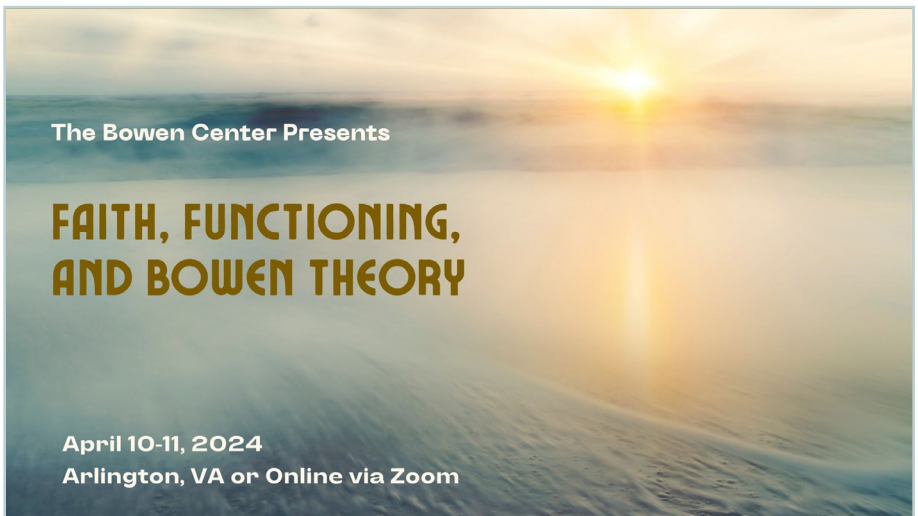


The Bowen Center Presents

The Spring Conference

APRIL 10-11, 2024

Faith, Functioning, and Bowen Theory
Guest Speaker: John Haight, PhD



thebowncenter.org | info@thebowncenter.org

Guest Lecturer

John Haught, PhD

**Emeritus Faculty and
Distinguished Research
Professor at Georgetown
University, Washington Dc.**



Dr. Haught's area of specialization is systematic theology with a particular interest in issues pertaining to science, cosmology, evolution, ecology, and religion. Dr. Haught has presented at numerous conferences on Bowen theory, faith, and theology organized by the late Fr. Joseph Carolin, including the first such conference, in 1987, at which Murray Bowen was an active participant. Dr. Haught has authored two recent books which he suggests participants read prior to the conference.

Dr. Haught's Presentations

Teilhard de Chardin and Albert Einstein: A Conversation

Although Albert Einstein denied the existence of a personal God, he confessed to being sincerely religious, and he thought that good science and right living cannot take place without faith. To understand what he meant by religion and faith, this presentation will place the celebrated physicist in "conversation" with his contemporary, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The two scientists had been living in the United States within miles of each other when they both died in the spring of 1955. If they had ever met and been able to talk about science, the universe, time, faith, God, and the meaning of life, how would the conversation have gone? This presentation, with the prese

The New Cosmology and Reasons for Our Hope

In my journey toward a theology of hope suited to the newest scientific cosmology, I have found support in a number of religious thinkers and philosophers, but I have traveled mainly in the company of Teilhard de Chardin and Alfred North Whitehead. In this presentation I outline how their shared, but at times differing, cosmic sensitivity has guided me as I have dealt in the classroom and my books with the main questions in science and religion. I propose in passing also that Teilhard's cosmic vision and Whitehead's aesthetic metaphysics together provide a fertile framework for a contemporary ecologically oriented theology of nature.

Faith, Functioning, and Bowen Theory

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

- 9:00 Welcome**
Randall T. Frost, MDiv, Bowen Center Director
- 9:05 Fr. Joe Carolin Legacy Endowment**
Kathleen Cotter Cauley, MEd, LMFT
- 9:10 What is Bowen Theory? What is Faith? And What is Theological Thought?**
Rev. Edward Henley, MDiv
- 9:35 What is the Relationship Between Bowen Theory and Faith and How Does it Influence One's Functioning?**
Rev. Lori-Anne Boutin-Crawford, MDiv, RCC
- 10:00 Panel Discussion:** Priscilla J. Friesen, LICSW,
Wednesday Morning Moderator
- 10:25 Break**
- 10:45 Teilhard de Chardin and Albert Einstein:
A Conversation**
Distinguished Guest Lecturer, John F. Haught, PhD
- 12:15 Lunch** A complimentary lunch will be served.
- 12:45 Lunch Event: Book Signing**
- 1:15 On Faith, Functioning, and Finding the Right Way: Developing Functional Strength**
Daniel V. Papero, PhD, LCSW
- 1:40 Thinking Systems as a Christian**
Rev. Robert Creech, PhD
- 2:05 Panel Discussion:** Anne S. McKnight, EdD, LCSW,
Wednesday Afternoon Moderator
- 2:30 Break**
- 2:45 The Balance of Individuality and Togetherness in Functioning and Faith**
Barbara Laymon, PhD MPH
- 3:10 Can Ancient Scripture Illuminate Differentiation**
Erik Thompson, MA
- 3:35 Panel Discussion:** Anne S. McKnight, EdD, LCSW
- 4:00 Conference Adjourns for the Day**

Thursday, April 11, 2024

- 9:00 Housekeeping and Welcome**
Randall T. Frost, MDiv
- 9:05 Differentiation and the Divine: A Constructive Pastoral Theological Effort**
Rev. Carol P. Jeunnette, PhD
- 9:30 Conceptual Links Between Bowen Theory and Theology**
Rev. Randall T. Frost, MDiv
- 9:55 Panel Discussion:** Jennifer Long, MDiv
Thursday Morning Moderator
- 10:20 Break**
- 10:35 The New Cosmology and Reasons for Our Hope**
Distinguished Guest Lecturer: John F. Haught, PhD
- 12:05 Lunch** A complimentary lunch will be served.
- 1:00 Presentation of the Polly Caskie Awards**
Randall T. Frost, MDiv
- 1:15 Forgiveness and Bowen Theory**
Rev. Dana Runestad, MDiv
- 1:40 Bowen Theory: A Resource for Practical Theology**
Rev. Michael Nel, PhD
- 2:05 Panel Discussion:** Kathleen Cotter Cauley, MEd, LMFT
Thursday Afternoon Moderator
- 2:30 Break**
- 2:45 God, Self, and Ministry**
Rev. Robert Spillman, MDiv
- 3:10 Bowen Theory and Perspectives on Christian Faith Formation**
Rev. Kenton Derstine, DMin
- 3:35 Panel Discussion:** Kathleen Cotter Cauley, MEd, LMFT
- 4:00 Conference Adjourns**

Abstracts

Rev. Edward Henley, MDiv
ehenley@thebowncenter.org



What is Bowen Theory? What is Faith? And What is Theological Thought?

The engagement of Bowen theory is central to this conference. The presentation will begin with a brief orientation to the theory emphasizing the shift from an individual perspective to a systemic perspective. The data, the facts, of human functioning look much different from a systemic perspective. The theory then invites a whole new realm of questions, including those of differentiation of self in human systems.

Facts, and facts of functioning, are data points. They appear different depending on perspective and frame of reference. When we assess a fact, especially with regard to its significance or meaning, we need to know where we sit in order to know what we see. For example, a person seeking therapeutic help citing high anxiety might be seen as having a disorder calling for a specific treatment. In another frame, the same person may be seen as the focus of a Family Projection Process calling for a different therapeutic approach. The initial facts, however, are the same. The reference frame, the theoretical frame, of the therapist will be the source of more questions and possible responses.

What is faith? Most broadly stated, what do you think? Do you depend upon your understandings and perceptions? Facts exist as data points, but how they appear and what their significance is depends on the frame of reference and the cognitive framework we bring to them. "Reality" is complex. The perception, selection, and the attribution of significance to facts all work together to form coherent understandings. Many in the field of cognitive neuroscience argue that people operate in the world with expectation of what is before them. Predictive processing frameworks are seen as fundamental to human cognition. We see what we expect to see based on past experience, adjusting our perceptions when the incoming data points cross a threshold of significance and within the scope of

human imagination. What eyes do we bring to the world? What significance do we bring to what we see?

Not all knowledge is factually known. This is true of scientific theories as well as theological thought. Theology at its best is not contrary to reason, and it is limited only by the scope of human imagination. Theology can meet Bowen theory in the realm of fact, sharing many of the perspectives on human functioning common to both Bowen theory and directions in theological thought.

The underlying questions of this conference revolve around how beliefs, expectations, and hopes participate in human functioning. Bowen theory argues that basic self and solid self are rooted in principles and beliefs that guide both perception and behavior.

Rev. Henley is a member of the Bowen Center faculty. He coordinates the Bowen Center Faith Leadership Seminar and is Program Head of the Introduction to Bowen Theory Course. He works in pastoral ministry as Priest-in-Charge of St. James House of Prayer Episcopal Church in Tampa, Florida.



What is the Relationship Between Bowen Theory and Faith and How Does it Influence One's Functioning?

There are no easy answers when observing how Bowen theory and faith coalesce, interrelate, influence, or perhaps are even at odds within a person. The likelihood is that this will be different for each person who takes on the responsibility of observing where theory and faith collaborate, converse, or conflict. Both Bowen theory and faith include a belief system, with ideas of how to observe and interpret reality. However, these systems come from differing starting points, which will impact how someone engages with theory and faith.

Bowen theory begins with a scientific and fact-based analysis of humanity as integrated in relationship with creation. It focuses on the efforts and the work of the individual to become more mature, more thoughtful, and more differentiated in relationship systems. Bowen theory provides a lens to perceive “what is happening” with emotional process and relationship systems, widens the lens to understand the functioning of anxiety, offers predictions regarding the impact of efforts of differentiation, and provides suggestions to interpret behavior. It begins with reality as it is already created and is continuing to be created; this understanding of reality is not static, but is in flux, and continuing in the process of evolution. The theory provides the hope that a human being is evolving and can focus its concerted efforts in relationship with its surrounding world, and, with itself, to evolve in the direction of differentiation.

Bowen theory is thus set within the metanarrative of evolution, with the goal of progress and growth experienced within relationship. While it highlights the forces of individuality and togetherness within an emotional system, it does not name the influence of the originator or creator of these forces as a faith system would. Bowen theory does observe the functional facts of faith and has been used to understand and guide the work of leaders within religious communities. As a Lutheran pastor engaged in ministry for over a

decade, Bowen theory has informed my leadership functioning, and given me a lens to observe and understand human functioning on organizational, group, family, and individual levels. It has informed my personal goals to maturely relate with others and to observe my own default over-functioning position paralleling my own family functioning. Bowen theory gives me a concrete fact-based systemic focus when leading anxious churches in difficult times.

Like Bowen theory, faith also includes the observed facts of reality, and the view of humanity as fundamentally relational. However, faith begins with an acknowledgement that there is always more than meets the human eye in this world that we analyse, as there is a life-giving force at work assisting the individual to become more mature and more thoughtful in relationship. While faith includes a belief system, it is not merely an ideology, but includes a lived relationship with a benevolent force that cannot always be accounted for by the parameters of a belief system. There are many belief systems that inform a collective or personal faith, and each system has its normatively official and formalized framework. However, each believer is firstly personalizing a faith that has been passed down by others, as an historical, and likely a familial and cultural faith, observed in espoused beliefs or operant practices. Each person may accept or adhere to the explicit or implicit ideas and practices of a specific tradition without critique or analysis or may actively think through and determine what beliefs and behaviors are in line with who they are. I think that Bowen theory can assist a believer in identifying what aspects of faith functioning are more fused or differentiated, or where faith can be a function of pseudo or solid self, be it the individual, common, or collective self.

For me as a faith practitioner and as a registered clinical counselor, it would be idolatrous to engage with Bowen theory as a closed and complete system of thought, simply accepting these ideas as fact without testing the theory and how it relates to the world in which I function. I think it is a theory developed by human beings and is best worked with to account for that which may be missing from it, and thus what can be added, including the reality of the Divine. For me as a Lutheran theologian, it would be equally idolatrous to engage with the written work of scripture and the confessions of my denomination as a closed and complete system of thought that does not make space for the work of a Living God, or the Living Word of God, that is in relationship with all humanity, and with the whole world. This includes being open to ideas that are not

inherently religious but may be inspired and inform the functioning of my faith.

Bowen theory, in and of itself, does not serve as the inspiration to work on my own differentiation in relationship with others. My faith, and my living relationship with God is my great motivating 'why,' inspiring me to bring my best, disciplined self, into my relationships. As observing a relationship triangle (God, me, others/world), my faith includes the idea that I am not only interconnected to my systems, but also responsible to those in all my interlocking triangles. This includes a call to be my most highly functioning self, understanding that my brokenness will negatively impact others.

While both theory and theology offer me a wider lens to observe the greater impact of my own personal functioning, my grace-centered faith also serves as a corrective that can come with an anxious works-oriented focus on Bowen theory. The work of grace also informs my understanding of human healing and transformation that meets us and works with us in our undifferentiation. My faith ultimately decreases the anxious focus of my own personal growth, accepting there is a larger relationship system that I have come from that continues to affect my undifferentiated functioning. I can only work with what I've got, where I am at, as I am. I can only be responsible for myself, and work on my own functional differentiation, and do not have the power to change others, to change systems, to change my history, to change my world. I cannot make myself become more basically differentiated overnight, if at all, despite my efforts towards differentiation. While I play my part in working on bringing my most mature self to my relationships, the mechanism of solid growth that seems to suddenly appear is still a mystery to me. My spiritual experiences have also contributed to my personal growth and have come as a gift of grace instead of a gift of my own work. Faith essentially helps me to see what is within my control, what is outside of my control, and accept that I will simultaneously be a saint and sinner, simultaneously solid and pseudo self, whose differentiating work will always be in progress, and whose results will always be outside of my ultimate control.

Rev. Boutin-Crawford is an ordained Lutheran Pastor in the ELCIC, and an Associate Clinical Counsellor and Faculty Member with Living Systems Society in North Vancouver, Canada. She is currently working on a DMin in Contextuaml and Practical Theology,

Daniel V. Papero, PhD, LCSW
dpapero@thebowncenter.org



On Faith, Functioning, and Finding the Right Way: Developing Functional Strength

The theoretical assumption considers emotional illness to be a disorder of the emotional system, an intimate part of man's phylogenetic past which he shares with all lower forms of life, and which is governed by the same laws that govern all living things. (Bowen, 1978, 356)

"There are no atheists in foxholes." (Leo Bourgeois in 1957, commenting on his experience as an infantryman during the Battle of the Bulge [Battle of the Ardennes], December, 1944.)

"God on high, hear my prayer. In my need, you have always been there." ("Bring him Home," *Les Miserables*, sung by Jean Valjean. Music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, English libretto by Herbert Kretzmer)

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Mark 9:24

To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how. (Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, 103)

Eudaimonic well-being may have the potential to compensate for the adverse impact of loneliness on CTRA gene expression. Findings suggest a novel approach to targeting the health risks associated with social isolation by promoting purpose and meaning in life. (Cole, S. W., Levine, M. E., Arevalo, J. M., Ma, J., Weir, D. R., & Crimmins, E. M. 2015. "Loneliness, Eudaimonia, and the Human Conserved Transcriptional Response to Adversity. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 62: 11-17.)

You have inherited a lifetime of tribulation. Everybody has inherited it. Take it over, make the most of it and when you have decided you know the right way, do the best you can with it. (Murray Bowen, October 1990)

The quotations listed above all address, in one fashion or another, the challenge humans face in confronting adversity. In his writing, Murray Bowen uses the term *functional strength* to refer to the ability of the individual and family to meet the challenges of living (1978, 61, 265, 273, 274, 450). He equates an estimate of functional strength with the estimate of level of differentiation of self (273). The level of differentiation of self addresses, in part, the firmness of individual beliefs derived from life experience, examined and tested principles for guiding the decisions made, and the person's ability to retain and utilize those guidelines to engage challenges and adversity. Retaining and using guidelines involves, in part, the ability to tolerate a degree of emotional discomfort and control emotional reactivity. The effort also involves the development of a life plan, a set of goals or objectives that the individual determines to be important and meaningful.

Depending upon the level of differentiation of self, a person gains functional strength differently. At modest levels of differentiation, the individual "borrows" functional strength from the group and relies upon the group to support and sustain his or her efforts. In the middle ranges of the scale, the person still depends to a large degree on the group and its culture but has some ability to develop and retain functional strength with less dependency on the group and its processes. At the more robust end of the scale of differentiation, the person gradually develops functional strength internally, through processes of examination, experience, experimentation, and learning. He or she "thinks for self" and acts in accordance with beliefs, principles, and life experience. The individual has some ability to stand alone on principles in the face of disapproval and even coercion.

Although Bowen does not specifically address religion, faith practice appears to provide one avenue for the development of functional strength. The Stanford anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann proposes that the many aspects of a faith practice serve several functions. Alongside a sense of community (in itself difficult to define), Luhrmann (2020) suggests that the processes of faith, particularly prayer, serve to shift cognitive processes and regulate emotion

She refers to prayer as metacognition, a process of thinking about thinking and the inner experience of the individual. Through the process, individuals establish goals for themselves, change the contents of their thoughts, and manage their feeling state. She proposes that such a metacognitive process “changes people and helps them to deal with the disappointments and the difficulties of their lives.” (Kindle, 139) Through the process of prayer, people strive to align behavior with belief.

In this talk I will define the term functional strength, describe its relationship to *Bowen’s scale of differentiation of self* (472), and speculate briefly about the possibility of faith practice as one approach to the development of functional strength.

Dr. Papero entered postgraduate training in family systems theory and psychotherapy after graduate training in social work. In 1982, Dr. Bowen invited him to join the faculty of the Family Center, now the Bowen Center. He currently organizes a research seminar and coordinates the Theory Meeting. Dr. Papero writes, presents, and consults extensively on Bowen theory. In 1990, he published a basic introduction to family systems, *Bowen Family Systems Theory*. He and Robert Noone, PhD, co-edited the volume *The Family Emotional System: An Integrative Concept for Theory, Science and Practice* in 2015. He has served on the editorial board of the journal *Family Systems* since its founding.

REFERENCES

- Bowen, Murray. 1978. *Family Theory in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Luhrmann, T.M. 2020. *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rev. Robert Creech, PhD
rrcreech@me.com



Thinking Systems as a Christian

The issue of the relationship between scientific and theological knowledge is not a new one. St. Augustine discussed it in the fourth century. However, since the Enlightenment, western thought has been captured by a scientific worldview that limits knowledge to the bounds of the physical world. Reactivity on the part of both people of “faith” and people of “science” has often created a chasm between the two perspectives, in which people on either side have not been able to make space for the other comfortably.

The residue of this divide has made it difficult for some in the “faith” community to hear and accept the work of the “scientific” community. Everything proceeding from human science, from conclusions about the universe’s age and the process of evolutionary development of life to the impact of human behavior on the climate, is considered suspect. Scientific knowledge and biblical texts are often twisted and misused to make the “faith” perspective come out on top.

At the same time, the perspectives of the “faith” community are sometimes summarily dismissed in the “scientific” community, whose “rules” do not permit “knowledge” apart from the bounds of the physical universe. Only physical explanations are permitted in this kind of “scientism.”

I have presented Bowen family systems theory to pastors and theological students for twenty years. Often, some thoughtful person in the group endeavors to bring the theory’s concepts, which intuitively make good sense to them, into conversation with their understanding of the Bible and of Christian theology. Someone will raise their hand and ask, “How does that idea relate to . . .?” or “Isn’t that in conflict with . . .?” Students and pastors often voice concerns about the relationship between scientific knowledge and biblical truth.

How can we reconcile those two sources of knowledge? Can Christian leaders work with a theory of human behavior based on science, such as Bowen family systems theory? In this presentation, I will offer a perspective on the relationship between Bowen family systems theory and Christian theology. I'll also address the need for Christian theology and Bowen theory to come to terms with each other by taking on the equivocal use of language, such as the Christian idea of "denying self" and Bowen's "differentiation of self," along with Bowen's use of the word "love" as an example of human reactivity and the Christian concept of *agape*.

Rev. Creech served twenty-two years as a pastor in Houston, and as Professor of Pastoral Leadership at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary for twelve years.

Barbara Laymon, PhD, MPH
blaymon@thebowncenter.org



The Balance of Individuality and Togetherness in Functioning and Faith

Murray Bowen suggested that an important measure of the functioning of an emotional system is its balance of individuality and togetherness forces. To begin, I will provide background on the terminology surrounding individuality and togetherness, positing that the forces can be expressed in varying levels of maturity, which then impact the overall ratio within a family system.

Using a family diagram based in Genesis, I will explore the variation of functioning of biblical families as seen through the lens of individuality and togetherness, with attention to variations in family functioning. Next, I will consider unit functioning from the view of Dan Papero's (2018) Systems Model of Family Assessment, discussing items from the Natural Systems Scale for Congregations (Laymon 2023). In what ways can these items be useful to congregations? What interferes with congregational maturity?

Finally, I will consider the extent to which the framework of individuality and togetherness provides a way to consider the important questions around faith and functioning. Using an example from scripture, I will address questions including: What is the role of faith in promoting maturity within a family unit? When does faith have the opposite effect, moving a system towards more immature behavior? How predictable are these shifts?

Implications of the material from the perspectives of biblical interpretation and science will be considered. The view of natural family systems will be explored with attention to its differences from a deterministic philosophical lens. Family diagrams related to scriptural examples will be taken from my recent book *All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times* (2023, Resource Publications).

Dr. Laymon is a faculty member and clinical associate at the Bowen Center. Licensed as a professional counselor, she enjoys reflecting with her clients about family emotional processes. Her recent book, *All the Families of the Earth, Therapists in Bible Times*, looks at family emotional processes through the stories of scripture.

Erik Thompson, MA
erik@thompsonleadership.com



Can Ancient Scripture Illuminate Differentiation?

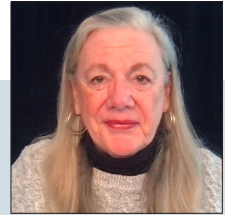
Murray Bowen noted that there is nothing new about differentiation of self. It was always known by those who could hear its “distant drumbeat.” The unifying value of spiritual experience is often emphasized, but does scripture contain a rich exploration of differentiation consistent with Bowen theory?

The ancient Indian Bhagavad-Gita is a candidate that may offer a portrait of higher stages of differentiation of self. It is a family business case study with a highly differentiated coach. It explores a state wherein “the Self is experienced as separate from activity” (Bhagavad-Gita, 6:6, 398). A person living in this state is described as experiencing an “intellect” that is “even” in any social context— “among well-wishers, friends and foes, among the indifferent and the impartial, among hateful persons and among kinsmen, among the saintly as well as the sinful.” (Gita 6:9, 401).

As Michael Kerr stated at the Bowen Theory Academy’s December 2021 monthly webcast, Murray Bowen said there are two ways that people can pull up differentiation of self, one is with an organized effort in their own family, and the other way is with an unusual life experience.” Spiritual texts such as the Bhagavad-Gita may offer clues to such experiences. This presentation will define differentiation of self and examine the evidence for its presence in this ancient text.

Mr. Thompson is Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Family Studies and a member of the Network for the Advancement of Bowen Theory. He holds a BA in Indian philosophy and is a licensed psychologist. His peer reviewed publications include “Differentiation of Self, Life Span Theory, and Higher Stages of Human Development” with Fred Travis and Nyazi Parim in *The Family Journal* as well as “Self Harm and Bowen Theory,” in *Family Systems Journal*.

The Rev. Carol P. Jeunnette, PhD
caroljeunnette@mac.com



Differentiation and the Divine: A Constructive Pastoral Theological Effort

Dr. Murray Bowen's goal was to develop a science of human behavior. Although he briefly explored the idea of the function of belief in the supernatural, religion and theology were not his focus. For people of faith drawn to Bowen theory, and especially leaders of faith communities for whom this thinking has been a lifeline, religion and theology are important. What then is the relationship, if any, between one's understanding of the Divine and Bowen theory? And how does that understanding shape one's functioning?

As a person of faith and leader of faith communities, who is deeply steeped in Bowen theory, I offer a proposal: Differentiation of self—the central concept of Bowen's theory—is a process built into creation, through which God lures creation toward Beauty: the harmony of contrasts, multiplicity in unity, and the greatest complexity that can be held together without falling into chaos, violence, or homogeneity. Differentiation offers us a glimpse into the mystery of God. By working on differentiation, we function in a way that is congruent with what God is about.

This proposal grows from an exploration of the juxtaposition of Bowen theory with aspects of Alfred North Whitehead's (1861-1947) process theism, especially his ideas of concrescence and ongoing creation, and his concept of God. It is a constructive theological effort in that it offers nuances to a concept of God. It is a pastoral theological effort in that it suggests ways in which this concept of God can guide functioning in life, care of congregations, and leadership. It expands a way of thinking that shapes a way of being that is life-giving.

Dr. Jeunnette is a retired Lutheran pastor who began her Bowen theory studies in 1966 with Rabbi Edwin Friedman. She holds a PhD in Religion and Psychological Studies. Her dissertation draws on the work of both Whitehead and Bowen. Dr. Jeunnette serves as chairperson of the Voyagers (www.voyagers.life), works with the Faith Leadership group at the Bowen Center, and continues consulting and coaching with congregations and clergy.

Rev. Randall T. Frost, MDiv
rfrost@thebowncenter.org



Conceptual Links Between Bowen Theory and Theology

Murray Bowen wrote that the term theory has a number of definitions. The most exact definition is comparison of one scientific fact with another. (*Family Evaluation*, 350). He noted “a valid theory is an abstract conceptual formulation of verifiable natural events.” Bowen held the “main concepts in the theory were developed from the functional facts of relationship systems.” (*Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 360). Each concept in the theory can be said to represent a bundle of facts that fit together. The theory itself is a set of interlocking concepts that fit together, all based on verifiable natural events. “If a theory is accurate,” he wrote, “it should be able to predict what will be observed in other similar situations.” (*Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 305-306)

To define a conceptual link between theological understanding and Bowen theory requires the ability to specify facts and facts of functioning in Bowen theory that are also found in a theological formulation of human behavior. The two frameworks differ, but common facts could provide conceptual links that go beyond analogy.

For example, differentiation defines a bundle of facts of functioning that represent higher and lower levels of differentiation. Robert Creech, a biblical scholar, studied the picture presented of Jesus in the four gospels and concluded that Jesus represented a high level of differentiation of self. To the extent people strive to follow Jesus, working on differentiation would be consistent with that aim.

But what determines basic level of differentiation? In his research, Bowen observed facts of functioning in families that led to his conclusion that it is the intensity of unresolved emotional attachment to the original family that determines basic level of differentiation. Bowen developed family psychotherapy as a way to reduce the intensity of unresolved attachment and enable a gradual increase in functional and even basic level of differentiation.

The Judeo-Christian tradition assumes that there is an idolatrous element in most intense attachments. Idolatry refers to the effort to find something which can absolutely secure us, unquestionably confirm our worth, and fully ground the ultimate meaning and significance of our lives. The observable effort to turn people and things into sources of salvation tightens our emotional attachment to them. Bowen observed similar facts of functioning when he described variation in the assumed, assigned, or actual importance of significant others, and the processes of emotional over investment and overvaluing.

A conceptual link may exist between what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls a process of redemption and the possibility of increasing level of differentiation. The assumption is that people who come to know and trust God no longer have the same need to secure themselves by means of overinvesting in others to be their ultimate source of security. Minus idolatry, the intensity of an emotional attachment should diminish. w

Is that so? Is it a fact that the kind of faith which accompanies a process of redemption can actually modify intense emotional attachments and permit a slow rise in level of differentiation? Clinical study of the variation in how faith functions, informed by Bowen theory, could help provide some answers.

Rev. Frost is Director of the Bowen Center. Previously, he had been Executive Director and then Director of Training and Research at Living Systems—a Vancouver, British Columbia based pastoral counseling center that uses Bowen theory as its primary approach. Rev. Frost is a long-time student of Bowen theory and became a faculty member at the Center in January 2015. He's led the Network Seminar program since 2012, is the author of articles and book chapters on Bowen theory, including in the Center's journal, *Family Systems*, and has presented numerous papers at professional meetings over the past thirty years. He is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

REFERENCES

Bowen, Murray. 1978. *Family Theory in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.

Kerr, Michael and Bowen, Murray. 1988. *Family Evaluation*. New York: W.W. Norton

Rev. Dana Runestad, MDiv
danarunestad@gmail.com



Forgiveness and Bowen Theory: A Way Through?

Most world religions include teachings on forgiveness which provide guidance for its practice. Forgiveness is central to Christianity. It implies that one party has been harmed by another; and the other is at fault or to blame. Bowen family systems theory, on the other hand, places conflict in the context of emotional process and offers an opportunity to see one's own part in reciprocal and multi-generational processes, where blame is often not useful. "Forgiveness is for God," says Dan Papero. "You don't need to forgive your parents, you don't even need to like them, but it's a good exercise to work on being able to sit in the same room with them without getting anxious."

- With such a perspective, is the concept of forgiveness necessary?
- What would Christianity look like without this concept?
- How might a particular definition of forgiveness bridge both perspectives?
- How might forgiveness look different, depending on if one is moving in a more differentiated or a more fused direction?
- What happens in emotional process when forgiveness becomes an "issue" and feeds a focus on content rather than process?
- Might there be a "common denominator" that is shared by forgiveness, differentiation, and resurrection?

This presentation will examine these questions. A polarity map (Barry Johnson) will offer a structure for a long-distance view of differentiation as a process (responsibility for self and to others vs. responsibility to self alone or for others).

Rev. Runestad is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a facilitator and presenter for Healthy Congregations, Inc. She is the great-granddaughter and daughter of clergy, younger sister of three older brothers, spouse for forty years, mother of two grown sons, and a student of Bowen family systems theory (Post-graduate program 2015-2018; Bowen Center Faith Leaders Seminar 2018-2023).

Rev. Dr. Michael J. Nel, PhD
mnel@telus.net



Bowen Theory: A Resource for Practical Theology

Theology, and in particular, *practical theology*, has adopted the social sciences as the central and essentially the sole resource for understanding and explanation of human relationships. What Practical theology has failed to appreciate are the limits inherent in the social sciences. One such limit is that the explanations and understandings of the social sciences contain biases that are the result of the influence of Western and particularly North American cultural beliefs. An example is the commitment in the West to the philosophy of individualism. The failure to acknowledge and understand these biases has led Western theologians to impose these limitations on the theological education of clergy, especially in Africa, in other cultures.

The exclusive focus on the social sciences as its primary resource has blinded practical theology to the contribution of the life sciences and evolution for a more inclusive explanation and understanding of human functioning. The reluctance to acknowledge the possible contribution of the life sciences and evolution to practical theology is partly due to its commitment to the social sciences, but also to the lack of a “bridge” that will facilitate a process to incorporate concepts from the life sciences. Attempts to address this oversight have led to some strong reactions. Some theologians have rejected these attempts to incorporate knowledge from the life sciences and evolution, believing the ideas will contribute to scientific materialism and create doubt in God, thus undermining faith.

There are many practical theologians who acknowledge the importance of the life sciences and accept that evolution is a fact. However, all too often these theologians separate their personal belief from their theology by failing to incorporate the life sciences and evolution into their theology as a resource. Then, there are other theologians such as Gerd Thiessen who do accept evolution

but believe that culture is dominant, as illustrated when he writes that “The forms of the process of cultural evolution transcend those of biology.” (17)

Relationships and relational processes are where Bowen theory and practical theology intersect. At this intersection, Bowen theory becomes both a significant resource and functions as a bridge between practical theology and science.

Christian theology, according to the reformer Martin Luther, can either be a theology of glory or a theology of the cross. A theology of glory reduces theology to legalism and proposes that to be a Christian one has to accept a number of propositions, thereby reducing faith to belief. The most blatant form of this is fundamentalism. However, the whole spectrum of Christianity falls prey to influence of a theology of glory. A theology of the cross is relational and seeks explanation and understanding not only of God’s gracious relationship to the cosmos (John 3:16) but how that relationship shapes humankind’s relationship to the cosmos. It is at this juncture that Bowen theory becomes a resource and a bridge to the life sciences for practical theology of relationships, thereby providing practical theology with new and enriching explanations and understandings of relational processes for practical theology.

Rev. Nel grew up in Cape Town, South Africa and in 1966 emigrated from South Africa to Canada, earning an MDiv degree and an STM degree from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon. He then obtained a DTh degree from the University of South Africa. From 1971 to 1990 he served three parishes. In 1990 he joined the staff of the North Shore Counselling Centre, serving from 2003 to 2009 as the Director of Consultation to Clergy.

REFERENCES

Thiessen, Gerd. 1885. *Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach*. UK: First Fortress Press.

Rev. Robert C. Spilman, MDiv
rcspilman@roadrunner.com



God, Self, and Ministry: A Systems View of Idolatry in a Sea of Anxiety

The concept of God is the fundamental theological construct in the monotheistic religions of the Western world. In the Judeo-Christian faith tradition, idolatry—the worship of a false god—is the subject of prohibition in the First Commandment in the Old Testament narrative. This prohibition forms the foundation for the rest of the Biblical Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity.

This presentation will address the theological subject of idolatry—its centrality in the Judeo-Christian tradition—from a Biblical perspective and relate that viewpoint to Bowen family systems theory, which focuses on the functioning of families and other natural systems. The presentation will offer a functional view of idolatry that can connect with Bowen theory’s understanding of chronic anxiety and over/under-functioning reciprocity in human systems. It will challenge clergy and church leaders to link their theological thinking to their use of self in families and congregational systems.

The presentation will raise questions, such as:

Are clergy in a functional position of expertise in congregations that paradoxically encourages them to act in the service of idolatry as they proclaim the Word of God?

Might over-functioning in one’s family and work be viewed as an expression of idolatry in human life?

Is over-functioning in the pastoral position a common emotional pattern in churches that binds, or absorbs, anxiety in the church system? If so, what factors might contribute to this pattern?

How are leaders in families and institutions susceptible to absorbing the tension between others in their systems?

The presentation will start with a Biblical story that illustrates the presence of anxiety in church systems and then touch on Bowen theory’s understanding of chronic anxiety in family systems. It will

reflect on the binding of chronic anxiety in the presenter's own family of origin with reference to Rabbi Edwin Friedman's concept of "the fallacy of expertise." Using Biblical texts from the Old and New Testament and examples of emotional triangles in church life, the presentation will present a functional view of idolatry that connects with a Bowen perspective on chronic anxiety and reciprocal over and under-functioning in systems. It will also address pastoral leadership in a "sea of anxiety" in church life and encourage clergy and lay leaders to ground their work more on pastoral presence—God and self—than on expertise in ministry.

Rev. Spilman is a retired CPE Educator and an ordained pastor of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He is a retired certified member of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. He served on the staff of the Samaritan Counseling Center in Western New York and as an interim pastor in the Buffalo area and directed a program of Congregation-Based Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in Western New York from 1988 to 2017 with a focus on Bowen family systems theory applied to church life and pastoral leadership. He attended the Edwin Friedman family systems seminar from 1989 to 1996, has been a member of the Voyagers Bowen theory and theology group since 1998, and participated in the Bowen Center Post-Graduate Program in 2018-2019.

Rev. Kenton T. Derstine, DMin
kderstine@thebowncenter.org



Bowen Theory and Christian Formation

Bowen theory's concept of differentiation offers a description of the broad variation found in human functioning. The process of differentiation identifies perspectives and practices intended to express and promote a higher level of mature functioning. A Christian theological understanding of the human also depicts human functioning as ranging widely from a lesser to a greater maturity. One expression of this maturity is the relative capacity for "...self-giving love" as demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus. Dr. Haught proposes this love as the "...indestructible...creative source of the universe." (Haught, *God After Einstein* 2022, 92) Christian formation practices are intended to further each adherent's practical embodiment of this self-giving love. Nevertheless, Christians and others have wondered, along with Socrates, "How is it, that men know what is good, but do what is bad?"

This presentation will explore several traditional formation practices that function as critical components of a process that furthers a more consistent embodiment of this love that was in Jesus. One practice to be considered is "thoughtfulness." A significant practice within the Judeo-Christian tradition is learning that supports a deepening wisdom. This wisdom is most often associated with and demonstrated in how an individual functions in relationships.

Another practice to be explored is "lament." The modern practice of lament is typically associated with the expression of feelings. Alternatively, lament can be understood as emerging from an objective appraisal of reality. Lament arises from a moral sensibility built on the apprehension that not all things are as they should be. In other words, not all things, particularly in human behavior, reflect the self-giving love as demonstrated in the "covenant fidelity" of Yahweh or the self-sacrificing love of Jesus. Other elements

considered will be the embrace and limits of human action as well as the role of a patience enabled by the embrace of hope.

Finally, love will be explored as a central Christian practice. This will be accomplished with an examination of common contemporary conceptions of love relative to how it is understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition. An effort will be given to associating these selected Christian practices with the processes commonly associated with the concept of differentiation of self within Bowen theory. What elements might be considered correlative and what might stand alone as unique to each orientating framework?

Rev. Derstine, an ordained Mennonite minister, is associate professor of supervised ministry and director of the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program of Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS). He has served in pastoral education as a Certified Clinical Supervisor/Educator for over twenty-five years. He completed two years of the Bowen Center's Postgraduate Program, served as a clinic intern, and is now a Bowen Center faculty member.

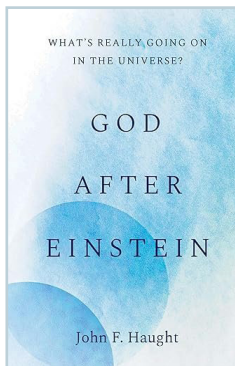
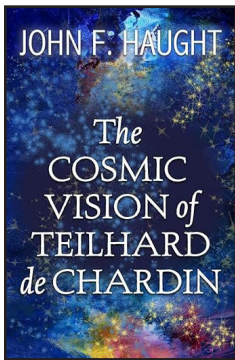
Conference Event



Book Signing: Wednesday 12:45 pm

Dr. Haught will be available to sign copies of his books at a book signing event at the April 10th lunch break.

Please note that the Bowen Center is unable to acquire books for purchase at the conference. Please plan to bring your own copies.



Learn more and view purchase information at: thebowncenter.org/publications

Bowen Center Learning and Development Programs

INTRODUCTION TO BOWEN'S THEORY

An introduction for people who have little to no formal training or education in Bowen theory. There are no prerequisites.

POSTGRADUATE TRAINING PROGRAM

Designed for those with prior training/coaching experience utilizing Bowen theory who want to establish a foundation in theory and learn to apply it in their personal and professional lives.

CONTINUING STUDIES PROGRAM

The Continuing Studies in Bowen Family Systems Theory Program is for professionals in various fields with at least one year of training in Bowen family systems theory.

FAITH LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

An online seminar for those leading faith communities. Includes guest speakers, small group, and individual coaching sessions. For those who have had experience with Bowen theory.

DIFFERENTIATION AT WORK

A think tank for those interested in the application of Bowen theory to work organizations: leadership, coaching, organizational development, family business and transfer of wealth in families.

CLINICAL STUDY GROUP

A monthly discussion format for applying Bowen theory to clinical cases.

SPANISH SPEAKING STUDY GROUP

The Spanish Speaking Study Group centers around the reading and discussion of Dr. Bowen's seminal book, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*.

Learn more at
thebowncenter.org/learning-development



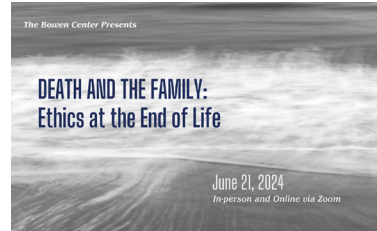
Bowen Center Conferences and Resources

Death And The Family: Ethics at the End of Life

When there are medical, financial, and relationship decisions to be made at the end of life, what principles are important to consider?

*June 21, 2024 | 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
In-Person or Online via Zoom
Ethics CEs/CEUs are available*

Learn more: thebowncenter.org/ethics-seminar2024



Clinical Conference Series

The Clinical Conferences combine presentations by Bowen Center faculty with recorded clinical interviews with families.

Upcoming: April 12, 2024

Faith and Functioning
Presenter: Randall T. Frost, MDiv

Learn more: thebowncenter.org/clinical-conferences



For information on all Bowen Center conferences, please visit thebowncenter.org/conferences.

Professional Lecture Series

Free and open to the public

*Cries & Whispers: The Possibility of
Vocal Control in Monkeys and Apes*

Presenter: Sofia Berstein, PhD

Thursday, May 23, 2024

7:00pm - 8:30 pm ET

Online Via Zoom



Learn more: thebowencenter.org/professional-lectures

The Bowen Center Clinic

The Bowen Center

Clinic offers affordable psychotherapy to individuals and families and consultation to organizations.



For more information, please visit thebowencenter.org/clinic.

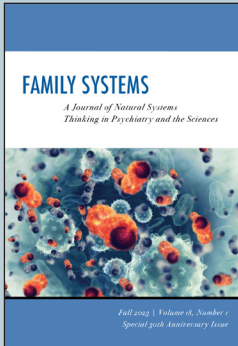
Consider Donating to the Bowen Center

Your ongoing generosity is important and makes possible the continued development of theory and engagement for students of Bowen theory around the world.

Support the Center with your tax deductible donation at:
thebowencenter.org/donate



Current Issue: Volume 18, Number 1



The journal's purpose is to advance the understanding of human emotional functioning and behavior based on Bowen theory.

The journal is published twice per year and is now available in print + digital and digital-only subscription options.

Visit thebowencenter.org/journal/ to learn more and subscribe.

Coming this Spring! Volume 18.2

FROM THE EDITOR

Robert J. Noone, PhD

Bowlby's Attachment Theory And Bowen Family System Theory: Their Differences And The Implications For Clinical Practice

Anne S. McKnight, EdD, LCSW

Faculty Case Conference: A Bowen Coach's Attempt At a Strong Start

Presenter: John Millikin, PhD, LMFT

FROM THE ARCHIVES: Nuclear Family and the Projection Process: Basic Series Lecture #2

Murray Bowen, MD

Introduction by Daniel V. Papero, PhD, LCSW

BOOK REVIEWS:

The Song of The Cell

by Siddhartha Mukherjee

Reviewed by Cecilia Guzman, MS, LCPC

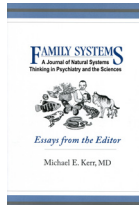
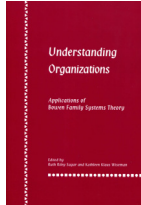
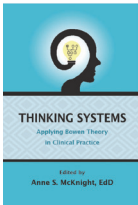
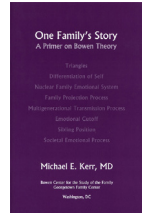
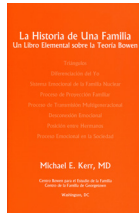
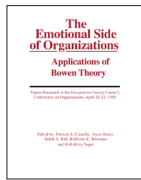
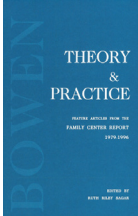
It Didn't Start With You : How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How To End The Cycle

by Mark Wolynn

Reviewed by Kathleen Cotter Cauley, MEd, LMFT

Publications and Media Resources

Visit thebowncenter.org/publications for books and periodicals on Bowen theory, some published by the Bowen Center.



Visit thebowncenter.org/videos for a wide variety of free recordings, including *The Basic Series*, *The Bowen-Kerr Interview Series*, and our YouTube channel, which includes the *Family Matters* playlist. Other recordings, such as conferences, are available for rent or sale.



About the Bowen Center

The Family Center was originally established by Murray Bowen, MD in 1975 under the auspices of Georgetown University. The Center became independent in 1990 as the Georgetown Family Center. In 2000 it was renamed for Dr. Bowen.



Dr. Bowen was a pioneer in family research who developed a new theory of human behavior and a different approach to the treatment of human problems. Through the varied activities of the Center, Bowen theory continues to be refined by the latest knowledge from the various scientific disciplines. The Bowen Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Conference Recordings

Conference recordings will be available for purchase after the conference. Attendees will be notified and emailed a discount code.