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**POPULAR CURRENT THEORIES OF
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY:
AN ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVE**

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BACKGROUND

Sigmund Freud is the father/founder of modern psychology. Before the era of Freud, counseling belonged to the sacred domain. The church was responsible for dispensing ways to live life more meaningfully.

The focus on reason and human potential of the modern era has resulted in a number of theories that try to explain life apart from God. From this philosophical milieu, current popular theories of counseling and psychotherapy have emerged. While some theorists have modified Freud's psychoanalysis, others have found reason to depart from it. The departure is not based on a religious platform but on a different understanding of human behavior. Secular theories are relative and are based on different world views and understanding of human nature. However, a more definite approach to counseling is a biblical one because it avoids the quicksand of relativism and human reasoning and grounds the counselee on the undiluted and absolute authority of God's word.

Counseling is based on an interpretation of life. The major difference between current popular theories and a Christian approach is based on this interpretation. A Christian counselor allows God's special revelation to interpret life, whereas the secularist relies on a theory for the same.

The secular discipline of counseling psychology as it is known today is based on Godless humanistic assumptions and presuppositions that lock out God. A theological/biblical

anthropology maintains that man cannot successfully live out his life without/apart from God.

There has been debate over the sufficiency of Scriptures in counseling. Hindson has rightly stated that “for too long now, Biblical counseling has been misunderstood or misrepresented as a simplistic approach to the complex problems of human nature”¹ and Biblical counselors “are generally represented as non-professionals interfering in various areas of the psychological domain, where they are said to have no business practicing their supposedly inadequate approach to counseling”.²

However, this should not be so because as Adams put it:

Christians have not suddenly burst upon the scene challenging psychiatrists and clinical and counseling psychologists rather (the historical facts show that) the latter are the newcomers who moved in to support the church in its work of counseling.³

It is imperative that counseling be restored to its rightful place and not left to the whims of secular theorists.

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this essay is to critique the current popular theories of counseling and psychotherapy and to give a wake up call to counselors and counseling teachers in the Adventist world to restore counseling psychology to the church. It is an urgent appeal for Adventist educators in the field of counseling psychology to re-examine if their belief matches their behavior when it comes to the practice and teaching of counseling. This

paper will help teachers avoid the fallacy of separating *orthopraxis* from orthodoxy. It is hoped that this essay will influence curriculum design in counseling and psychology.

THEORIES CRITIQUED

The basic anthropology of psychology and theology are diametrically opposed. While the former is based on human reasoning, the latter is directed by the authoritative word of God. Hence the Bible is the tool to use in offering a critique of the secular popular theories of counseling.

The Bible provides a framework to understand the origin, meaning, purpose, and destiny of human beings. While secularism maintains that man is the product of chance, a biblical anthropology affirms that man came into existence by the deliberate and creative act of God.

A counselor's approach will be determined by which view he/she takes. If the counselor believes that man is an accident, then the solution to his problem might as well be reached through trial and error. However, with the knowledge that man was designed and purposefully placed on this planet the counselor is equipped to declare the destiny of the counselee. Enjoyment of life (living the abundant life) is ultimately found in following the plan of God for man.

Another aspect of anthropology has to do with the nature of man. Humanistic psychology views man to be the measure of all things and that man's nature is basically good. Sin is considered as the result of ignorance and guilt that can be eliminated by the acquisition of knowledge. Religion is not necessary, but knowledge is. On the contrary, biblical anthropology maintains that man was created perfect but after the fall in Eden, he assumed a sinful, fallen nature that is continually bent to doing evil. The only way it can be changed is by the power of God.

I propose that for a counselor to be truly biblical, his use of secular theories must support or be supported by biblical principles. The biblical counselor must use the word of God to inspect all the theories he/she uses. While the word of God is unchanging, authoritative and absolute, human theories on the other hand, are as relative and as changing as those who originate them. When we operate on a platform of relativism, we cannot for sure indicate what is right or wrong.

Howard Ostendorff⁴ has tried to compare contrasting views of man from the biblical and psychological perspectives as follows:

	Biblical View	Psychological View
1.	Man created by God	Man came into existence without God
2.	Man created to have a relationship with God	Man is adequate in himself
3.	God is the center of the universe	Man is the center of the universe
4.	Man is dependent on revelation	Man can seek out truth without God. Truth

	from God to properly understand God, life and himself	about life and man can be known without God.
5.	Man's greatest problem is sin which is evidenced by rebellion and pride	Man's greatest problem is ignorance which is evidenced by guilt and self-doubt
6.	The solution to man's problem is salvation, a new relationship with God	The solution is knowledge, belief in self and goodness of man, self-understanding and self actualization
7.	When man sins he becomes a slave of sin	Sin and guilt are creations of religion and should be ignored
8.	Growth comes through a deeper relationship with God and with His word	Growth comes through the attainment of greater knowledge in science and self
9.	Recognizes the unseen, spiritual nature of man	Recognizes the rational, the source of truth
10.	Sees natural man as intrinsically rebellious	Sees natural man as intrinsically good
11.	Man's basic worth is based upon his creation in the image of God and the value that God puts on him	Man's worth is built upon his usefulness to society
12.	Evaluates men in relation to their relationship with God	Sees all men as the same

Outside of the Bible, the Adventist counselor should refer to the writings of Ellen G. White. These writings offer valuable information that elucidates those aspects of the Bible that may not be clear at the first instance. She is not silent on psychology. In one of the compilations of her writings she counsels that “the true principles of psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures. Man knows not his own value. He acts according to his unconverted temperament of character because he does not look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith.”⁵ In general, Ellen White is not for psychology as we know it today. She raises issues with the methodology of psychology and concludes that psychology is an avenue that the devil uses to confuse the mind.

A few theories will be critiqued in this paper. The theories to be critiqued include:

Psychoanalysis

McArthur (1998) explains that in psychoanalysis, it is believed that people are ruled by their unconscious minds. Freud (the founder of this theory) believed that human behaviors, responses, and attitudes are governed by primitive urges combined with a vast horde of personal experiences of which they have no knowledge or conscious control. Essentially, Freud saw man as an instinct-ruled beast dominated primarily by the drives of sex and aggression.⁶

However, from a Christian perspective, a rebellious teen’s destructive behavior is rooted in sin. It can be understood in response to, but not pardoned on the basis of parental

negligence, for example. Rather than explain as sin, the child molester's behavior, Freud will blame it on an "unresolved Oedipus Complex".⁷

Biblically, the reason why we do wrong things (sin) is because of the sin principle in us and not because of primitive urges. Everyone therefore is held accountable and responsible for the sins they commit.

After reading Sigmund Freud's background, it is easy to understand why he takes the position he does with respect to human behavior. His theory has been shaped by his own early life experiences. Freud also talks of three forces struggling for expression in the human organism. They are id, ego and superego. In a way, this is in line with biblical understanding since we know that the sinful nature which Sigmund Freud calls (id) is in constant opposition to the voice of God in our lives (the conscience, although Freud calls it the superego). While in psychoanalysis, the resolution takes place through ego-defense mechanisms, the Christian receives mediation through Jesus Christ.

Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler is the originator of this theory sometimes referred to as Adlerian theory.

Adler's is a goal oriented theory of human nature. Human behavior is thus controlled by the desire to achieve a particular desired goal. In the words of Corey:

This view espouses the purposeful nature of behavior, emphasizing that where we are striving to go is more important than where we have come from. Adler saw humans as both the creators and the creations of their own lives; that is, people develop a unique style of living that is both a movement toward and an expression of their selected goals. In this sense, we create ourselves rather than merely being shaped by our childhood experiences.⁸

While biblically it is true that we have a part in “working out our salvation in fear and trembling”, this behavior is not to make us what we want to become, but rather, the results of what we have become in Christ Jesus. Adlerian psychotherapy will encourage legalism and rob people of the strength derived from knowing that “the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord”; so that it is not “us but Christ living in me.”

Client Centered Theory (Rogerian Theory)

Sometimes referred to as Rogerian counseling, this theory requires that the counselor does not offer any solution to the client; rather he is to provide an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard (UPR) for the client. This UPR precludes value judgments on the counselee. It means therefore that the counselor must maintain a non-judgmental attitude, free of condemnation. This is really nothing new to biblical thinking except that it falls short. An example is when Jesus told the woman caught in adultery “neither do I condemn you.” He was actually conveying and expressing a non-judgmental attitude. The deficiency in Rogerianism glaringly shows because whereas Rogers stops at “neither do I condemn you”, Jesus goes further and directs “but go and sin no more.” It is this last part of the client-counselor experience that Rogers is uncomfortable with since he believes that human beings have within themselves the ability to change. This inherent goodness residing in man, according to Rogers, must not be directed. Rather, it is to be respected. The implication of this is that you cannot tell the counselee, in the counseling experience, that any particular act is wrong. It is upon the counselee to decide whether or not a particular behavior is right or wrong for them.

Cognitive Behavior Theory

Cognitive Behavior Therapy relies on cognition (the thinking process) and how it influences behavior. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy emphasizes both the emotions and the thinking process in explaining behavior. This is in line with biblical thinking because the Bible admonishes in Rom.12:1 that we should be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The same is true from Prov.17:17 which indicates that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Philippians 4:6-8 reiterates a similar thinking when Paul declares that we should fill our minds with whatever is true and pure. The ability to think straight and right is not possible outside of God. It is Him who gives the ability to do so and for this reason REBT and CBT falls short of biblical ideals.

Reality Theory

The essence of reality theory is that everyone is responsible for what he/she does. It maintains that human beings are troubled either because they are in a present unsatisfying relationship or completely lacks one. Corey explains that the task of the therapist is to guide the client toward a satisfying relationship and to teach them more effective ways to make choices as they deal with the people they need in their lives.⁹

The Bible also teaches individual choice as was the case when Joshua called the congregation of Israel to choose whom they would serve (Joshua 24:15). It is also true that human beings need to connect. The major problem with this theory is that it does not mention God as the ultimate connection that will give us any measure of connectedness.

Whereas the word of God outlines how to connect, reality therapy leaves the client dependent on the counselor.

Behavior Theory

Behavior theory maintains that behavior is environmentally determined.¹⁰ Behavior change therefore calls for change in the environment. Biblically, however, the environment influences behavior (1Cor.15:33) but is not the cause of the behavior. Man's sinful nature is the cause of bad behavior (Rom.7:20). While it is true that human beings can be trained to do good (Prov.17:22), it is only possible and enduring in the context of a changed nature (2Cor.5:17). Without this, it is impossible to change (Jer.13:23). Behavior theory may succeed in behavior modification but not in behavior sanctification.

Gestalt Theory

This theory focuses on the here and now experience of the client. It is "based on the premise that individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment".¹¹The approach is both existential and phenomenological. It is existential because "it is grounded in the notion that people are always in the process of becoming, remaking, and rediscovering themselves" and phenomenological because "it focuses on the client's perception of reality."¹²

Gestalt emphasis on dealing with the whole person (considering all dimensions of human functioning) is biblical because the Christian is called upon to serve God in totality (Mark 12:30).

A major flaw in Gestalt theory is the premise that “individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment.” Biblically, individuals must first and foremost be understood in the context of whether or not they have a relationship with the creator.

Existentialism

One of existentialists approach is the need for clients to find meaning in life if they are to come out of their problematic thinking. This idea of finding meaning and purpose is very biblical. The existentialist limits meaning to what is not beyond this life. Meaning is within the dome of existence. However, the Bible admonishes the Christian to look beyond this life, in determining meaning for existence. While for the existentialist “meaning” is temporal, for the Christian it is permanent and everlasting.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SECULAR PSYCHOLOGY IN COUNSELING?

Secular psychology should play an illustrative role in providing examples and details that illustrate the biblical model. From their illustrations, we can read back into the Bible and be challenged and provoked to develop our model in areas that we may never have thought about or may have neglected.¹³ Adams expresses the same idea when he states that psychology can be a “useful adjunct” for the purposes of illustrating, filling in

generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong human interpretations of Scripture, thereby forcing the student to restudy the Scriptures.¹⁴

DISCLAIMER ON PSYCHOSOMATIC AND SOMATOPSYCHIC PROBLEMS

It is significant to note that our mental lives are affected to a very great degree by our physical well-being. This being the case, the biblical counselor must work hand in hand with the medical doctor and the psychiatrist. Some psychological problems are psychogenic in nature. They are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain chemistry or some could be due to some physical illness. Examples of physiological problems that could cause psychological problems include cancer, diabetes, lupus, amoebiasis, etc. The psychiatrist or the medical doctor could prescribe medication that would in turn alleviate the psychological symptoms. Psychological problems could also generate physical problems. Sometimes it may be necessary to medicate the physical symptoms as you work on the psychological problems from a biblical stand point. Examples of mind/psychological problems that may cause physiological problems include unresolved guilt, bitterness, depression, unresolved anger, envy, jealousy, etc.

Mind-body problems are usually referred to as psychosomatic or somatopsychic disorders/complications. This is to bear in mind that, “stress alters the body’s susceptibility to diseases when we are struggling to cope with problems in marriage relationships, or work and the body gradually loses its ability to fight disease.”¹⁵

A good example of a psychosomatic complication in the bible is David's experience in

Psalms 38:3-10:

Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin.
 My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.
 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly
 I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go mourning.
 My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.
 I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.
 All my longings lie open before you, O Lord;
 my sighing is not hidden from you.
 My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.

In these verses, David's spiritual experience (guilt) is affecting both his mental/emotional life and his physical life as well. There is no soundness in his flesh. He goes mourning all day long.

Ellen White explains this spirit-mind-body relationship so well:

The relationship that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces, and invite decay and death.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

The pitfalls of secular counseling and psychotherapy cannot be safely ignored in the Adventist church. If we do so, it will be at our own peril. Counseling psychology rightly belongs to the sacred domain, and the Adventist educators must restore it to its rightful place.

Secular psychology is founded on a world view that is diametrically opposed to Christianity. Its relative orientation precludes moral responsibility and accountability. Christianity on the other hand embraces Biblical authority and regulates behavior with absolutes.

Unfortunately the Christian church (Adventists included) has been seduced by the high sounding words of secular psychology to the extent that a biblically oriented counsel is viewed as unprofessional and inferior. This line of thinking has found its way into the curricula of Christian universities as well.

In this paper I have shown the deficiencies in the current popular secular theories of counseling and psychotherapy. Serious attention must be given to the way the Adventist Christian approaches the teaching and practice of counseling and psychotherapy so as to restore counseling to its proper place.

END NOTES

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