his or her own assumptions and biases to the text rather than allowing it to speak for itself. Those presuppositions then become guiding factors in determining the meaning of a text. In reality, the interpreter working from this stance imposes personal biases on the text.<sup>25</sup>

## The Inductive Process

The IBS approach also includes a clear methodology described as an inductive process. However, this process is not rigid or inflexible. Rather, since it is shaped by the individual differences of the interpreter. One may consider it an individualized approach to the interpretation

---

<sup>23</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 18–22; Joshua E. Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *JETS* 55 (2012): 155–58.

<sup>24</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 28–32; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 155–56.

<sup>25</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 17–23; Justin Marc Smith, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *RBL* 15 (2013): 482–84 available at <https://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=8103>; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 156.

of a text. In fact, the authors emphasize the need for students to develop their own skills as they study the Bible. The approach seems individualized in another sense; namely, the interpreter determines what approaches are best suited to a text. As such, the authors described it as doing “... whatever is most effective and efficient in determining the meaning of the text and thus effectuating or implementing an inductive attitude.”<sup>26</sup> In parts 2–5, the authors described this experimental process as one that includes observation, interpretation and appropriation (application) and correlation.<sup>27</sup> These parts and their corresponding chapters lie at the heart of the inductive process. Part 5, which focused on correlation, involves integrating smaller parts of the Bible with larger parts. Correlation serves to help one arrive at the meaning of larger sections of biblical material.<sup>28</sup> Although this section may contain ideas relevant to counseling (such as its emphasis on over-generalization), this author will focus on parts 2–4 that begins with observing and asking.

### *Observing and Asking*

The initial procedure in the IBS approach emphasizes detailed observation that leads to asking pertinent questions of the text. Observing serves as a valuable tool for yielding evidence from which general conclusions may be drawn.<sup>29</sup> It focuses systemically on all parts of a written document including books-as-wholes, its divisions, sections and segments.<sup>30</sup> Here, the authors appear to utilize the idea of the hermeneutical circle whereby exploring parts and wholes promote understanding of each other. This idea of the hermeneutical circle also “... means that

---

<sup>26</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–361.

<sup>28</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 337; Walter M. Dunnnett, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *AThR* 94 (2012): 342.

<sup>29</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 73–175, esp. 73 and 75.

<sup>30</sup> See chs. 11–12 in Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 79–151.



the interpreter can enter the circle of possible narratives at any point, that each narrative modifies the whole and that the experience of the circle opens up new horizons of meaning for the enquirer.”<sup>31</sup>

In my judgment, the described characteristics of observation that facilitates effective questions appear important. Bauer and Traina describe these characteristics as perceptivity, exactness, persistence and impartiality. These four characteristics serve as important elements in the IBS method and bear some brief explanation. Perceptivity means the interpreter becomes aware of what is actually present in the text. This implies that one does not bring material foreign to the text as would be true in a deductive process. Exactness refers to a focus on accuracy and precision in seeing what is present in the text. It also indicates a process that is specific and depth-focused rather than superficial. The authors suggest that labeling one’s observations can facilitate exactness. Persistence involves continually seeking to discover what is present in the text. This appears of crucial importance since a document or text might possess many layers of meaning. Finally, those who observe a text need to exhibit impartiality. This involves being aware of one’s preunderstandings, prejudices, and biases brought to the text that can color what one observes.<sup>32</sup>

As noted earlier, in the IBS approach keen observation leads to asking questions. This makes sense since asking questions lies at the heart of inquiry.<sup>33</sup> Although I will discuss questions more thoroughly in the section that follows, it seems appropriate here to note the nature of questions asked in the IBS process. I note that the questions asked were open in nature. Open questions typically begin with how, what, when, where and why.<sup>34</sup> They require a fuller response than one normally gets when the question elicits a minimal response or a simple yes or no. Examples of such open questions would include “Where are the

---

<sup>31</sup> Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 307.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–78.

<sup>33</sup> Hendry, “Narrative as Inquiry,” 73.

<sup>34</sup> Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2010), 139–40; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 117–23.

problems here? What are the questions that pertain specifically to the major problems?”<sup>35</sup>

### *Answering and Interpreting*

The authors titled this section “Answering and Interpreting” for a specific reason. Persons using the IBS approach begin to answer and interpret the material by answering significant questions raised in the first phase.<sup>36</sup> Here, the budding interpreter determines which of the questions formulated earlier are most important. But how does one determine which questions to pursue? Here, Bauer and Traina discuss selection criteria such as importance, difficulty, interest and interrelatedness. In relation to importance, the interpreter should seek to focus on those questions which are most likely to bring one into contact with a passage’s central concerns. One should also focus on questions that facilitate addressing the major problems in a passage. Of course, one should also focus on those questions that will address the personal or professional concerns with which one approached the text. While considering these various factors, one ought also to be aware that questions interrelate and impinge on each other; that is, answering one question often encompasses answers to other questions raised.<sup>37</sup>

As one seeks to answer significant questions, two broad elements come into play: identifying appropriate evidence that becomes the basis for devising premises and drawing inferences germane to the text.<sup>38</sup> In addressing the first element, Bauer and Traina highlight a number of evidences that facilitate answering the questions. For the purpose of this article, this author will briefly mention the evidences that seem to possess particular relevance to counseling. These would include word usage, kinds of terms used, inflection and syntax, tone or atmosphere,

---

<sup>35</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

<sup>36</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80.

<sup>38</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

author's purpose and viewpoint and historical background.<sup>39</sup> As one wrestles with these evidences, one also begins to formulate premises that lead to various inferences. In some sense, in pursuing this process, the interpreter makes hypotheses and carefully tests them out. Through these aspects, one enters into the interpretive task of understanding the meaning the writer intended.<sup>40</sup> Bauer and Traina described this in the following manner: "Interpretation involves precisely and specifically ascertaining the sense of the text by identifying, on the basis of evidence within and surrounding the text itself, the communicative intent of the implied author toward the implied reader, that is, the reader that the text itself assumes. The interpretive process thus depends on the guidance the text gives to the reader in the construal of meaning."<sup>41</sup> Of course, in the interpretive process, paying careful attention to context is also vitally important. In fact, the literary context of a passage provides the most significant evidence for interpretation.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that the contexts of the writer and interpreter also play an essential role in the communication process.<sup>43</sup>

However, in seeking to make valid interpretations of a text, the possibility for various fallacies arise. These can serve to negatively influence the discovery of meaning. Bauer and Traina highlight several possible fallacies. However, this author will focus on the fallacies of premise, fallacies of lexical reductionism and psychological fallacy. The first of these errors involve starting with an invalid or ambiguous premise which virtually assures false interpretations. The fallacy of lexical reductionism revolves around deriving meaning from statements simply by paying attention to the cumulative definition of terms. In the process, one misses the relationship of terms to each other. At the same time, the terms and their meaning become delinked from their

---

<sup>39</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 186–221.

<sup>40</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 239–48.

<sup>41</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 177.

<sup>42</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 183–86; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 156.

<sup>43</sup> Tridarmanto, "Inductive Approach to Paul's Theology," 60–62.

literary, historical and cultural contexts. The psychological fallacy involves imposing an emotional interpretation on the text when such a reading is not present within the passage or its original context.<sup>44</sup>

### *Evaluating and Appropriating*

How important and valuable is interpretation if it lacks relevance for life in the world? This appears to be the intent of the section on evaluating and appropriating. Evaluation deals with the validity of the scriptures in both a general and specific sense. In the general sense, evaluation inquires as to the validity and worth of the scriptures for contemporary persons. In the specific sense, evaluation relates to whether biblical passages possess continuing value that makes them suitable material for appropriation and how relevant they might be to specific situations.<sup>45</sup> As one can see, evaluation has appropriation, that is, application in view. In fact, the text indicates that the focus here is to “... ascertain what values for thinking, character and behavior they may derive from the interpretation of the text for the formation of contemporary personal and community life.”<sup>46</sup> Appropriation is all about applying biblical truth discerned through interpretation to the contemporary situation. From this standpoint, interpretation is not an end in itself; it is not strictly intended to promote understanding and insight. Its ultimate goal ought to inform how persons and communities respond to truths gained through the interpretive process. In effect, this section highlighted IBS as having moral and ethical implications rather than serving as simply an academic and scholarly exercise.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 210–12.

<sup>45</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 282–88.

<sup>46</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

<sup>47</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 319–25.

## Hermeneutics and Counseling: From Sacred Text to Living Text

Before showing how insights from the IBS approach to hermeneutics apply to counseling, it is necessary to settle a couple of questions that likely arise from the title of this article. From the title, two questions likely arise. First, one might reasonably wonder about the meaning of the words *living texts*. Second, one might question the presupposed link between the interpretation of sacred texts and living texts. In fact, when I related the nature of this writing project to a colleague, he wondered aloud about the connection between hermeneutics and counseling. So, these are legitimate questions worth addressing.

By the term *living texts*, I refer to human beings who possess the inherent capacity for communication through language, whether in spoken and written forms or through non-verbal language. Given this capacity for language, the phrase means that humans are texts in the sense that they possess life stories and narratives which can be communicated.<sup>48</sup> Similar to the interpretation of sacred texts, the phrase implies that counselors can plumb individual stories and narratives for meaning as they seek to comprehend a speaker or writer. Moreover, referring to humans as texts (or documents) within the healing arts is not new. For example, in 1984, Charles Gerkin, drawing from the work of Anton Boisen, the founder of clinical pastoral education, espoused the idea of individuals as living human documents. Gerkin construed human persons as documents capable of being read and interpreted in a similar fashion to the way in which one would interpret a historical text. Furthermore, he thought human documents revealed a depth of

---

<sup>48</sup> Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, 12; Park, "History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin's Pastoral Theology," 66; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306–7.

experience that needs to be respected just as interpreters respect historic texts.<sup>49</sup> In the same year, Donald Capps also utilized this concept when he applied the discipline of hermeneutics to pastoral care and counseling.<sup>50</sup> Given this history, one can consider my use of living texts as synonymous with the notion of living human documents.

## Language: The Common Denominator

On what basis can one relate a living human text to written sacred texts? What do human and sacred texts have in common that permit the application of hermeneutical principles to both types of documents? How can processes developed to interpret sacred texts serve as suitable instruments for understanding the meaning of living texts? The answers to these questions lead to a consideration of the common medium of language present in sacred and living texts. Living texts who come to counseling possess the capacity for language and through it, they generate meaning. More importantly, in living human documents language serves as a major root of personal identity and is deeply connected to personal truth and culture. Given its nature and the focus on language, hermeneutics appears an appropriate discipline for exploring human texts as well as sacred texts. In fact, it is germane wherever one seeks to understand spoken or written language.<sup>51</sup> Its principles and processes appear relevant whether one is seeking to understand a biblical or religious passage or endeavoring to make sense of the spoken

---

<sup>49</sup> Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*; Rodney J. Hunter, “Conversations about Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms,” *J. Pastoral Care* 15 (2005): 75–83; K. R. Mitchell, “The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 38 (1984): 64–72; Park, “History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin’s Pastoral Theology,” 66; Paul D. Steinke, “Living Human Documents Write Books,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 50 (1996): 405–8; F. B. Wichern, review of *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*, by Charles V. Gerkin,” *BSac* 141 (1984): 374.

<sup>50</sup> Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, 37–60.

<sup>51</sup> Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 306.

(and written) words clients bring to counseling. One might even go further in comparing sacred texts to living texts and thereby reinforce the relevance of hermeneutics; because of language, even in sacred texts there exists a human element. As the Apostle Peter informs us, although scripture came inspired by the will of God, men yet spoke (and wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

However, other connections exist between sacred and living texts that make the application of hermeneutical principles relevant. First, as is true with sacred texts, history and culture also play an influential role in living texts as individuals bring these ways of knowing to their narratives.<sup>52</sup> As such, the task of understanding the meaning of sacred and living narratives largely involves the same hermeneutical processes. In fact, understanding itself involves an effort to interpret the meaning of language.<sup>53</sup> However, understanding these texts does not happen casually or without effort; understanding necessitates paying keen attention to the text or otherwise actively listening in order to comprehend its meanings.<sup>54</sup>

Second, hermeneutics becomes important to sacred and living texts for another reason; namely, these texts do not necessarily carry one meaning; written or spoken words may possess multiple meanings.<sup>55</sup> In other words, as is true in sacred texts, the narratives of living human texts are also polysemic.<sup>56</sup> Human language, written and spoken, through its rich use of metaphor, possesses the ability to conceal multiple meanings and the depth of a message.<sup>57</sup> This ability of language to

---

<sup>52</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 288–325; Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 261, 269; Tridarmanto, “Inductive Approach to Paul’s Theology,” 57–59, 60–62.

<sup>53</sup> Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 266.

<sup>54</sup> Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 306.

<sup>55</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Boden and Eatough, “Understanding More Fully,” 162–64; Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 269; Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 308–13.

<sup>57</sup> Boden and Eatough, “Understanding More Fully,” 163–64; Linda Finlay, “Sensing and Making Sense: Embodying Metaphor in Relational-Centered Psycho-

conceal multiple meanings invites interpretation as a way to discern and discover those various levels of meaning. At the same time, listening and discovering the multiple meanings also requires openness and curiosity to hearing and accepting the possible layers to a message.<sup>58</sup>

## Counseling as an Interpersonal Process

Earlier in this paper, the author described hermeneutics as an interpersonal process.<sup>59</sup> Counseling is also a deeply interpersonal process that brings together counselors and clients in dialogical encounters. It involves interpersonal processing whereby a counselor shares in the experience of a client. One might also consider it intrapersonal since counselors utilize skills that help clients to internally process their experiences.<sup>60</sup> In this encounter between counselor and client, there also exists a two-way flow of influence.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as in the hermeneutical process, counseling necessitates empathic encounter of the counselor with the client. As a result, noted authors such as Carl Rogers and Gerard Egan emphasized the need for empathic engagement with the client as a way of comprehending his or her internal frame of reference. They also considered empathy as one of the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective therapy.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, as in interpretation,

---

therapy,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 43 (2015): 338–53; Alia Sohail Khan, “A Hermeneutic Interpretation of Metaphor and Meaning Making in Read Alif Only,” *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry* 10 (2012): 55–75; Lena Wiklund, “Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding,” *International Journal for Human Caring* 14 (2010): 61–69; Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 308–13.

<sup>58</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 370; Boden and Eatough, “Understanding More Fully,” 161; Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 313.

<sup>59</sup> Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 267–68; Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 313.

<sup>60</sup> Robert R. Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 9th ed. (Amherst MA: HRD Press, 2009), 17–24.

<sup>61</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 59–60.

<sup>62</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 82–83; Hill, *Helping Skills*; Carl R. Raskin and Nathaniel J. Rogers, “Person-Centered Therapy,” in *Current Psychotherapies*, ed. Danny Corsini, Raymond J. Wedding, 6th ed. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 2000), 133–67; Worsley,



one has to *listen* to the messages inherent in the words of a client. This demands careful attending and bias-free active listening to the words the client is speaking.<sup>63</sup> Without such careful attention to the client's language, both verbal and non-verbal, it is almost impossible to discern the meaning and intent of the words.

Understanding the meaning and intent of a client's words is also no easy task. Comprehending meaning is a difficult task in itself. However, the task becomes more arduous because of the multiple meanings language can conceal.<sup>64</sup> Background issues such as personality, beliefs, values, demographics, and culture further complicate the process and can distort the message the client intends.<sup>65</sup> But in counseling, it is not simply these factors that bias what one sees and hears; the counselor's theoretical orientation and professional experience can also bias accurate interpretation.<sup>66</sup> Background issues in a counselor or interpreter makes the temporary surrender of one's own worldview, a necessary element to interpretation and understanding the essential message.<sup>67</sup> It is only through the surrender of one's own viewpoint that one is able to enter the client's internal frame of reference. Wise counselors, like successful interpreters, also know that background issues and preunderstandings bring a degree of subjectivity to the process. Likewise, they know that given their subjective biases, full objectivity is not possible. Nevertheless, they strive to balance their acknowledged subjectivity with a degree of objectivity. In the words of Bauer and Traina, they strive to be transjective.<sup>68</sup>

---

"Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

<sup>63</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 80–91; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 106–7.

<sup>64</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 160–64; Finlay, "Sensing and Making Sense," 338–39; Wiklund, "Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding," 61; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 317–18.

<sup>65</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 40–44; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 262.

<sup>66</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 40–41.

<sup>67</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 29; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 40–44.

<sup>68</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 28–37.

However, one would be in error to assume that it is only factors related to the counselor that distort meaning and understanding. Factors within the client can also generate *noise* that distorts the process. Beyond elements such as personality and demographics, a client's expectations regarding counseling, desire and readiness for change and problem situation might also enter into the process.<sup>69</sup> Because of these realities, successful counseling requires the collaboration of both client and counselor, a requirement described as collaborative empiricism.<sup>70</sup> In effect, similar to the interpretation of sacred texts, counseling involves a kind of dance. In this dance, client and counselor try to get in step and in rhythm with each other. In the process, they engage in a kind of negotiation whereby interpretations and meaning are co-constructed or co-created.<sup>71</sup> One writer described this dynamic interaction in which the background issues of counselor and client actively interface, a moment-by-moment interactional sequence.<sup>72</sup>

## The Inductive Spirit in Counseling

As in biblical interpretation, counseling includes an inductive spirit that revolves around radical openness. Earlier, I associated radical openness with a spirit of curiosity.<sup>73</sup> One cannot overemphasize the importance of openness and curiosity to the counseling process. Along with characteristics such as empathy and genuineness, openness is a critical characteristic of the effective counselor.<sup>74</sup> This radical openness

---

<sup>69</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 41–43.

<sup>70</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 39–41.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counseling," 265–66, 269.

<sup>72</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 41, 47–56.

<sup>73</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 161–64; Caesar and Roberts, "Conversational Journey with Clients and Helpers," 41–43; Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey, *Becoming a Helper*, vol. 5 (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2006), 133–34; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counseling," 263–67.

<sup>74</sup> Corey and Corey, *Becoming a Helper*, 151–54; Ed Neukrug and Alan Schwitzer,

means the counselor takes seriously the linguistic material clients bring to counseling. Openness also means the counselor approaches the client from a non-judgmental stance.<sup>75</sup> As in the interpretation of sacred texts, the counselor demonstrates a willingness to follow the client's narrative wherever it leads, and accepts as legitimate the conclusions derived from the dialogical encounter.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, openness means the counselor maintains an active curiosity in the multiple layers of messages inherent in a client's words.<sup>77</sup>

In relation to openness and curiosity in the counseling process, some have pointed to the importance of metaphor.<sup>78</sup> Metaphor serves the important function of promoting and facilitating meaning making as one seeks understanding of clients' stories. Metaphor also serves to connect language with felt sense. Felt sense refers to bodily being and knowing that lies at the periphery of human consciousness. Felt sense represents real lived experience, even though it is pre-reflective and prelinguistic.<sup>79</sup> Through ongoing openness and curiosity, the counselor remains attentive to the importance of metaphor in understanding the verbal and felt meanings clients bring to counseling.

## The Inductive Process in Counseling

### *Observation and Questions*

Counseling employs a methodology similar to that employed in IBS. As a result, one can easily relate the dynamics of the inductive process

---

*Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists: From Natural Helping to Professional Helping* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2005), 75–76; Raskin and Rogers, “Person-Centered Therapy,” 170–72.

<sup>75</sup> Raskin and Rogers, “Person-Centered Therapy,” 170–72.

<sup>76</sup> Strong, “Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling,” 262–63.

<sup>77</sup> Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 313.

<sup>78</sup> Boden and Eatough, “Understanding More Fully,” 163; Finlay, “Sensing and Making Sense,” 338–43; Wiklund, “Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding,” 61–67; Worsley, “Narratives and Lively Metaphors,” 306–13.

<sup>79</sup> Boden and Eatough, “Understanding More Fully,” 162.

to counseling in multiple ways. As noted earlier, observation stands as the first part of the interpretive process. Since parts and wholes mutually inform each other, observation includes a perusal of those elements.<sup>80</sup> Applied to counseling, observation dictates the need to understand the parts and the whole of a client's narrative. Sometimes, in order to gain greater insight into the entirety of the client's problem, the counselor might explore one aspect of the client's story in greater detail. On the other hand, once comprehending one part of a narrative, the counselor might seek to understand how this part pertains to the whole. Moreover, because the parts and whole of a client's narrative are inextricably linked, a counselor can enter the client's story at various points and still grasp the meaning inherent in the whole narrative.<sup>81</sup> One might also think of this reality theoretically. Different theories in counseling often place differential emphasis on cognition, affect or behavior that forms parts of a client's story. Depending on theory, one counselor might focus on the affective as a way to understand the client's story. Another counselor might look to cognition to yield the clearest comprehension of the client's narrative. A third counselor might pursue a behavioral focus. Because the affective, cognitive, and behavioral are all parts that link together in the client's story and life, counselors can enter the client's narrative at any of these points and still gain a holistic understanding.

Beyond this aspect, one cannot overstate the value of keen observation to the counseling process. Various explanations of the therapeutic process place a heightened emphasis on the skill of observation.<sup>82</sup> For example, in Allen Ivey's microskills hierarchy, observation lies at the base of his model, preceded only by the skill of attending.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 307.

<sup>81</sup> Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 307–8.

<sup>82</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 59–66; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 74–80; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 99–116; Allen E. Ivey, Mary B. Ivey and Carlos P. Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 9th. ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 83–104.

<sup>83</sup> Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 12.

Attending involves a way of letting clients know the counselor is tracking with them; it involves being fully tuned in emotionally and physically.<sup>84</sup> It is my opinion that attending itself includes observational features and thereby enhances focused observation on clients' verbal and non-verbal language. Given our earlier discussion, observing verbal language makes sense. However, one also needs to observe clients' non-verbal language as this too communicates meaning. I associate the non-verbal with felt sense. Similar to felt sense, non-verbal language is also pre-reflective and prelinguistic but carries the client's message in a significant way.<sup>85</sup> As a result, it can play a major role in interpreting and understanding clients' meaning. For example, non-verbal language can *punctuate* verbal messages. It can also corroborate, obscure, highlight or otherwise regulate verbal language.<sup>86</sup> This ability to observe non-verbal language and thereby gain a greater comprehension of clients' meaning represents one advantage interpreting living texts holds over the interpretation of sacred texts.

As in the interpretation of sacred texts, counselors also need to pay keen attention to word usage, inflection, syntax and tone.<sup>87</sup> Keen observation of a client's vocal qualities such as tone, pitch, fluency, intensity and pauses can assist a counselor in understanding and interpreting clients' messages.<sup>88</sup> Once a message is received and understood, it may prompt a counselor to make new observations leading to new questions. For example, the initial interpretation of a client's message might lead a counselor to perceive the presence of other meanings.<sup>89</sup> This often leads a counselor to inquire about the other layers of meaning in the client's narrative. Additionally, sometimes a client's speech carries an overt message as well as an implicit message. The

---

<sup>84</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 74–78; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 99–116.

<sup>85</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162.

<sup>86</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 75–76.

<sup>87</sup> For word usage pages 186–91; for inflection and syntax pages 201–8; for tone pages 212–13 in Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*.

<sup>88</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 75–76.

<sup>89</sup> Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313, 315–18.

counselor who makes keen use of observation might perceive this implicit message and endeavor to make it explicit through the verbal skill of advanced empathy.<sup>90</sup> Advanced empathy occurs when a counselor senses meaning not readily apparent to a client. In addition to making the implicit explicit, it also seeks to make connections to various elements in a client's speech and to identify themes therein.<sup>91</sup> Identifying themes refers to repeated ideas or beliefs that appear in a client's speech. Typically, clients might not be consciously aware of the themes that occurs in their narratives.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, as in the IBS method, careful observation informs and leads to questions that can further clarify a client's message and meaning. One observes this close connection between observation and questioning in Ivey's microskills model. In Ivey's model, the skill of questioning or probing comes right after the skill of observation.<sup>93</sup> Significantly, learning to ask important questions is just as important a skill to a skilled counselor as it is to the biblical interpreter.<sup>94</sup> How and when one utilizes questioning might partly depend on individual differences, preferences and style. However, in probing a client's message for meaning, the counselor should focus on the use of open questions. As stated earlier, open questions employ words such as how, what, when, where and why. These questions allow for an in-depth exploration of a client's words and meaning.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 176–83.

<sup>91</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 87–114; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 176–83.

<sup>92</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 179; Biance Cody Murphy and Carolyn Dillon, *Intervening in Action in a Multicultural World*, 4th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2011), 115–17.

<sup>93</sup> Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 136–47; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 117–28.

<sup>95</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 89; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 139–40; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 117–20.

*Characteristics of Effective Questioning*

In the IBS text, the authors focused on perceptivity, persistence, exactness and impartiality as qualities of effective questions.<sup>96</sup> As will be seen in the discussion that follows, each of these qualities are significantly relevant to the work of a counselor. Perceptivity involves being aware of what is actually present. This is absolutely important to counselors as they respond to clients' stories. In fact, Gerard Egan considers perceptiveness one of three important responding skills. Along with perceptiveness in seeing what may be present in a client's speech, one also needs to know how to deliver an appropriate response and be assertive enough to deliver that response.<sup>97</sup> For example, a counselor might perceive a contradiction in a client's story. The appropriate response to contradiction is a verbal challenge that highlights the discrepancy in the message.<sup>98</sup> However, because challenging possesses some degree of confrontation, a counselor might lack the requisite assertiveness to deliver the response. Alternately, a counselor might fear the client's response and therefore not make the challenge.<sup>99</sup>

As in the IBS approach, persistence is also a necessary counseling characteristic. Persistence means a counselor does not simply settle once making initial observations or interpretations. This is because a counselor is keenly aware of the depth and layers to a client's narrative. The idea of multiple meanings and different layers to a client's message finds support in the therapeutic literature. For example, Gestalt approaches to counseling speaks of *peeling the onion*. This imagery acknowledges the presence of multiple layers in clients' stories which are reflective of underlying neuroses and resistances.<sup>100</sup> One also finds an emphasis on multiple layers in Aaron and Judith Beck's downward

---

<sup>96</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–78.

<sup>97</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 112.

<sup>98</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 161–68; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 227–31.

<sup>99</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 112.

<sup>100</sup> Gary Yontef and Lynne Jacobs, "Gestalt Therapy," in *Current Psychotherapies*, 6th ed. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 2000), 303–39.

arrow technique, also called vertical descent. This technique seeks to plumb clients' narratives for deeper meaning attached to core beliefs or schemas. In this approach, the therapist begins by examining the client's thoughts that lie on the surface. Thereafter, the counselor probes for a client's core beliefs. In response to a client's answer, the counselor typically queries what it would mean if it were true.<sup>101</sup> Given this knowledge base, counselors know that meaning is polysemic. Accordingly, the effective counselor demonstrates persistence in searching out other possible meanings.<sup>102</sup> However, persistence also means "...investigating an experience more comprehensively by acknowledging and exploring its sensory aspects, thereby producing a more layered and nuanced account of the phenomenon."<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, persistence also has relevance for counseling beyond the skill of questioning; counselors know client change involves hard work and they are persistent in their willingness to accompany their clients through this difficult process.<sup>104</sup>

True to the IBS approach, one ought also to aim for exactness which involves striving for accuracy. This, too, is an important trait in counseling in several ways. As it relates to observation and questioning, it involves seeing what is really present in a text. As stated earlier, it also involves moving beyond superficial observations.<sup>105</sup> However, its benefit goes beyond probing a client's narrative for understanding. For example, pursuing exactness has relevance for other aspects of the counseling process including empathically listening to the client's story and assessing the problem.

In listening to a client's story, a counselor does not simply aim to demonstrate cognitive or affective understanding of the story. The

---

<sup>101</sup> Judith S. Beck, *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2011), 261–63.

<sup>102</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162–64; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 308–13.

<sup>103</sup> Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162.

<sup>104</sup> Corey and Corey, *Becoming a Helper*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 76.



counselor ought also to aim for accuracy. Writers such as Gerard Egan and Robert Carkhuff express the need for accuracy in one's empathic statements.<sup>106</sup> Carkhuff even developed an accurate empathy scale that labels counselor statements as subtractive, accurate or additive.<sup>107</sup> Subtractive statements involve a failure in accuracy that detracts from the client's narrative. Such statements typically involve giving advice or failing to accurately reflect feeling or content. Inaccurate statements can destroy the therapeutic relationship. However, one can also make statements that accurately reflect the client's meaning. Beyond this, one can make additive statements that accurately capture the implicit in client's words and then make them explicit.<sup>108</sup> Accuracy in delivering empathic statement thus serves as one of the basic necessities of effective counseling.

A counselor also needs accuracy in assessing a client's problem situation. Assessment involves the procedures counselors use to grasp clients' nature and problem situations as they interact with the environment. Sundberg classically defined assessment as involving the methods practitioners use to develop impressions of individuals and their overall pattern of characteristics. It also entails examining hypotheses made about individuals. However, assessment also has the larger goal of making decisions relevant to clients' situation.<sup>109</sup> As such, assessment plays a major role in planning for the effective treatment of clients. To make errors here potentially carries major negative consequences for clients.

The final characteristic Bauer and Traina described was impartiality; that is, seeing what is truly there and being aware of the biases one

---

<sup>106</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 92–104; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 114–19.

<sup>107</sup> Neukrug and Schwitzer, *Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists*, 101–3.

<sup>108</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 137–42; Neukrug and Schwitzer, *Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists*, 102–3.

<sup>109</sup> Norman D. Sundberg, *Assessment of Persons* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 22.

might bring to the text.<sup>110</sup> This, too, carries major implications for counseling. Here, one might recall the earlier discussion about culture and background issues and how they impinge on the interpretive process. These issues can contribute to blind spots in counselors which they bring to counseling relationships. Blind spots can prejudice counselors to see things that are not actually present in clients' speech. Because of these, they may make false interpretations of clients' stories. Counselors might also be unaware of how their own situations and stories align with clients' narratives. As a result, they might impose their own expectations and interpretations on clients. At the core, this often leads to countertransference whereby counselors transfer their feelings onto clients. Seeing what is actually there might also be influenced by the particular theoretical orientation counselors hold and use within sessions. Counselors might become so locked into a particular way of seeing, it prevents them from truly understanding clients' perspectives which differ from their own paradigms.

### *Answering and Interpreting*

Once an interpreter has observed and asked the important questions, how does she determine which ones to select that will focus on the central issues in a passage? It is at this point that IBS discusses the selection criteria of importance, difficulty, interest, and interrelatedness.<sup>111</sup> This author believes these qualities are critically relevant to the counseling process. To begin with, importance is essential to effective counseling. Just as biblical interpreters seek to unearth the central concerns of a passage, effective counselors likewise seek to explore and work on clients' important concerns. They need to decide on the important questions worth pursuing and which allow them to better understand clients' stories. Moreover, counselors need to strive for an accurate understanding of the central issues as well as the goals a client

---

<sup>110</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 78.

<sup>111</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80.

wishes to achieve and which are worth pursuing. They should also seek to determine key strategies needed to accomplish therapeutic goals.<sup>112</sup> One sees this concern reflected in counseling models such as Egan's. For example, in his three-stage model, the third point in the first stage involves helping clients to work on issues and concerns that will actually make a difference in their lives.<sup>113</sup>

Bauer and Traina also offer considerations that can help one determine importance. Among these considerations, they indicate the relevance of context and grammatical structure, that is, inflections and syntax.<sup>114</sup> For me, context and the grammatical makeup of client's words are significant concern for counselors. Counselors need to understand clients' problem situations in context since it carries implications for determining important foci. Egan described this attention to context as a *people in systems framework*.<sup>115</sup> Counselors should also help clients work on resolving key problems which can contribute to enhancing their lives within their various contexts. Moreover, counselors also need to pay attention to the way in which clients structure their language within counseling sessions. What words and terms do they emphasize? How fluently do they speak? What are the vocal qualities inherent in their voices when they speak? What viewpoint do they reflect? All of these are important considerations as one seeks to discern the salience of a client's message.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to working on important questions, counselors ought not to avoid tackling difficult questions. Difficult questions include those that touch on sensitive areas the counselor or client would prefer to avoid. More importantly, difficult questions are those which aid the counselor in understanding the central message and meaning(s) of a client's problems. Once counselors gain a fuller understanding of

---

<sup>112</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 342–72.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 201–8.

<sup>115</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 14–15.

<sup>116</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 75.

problem areas, they target those challenging areas for meaningful and lasting change.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the questions and the answers deriving from them are not necessarily separate from each other. As Bauer and Traina indicate, answering one question will often entail addressing other questions raised.<sup>117</sup> The same is true in counseling. This author believes the interrelatedness counselors encounter in counseling situations essentially springs from the holistic nature of the human text. All elements of a person's life exist together. Given this systemic nature of human life, answers to given questions might also pertain to the other aspects of a client's life.

Finally, counselors ought to approach answering and interpreting by pursuing personal or professional interests. In the IBS text, the authors emphasize the personal and professional interests with which the interpreter approached the text.<sup>118</sup> Although these interests can be important considerations in counseling, greater weight should be placed on pursuing the client's personal or professional interests. That is, counselors ought to work on the issues that lie at the heart of the client's interest. Working on interests of importance to clients not only enhances rapport but can also facilitate treatment outcomes.<sup>119</sup>

In the section on implementing interpretation, Bauer and Traina highlight a number of fallacies that can distort interpretation. In this author's earlier discussion, he focused on the fallacies of invalid or ambiguous premises, lexical reductionism and a psychological fallacy.<sup>120</sup> How might these fallacies relate to counseling? First, counselors are not immune from a number of difficulties brought on by holding wrong premises. Making invalid or ambiguous premises can spring from the counselor's covert background issues, countertransference or even from the theoretical orientation a counselor holds. Such factors

---

<sup>117</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80

<sup>118</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

<sup>119</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 270–81.

<sup>120</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 250–51, 255–56.

often lead counselors to minimize the importance of the client's actual words and meaning. They might also serve to distort the client's meaning. Alternately, misunderstanding the client's words can also spring from failing to interpret the client's words in context. Counselors can even engage in psychological fallacy through which they interpret clients' words while guided by emotional or psychological elements foreign to the client's situation. In effect, this often represents an imposition of the counselor's assumptions and worldview onto the client. Together, these fallacies function to distort the meaning of the client's words and message. Moreover, such errors inevitably breed resistance in clients. More importantly, they can lead to grievous outcomes; namely, they can lead to wrong assessment and diagnosis eventuating in ineffective treatment.

### *Evaluating and Appropriating*

The interpretation of a client's words, message and meaning are not ends in themselves. Interpretive encounters should lead individuals to the discovery of truths that holds significant relevance to their lives. In the IBS approach, Bauer and Traina suggested that engagement with the written text ought to help the interpreter establish values which influence "...thinking, character, and behavior."<sup>121</sup> To these areas, this author would add the idea of affective change. In short, interpretation relates to all of life and intends radical change. It possesses real world focus. It reveals truths that can lead to a consideration of how individuals and communities might apply these same biblical truths to present situations and dilemmas.<sup>122</sup> As such, interpretations possess moral and ethical implications.<sup>123</sup>

The application of discovered truth is a significant consideration in counseling. Counseling encounters are not simply meant to promote

---

<sup>121</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

<sup>122</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 484.

insight and understanding; they should facilitate real and meaningful change. They should impact schematic change whereby a counselee's thoughts, feelings and behaviors change for the better and which eventually leads to positive transformation.<sup>124</sup> Simply put, counseling should maintain a real life focus rather than serve esoteric purposes.<sup>125</sup> Truths gleaned and discovered need to influence significant transformation in counselees; they should influence change in their internal psyches and their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, truths discovered in counseling ought to lead counselees to effectively grapple with and effectively accomplish their various responsibilities in their external worlds. In short, truths gleaned in counseling relationships ought to be generalized to all areas of a client's life in the world outside of the therapeutic room.<sup>126</sup>

### *Developing Skills and Discovering a Counseling Style*

So far, this author has discussed several elements of the IBS approach and their relevance to counseling. Before concluding, it appears important to address the development of skills and style. The authors of the IBS approach spoke to the first of these when they emphasized the need for students to develop their own skills.<sup>127</sup> In addition to the development of skills, this author would emphasize the need to develop one's style. Just as budding biblical interpreters learn hermeneutical skills that permit understanding sacred texts, beginning counselors study and acquire a number of skills for engaging living texts. These skills include microskills like attending and observing.<sup>128</sup> To these, one adds a number of verbals skills like feeling reflection, restatement,

---

<sup>124</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 249–50.

<sup>125</sup> Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 314–15.

<sup>126</sup> Hill, *Helping Skills*, 56–57.

<sup>127</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 4, 20, 57, and 152.

<sup>128</sup> Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 63–113.

probing, reflection of meaning, challenge, self-disclosure and interpretation.<sup>129</sup> One can learn and understand all of these skills. However, it takes continual practice with human texts to develop mastery in real life situations. Mastery is not gained overnight. Rather, it comes from continual practice and engagement with clients. Such experiences typically begin with courses which teach procedural models and verbal skills for counseling. In addition, such courses provide opportunities for practicing these skills with living human documents. Students then develop a greater grasp of these skills and develop their own style through practica and internships. In each phase, just as the biblical interpreter engages the sacred text, beginning counselors must also continually engage the human text if they will master the skills and develop a personal style. In reality, the development of skills and style is a lifelong endeavor that continues even after one has completed formal training and entered the field as a professional. In short, enhancing one's skills and discovering and developing a style is a lifelong journey requiring ongoing practice.

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate the relevance and application of the IBS approach to counseling. Of course, I am not under the illusion that I have unearthed or discussed all possible insights and applications. Other investigators of this approach to hermeneutics might discover additional elements that effectively relate to counseling. However, it is hoped that enough has been discussed to provoke further thought about the relevance of hermeneutics to counseling.

In many ways, this article has emphasized the mechanics of hermeneutics. This process pursues an experimental method as it seeks to arrive at systematic knowledge. It is experimental in the broadest sense of the term since it involves a distinct methodology that includes keen

---

<sup>129</sup> Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 92–111; Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 104–90; Hill, *Helping Skills*, 117–268.

observation, investigating evidence, laying out premises and drawing inferences from them.<sup>130</sup> However, in this author's opinion, it would be an error to think of the process as one that is solely guided by an experimental procedure. More to the point, this author believes interpretation of sacred and human documents also employs a kind of *art*. It is art in the sense that each interpreter of written or spoken words brings his or her own skills and creativity to the interpretive process. It is also art in that each individual might creatively utilize these skills in different ways. Much of this creative process will also depend on the unique personality of the interpreter or counselor as well as other factors such as one's preferences, personal history and culture. One might also discern the artistic in the distinctive style or approach an interpreter or counselor brings to sacred and human texts. Earlier in this article, I described the interpretive process as a kind of dance between client and counselor. The same may now be said about the wedding of experimental and artistic elements; they too dance with each other in the interpretation of sacred and human texts.

---

<sup>130</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 1.