

Post-Traumatic Growth On the Way to Emmaus

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Part 1

Legitimacy of The psychological Reading of the Bible

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Outline of the Presentation

- 1. Legitimacy of the psychological reading of the Bible**
- 2. Understanding Post-traumatic Growth**
- 3. Post Traumatic Growth on the way to Emmaus : a psychological reading of Lk 24**

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Brainstorm: Is it justified to read the Bible from a psychological perspective?

- How can it be justified?
- Is it not true that the Bible was not written for the purpose of psychological reading?



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Reading the Bible from a psychological perspective?

		Yes/No	
1.	The Bible captures revelation in a particular context.	Yes	
2.	This context could also include psycho-social dimensions of human life and experience.	Yes	
3.	Human experience of God (even that which is captured in the written form in the Bible) involve the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of human beings.	Yes	
4.	Psychology examines the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of human beings – collective and individual.	Yes	
5.	Therefore, a psychological reading of the Bible could be meaningful.	Yes	

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What is Psychological Biblical Criticism?

1. . . . a way of reading and interpreting biblical texts which is critically attentive to psychological factors involved in their origin, composition, transmission, interpretation, translation, and expression (<http://psybibs.wordpress.com/>).
2. The aim of this approach is, *“to examine texts...as expressions of structure, processes, and habits of the human psyche, both in individual and collective manifestations, past and present”* (italics original; see also Rollins, 1999).

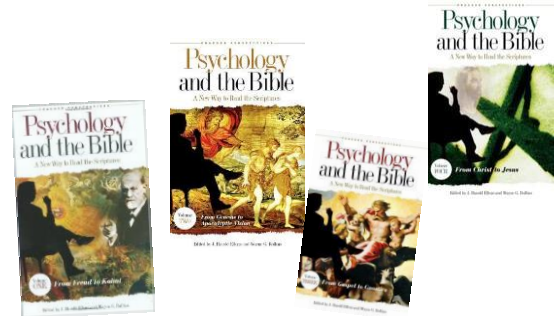
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Is Historical Critical Approach, the only approach?

- On a theological note, applying purely an historical approach to the study of the gospels could rob Jesus the Christ of that larger-than-life image (see Ratzinger, 2007, p. xv-xix).

Four-volume work by J. Harold Ellens & Wayne G. Rollins (2004)



Part 2

Trauma & Post-traumatic Growth

What is trauma?

- Trauma is an event-person complex. The event involves actual or threatened death, or serious injury to self or others, or an experience of 'loss'.
- The person's response in the trauma involves intense fear, helplessness, and perceived lack of control (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).
- Only about 25% of people who face a traumatic event go on to develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (Morrow, 2004, p.168); therefore the perception of the event by the individual plays an important part in the experience of trauma.

Schema

- What is Schema?
 - Our interpretation system!
- Adverse events are traumatic when they threaten our existing schema. The event challenges our schema, and makes us question parts of our schema.
- PTSD emerges when I am not able to fit the event into the schema.

Models of Dealing with Trauma

- Joyce (1993): trauma transformation is similar to the stages of death and dying proposed by Kubler-Ross (1969).
- Spiegel - four stages of the grief process: shock (the impact of loss), controlled stage (social rituals of mourning), regression (marked by defence mechanisms), and adaptation (assimilation of the traumatic experience).
- Four universal elements of tragedy (Tedeschi & Calhoun's, 1995, p. 4 citing Krook): precipitant (a cause being set in motion), suffering, knowledge (of the worthwhile nature of human life) and affirmation (learning the lessons).

Trauma Growth 1

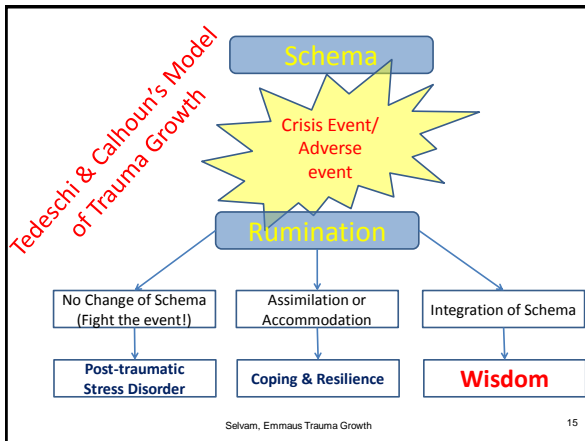
Trauma growth “occurs when the trauma assumes a central place in the life story” (T&C,85). So it is quite different from:

- coping (able to manage trauma),
- recovery (to come out of the shock),
- resilience (to emerge quickly out of the trauma), or
- adjustment (ability to return to baseline functioning).

Trauma Growth 2

‘Growth’ or transformation, following trauma, is marked by a paradigm shift in terms of one’s schema:

- that underlies one’s way of understanding the self
- and interpreting the world around.
- The trauma gets integrated into the person’s schema.



Accommodation and Assimilation

- Accommodation and assimilation are terms which were used by Jean Piaget to explain the process through which people add new information.
- Accommodation refers to having to make little/no adjustment to the existing schema while assimilation merely refers to adding new information.

Assimilation of trauma = coping

Accommodation of trauma = resilience

Integration of trauma = Post-traumatic growth

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Step 1: Rumination:

- Cognitive response (negative) in terms of reflection on the event! Questioning of existing schemas. Often this process could add to depression, but ultimately also to growth! There is a breakdown of assumptions about the self.
- In this stage there is a movement from *primary control* to *secondary control* (T&C, 1995, pp.62-63). That is, initially they attempt to put up with the loss caused by the trauma by finding an alternative to control the situation. When this proves futile they move to secondary control: “an adjustment of expectations to a difficult environment to reduce unpredictability, disappointment, and stress.” But this could be a dysfunctional coping mechanism.

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Step 2: Initial Growth

- When a person does take a path towards transformation rather than just coping, the process takes the person to the next stage. At this stage, there is a process of reframing one’s schema. The event becomes comprehensible in terms of the new schemas; emotions are now manageable; effective action re-emerges! There is a new way of seeing things.

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Step 3. Long term internalized paradoxical wisdom

- Longer-term internalization is the integration of cognition and affect: in harnessing the lessons from life; sense of self-efficacy; the appreciation of paradox; and the development of wisdom. This stage is beyond manageability & comprehensibility. This process of evolving a system of meaning is work in progress.

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Rumination

Manageability

Initial Growth

Comprehensibility

Internalised paradoxical wisdom

New Meaning
Wisdom

Five aspects of Post Traumatic Wisdom

1. Enhanced appreciation of life and the world around.
2. Deeper spiritual understanding of the world and people around!
3. Ability to relating to others in similar traumatic situations in a meaningful/hope-filled manner!
4. Looking at new possibilities to make an impact in the world in the trauma-associated area!
5. Personal strength (not just resilient) in handling future trauma!

Part 3

On the Road to Emmaus Lk 24:13-35

On the Road to Emmaus:

1. The Schema!

Lk 24: 21 "Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free."

The traditional understanding of the Messiah:

- To re-establish the kingdom of David;
- To set the people of Israel free from the present oppression of the Romans.

On the Road to Emmaus:

2. Trigger for the Trauma – the double tragedy

Lk 24: 19 "Jesus of Nazareth, showed himself to be a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; 20 ... our priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified... 22 and some women from our group ...23 ...could not find his body. They came back to tell us they had found an empty tomb and found everything as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing."

1. The messiah just died without doing anything against the Romans;

2. His body has mysteriously disappeared.

On the Road to Emmaus: 3. Dealing with the Trauma

Lk 24: 13 Now that very same day, two of them were **on their way to a village** called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and **they were talking together** about all that had happened.

Coping
(dysfunctional?)

Rumination

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On the Road to Emmaus:

4a. TOWARDS TRAUMA GROWTH – The Listening Mentor

- Lk 24: 5 And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; ... 17 He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, their faces downcast.

Listening

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4b. TOWARDS TRAUMA GROWTH

The Mentor's invitation to see alternatives

Lk 24: 25 Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?'

Initial Growth
(Comprehension)

'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road'

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4c. TOWARDS TRAUMA GROWTH

Integration of the trauma into Schema
of the Messiah
He died & Rose again!

Living
with the
Paradox!

He is alive!
Perhaps he is more than the Messiah!

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Signs of Post Traumatic Wisdom

1. Enhanced appreciation of life and the world around.
2. Deeper spiritual understanding of the world and people around!
3. Ability to relating to others in similar traumatic situations in a meaningful/hope-filled manner!
4. Looking at new possibilities to make an impact in the world in the trauma-associated area!
5. Personal strength (not just resilient) in handling future trauma!

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The Return Journey

- Lk 24: 33 They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, ... 35 Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

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Implication for Counselling/Therapy

- **Listening to the client** – what was their schema; what was the trigger; how are they being affected?
- **Immediate strategy:** Coping!
- **Challenging them to see alternatives** – is the world of their schema rather naïve?

(The role of psycho-spiritual approach!)

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Insights?
Remarks?




Thank you!

Thanks to
Rev. Dr Joanna Collicutt McGrath
Harris Manchester College, Oxford University

This PowerPoint will be available at:
www.sahayaselvam/currentactivity