

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING

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Introduction

Let me begin by first stating what is Christian counselling. Christian counselling is not just biblical counselling nor is it just pastoral counseling as both by themselves are inadequate to deal with the wide spectrum of human problems. Christian counseling is not secular counseling done by Christians in a church setting though some of their principles and intervention strategies are modified and incorporated into Christian counseling.

In fact secular and Christian counselling are worlds apart as their theoretical framework and philosophical underpinning are different and even diametrically opposed. However, proponents of Christian counselling with both theological and psychological training have over the years carefully and selectively integrate psychological truths with biblical truths. The bottom line of such integration is to only accept psychological principles and intervention strategies that do not go against scriptures.

As St Augustine said "All truth is God's truth" so it is perfectly alright to make use of other truths to help our fellow-men to resolve problems in life. In fact, apart from accepting certain aspects of the behavioural sciences Christians have been for years made use of other sciences for the advancement of human life, e.g. medicine, mathematics, aero-space technology and agriculture to grow crops with greater and better yields. Imagine how disadvantaged the church would have been in if the middle-age church insisted that the world was flat and how backward mankind would be.

INTEGRATION OF SECULAR AND CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING

All along through the integration process there were at least two different camps, the Christian eclectic counselling camp and the nouthetic counseling camp. Nouthetic from the Greek word "noutheteo" – ("to admonish" in English). Nouthetic counselling is based solely upon the Bible and focused on Christ alone. As for Christian eclectic counselors, they faced a long and arduous task of careful study and prayerful consideration of accepting or rejecting psychological principles or intervention strategies in the integration process.

In the integration process Christian counselors would have also to consider the views put up by the anti-integration who are adamant about the impossibility of finding any harmony between psychology and theology. There are also some unsophisticated and inconsistent evangelicals who simply insisted that when a Christian uses secular psychological counseling, it would be deemed as Christian counseling. Needless to say this plain naivety for those holding such a view as it is just like saying a Chinese speaking English is an Englishman.

Fortunately, there are thoughtful Christians with both theological and psychological competence recognise that any one term, whether "integration," "amalgamation," or "eclecticism," is inadequate without a contextual definition to explain how psychology and the Bible could intersect. Most Christian psychologists will agree that integration cannot include any compromise of a biblical world view and the doctrines of humanity, sin and redemption.

For Christian counsellors undertaking the integration process must accept the ultimate authority of the Bible and a willingness to know what God has enabled humans to discover through psychology and other sciences and use them to help our fellow-Christians struggle in a fallen world. Hence the cure is not in abreaction, or de-sensitization nor healing of memories, nor making the unconscious into the conscious, nor rationality, nor finding one's real self. Though the afore-mentioned can bring some form of relief but the real solution comes from God alone. As God is the Creator of man so He is able to fix his problems.

THE BOTTOM LINE FOR CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING

So is there compatibility between psychology and theology? Beyond what is discussed above the field of psychology and behavioural science is too vast to research. Hence their theories and application incorporated in counseling cannot be summarily embraced or dismissed. The dynamic, behavioral, and humanistic approaches, are basically non-theistic or even anti-theistic, naturalistic or pantheistic. None of these assumptions is compatible with a comprehensive Christian world view. Things get more difficult when we turn to the application of psychology in therapy, we find a host of conflicting practices that seemed to have strayed from their psychology foundations. Such inconsistencies and lack of a cohesive world view create a mixture of helpful, neutral and harmful practices therein.

Christian counsellors are to take what is relevant to his counseling practice the various psychotherapies that are not in opposition to scriptures and the Christian world-view. Biblical truths MUST prevail over psychological or scientific data whenever they are in conflict, EG – man's fundamental plight is not anxiety nor the oedipal situation nor chemical imbalance nor childhood traumas, though all of these may contribute to his problem but man's greatest plight is his separation from his Creator (God). This separation is brought by man through sin causing the deprivation and depravation of man.

Christian counsellors can re-claim and redefine the aspects of cognitive therapy by helping clients to align their thoughts to Christian truth and then have their renewed mind to correct their behaviour. (Rm 12:1-2) Like-wise the concept of "self-esteem," can also be re-claimed and redefined within the Christian context of God's sacrificial love He expressed toward us that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us". (Rm. 5:8). He likewise tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14).

Conclusion

A Christian counsellor can and should within the biblical framework of counselling, incorporate scripture-compatible psychological principles and intervention strategies that suit his skills and can resolve the problems of his clients.