I think that Neville would agree that doing the hard “pastoral” work of having “the talk” with people about where gods come from (and the costs of bearing them) can be intellectually, emotionally, and even existentially exhausting, even – or especially – when it occurs in an academic context. This chapter explores the dis-integrative dynamics within the ongoing process of relating the fields of psychology and theology, and argues that such dissolutive forces can play an important and valuable role in this interdisciplinary dialogue. Healthy development requires that we sometimes let things fall apart. The main sections of the chapter point to the potentially generative power of dis-integrating psychology, theology, selves, and gods. The conclusion addresses the existential fear and desire that often characterize human attempts to hold it all together, i.e., the tasks of “integration” in all its forms.

Integrating the disciplines of psychology and theology is a fascinating academic task, and one in which I was heavily involved for quite a long time. In this essay, however, I want to draw attention to the importance – and the value – of dis-integration. Although the generative forces of dis-integration are inexorably at work in all interdisciplinary engagement, they are too often inadequately emphasized and sometimes ignored or even suppressed. In my view, these ways of dealing with disintegrative dynamics are not good for the disciplines or for their disciples. Attending positively to the creative potential of dis-integrative negation can open up new possibilities for healthier ways of engaging within and across the fields of psychology and theology.

As I hope to make clear, my intention is not to dismiss the ideal of integrity – for scientists or for the sciences. However, I am resisting the idea that the and in “psychology and theology” can be reduced to a kind of linear function in which two integers are added together through a simple arithmetic conjunction. Instead we might imagine the relation of the disciplines within a non-linear topological space that invites a more complicated infinitesimal calculus, in which finding integrals requires attention to differentials, to changes in the value of functions. The goal of “integration” should not be a final enumeration or sum(ary) of static ideas, but an ongoing generation of open systems of

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1 This chapter is an adapted version of “Dis-Integrating Psychology and Theology,” which was originally published as part of a special issue on interdisciplinary dialogue in the Journal of Psychology & Theology 40, no. 1 (2012).
dynamic inquiry in which the value of breaking things apart can be included in the equations.

Coming up with a provocative title is one thing—provoking in ways that move the discussion forward is quite another. In this context my limited goals are to point out some of the disruptive and dissolutive forces within the ongoing task of integration and to advocate an open, differentiated way of relating to them. This is consonant with the "relational" model of integration that psychologist Steven Sandage and I developed and defended in a variety of places. We consistently emphasized the importance of facing the potentially transformative function of negation, of welcoming the "dark night" of the interdisciplinary soul as part of the ongoing quest for spiritual—and intellectual—enlightenment. In what follows, I press this point even further. In the conclusion, I will return to the necessary (and valuable) task of trying to hold it all together. First, however, let us acknowledge the value (and necessity) of letting go.

**Letting It All Fall Apart**

Good therapists know that the process of emotional healing usually (if not always) involves coming to a point where one is willing to let things fall apart. It is quite natural for human beings to try to hold things together; indeed, without integration of some kind we could not survive, much less thrive. When the integrator’s hold on a particular integrative strategy becomes rigid and anxious, however, tightening one’s grip on the “integrand” only makes the problem worse. Sometimes there must be a strategic dissolution before a new solution can be found. Healthy development in adapting to our natural and social environments occasionally calls for letting go of an integrand; the most radical transformations usually include intense moments of (at least partial) dis-integration.

Good theologians know this too. As James Loder argued, existential transformation involves a negation of negation, a facing of the Void in which one

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2 Shults and Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); Shults and Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); Sandage and Shults, "Relational Spirituality and Transformation: A Relational Integration Model." *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 26, no. 3 (2007). Although I was attempting to follow (what I now call) the iconoclastic trajectory of theology in the two books mentioned above, my contributions there were still held back by (what I can now see as) the theistic biases that motivate the sacerdotal trajectory of theology.