God and Soul Care

What Ministers Need to Know

AACC Charlotte
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Christianity is Therapeutic

Modern psychology did not invent therapy.

In the gospels Jesus was a healer of the body.

Now he is a healer of souls (and the body indirectly).

“He restores my soul” (Ps 23:3)

“By his stripes we are healed” (1Pet 2:24)

All of church life has a therapeutic dimension.
It’s all about God

Secular psychotherapy and counseling has the Self as its center of focus.

Christian psychotherapy and counseling has Christ as its center of focus.

God created us for his glory (Is 43:7)
What is human flourishing?

The capacity, tendency, and often experience humans have of developing their myriad powers of personhood-in-communion to maturity and expression in life.

-adapted from Christian Smith, To Flourish or Destruct

What is glory?

The outshining of God’s greatness, beauty, & love

-see Jonathan Edwards, The End for Which God Created the World

And God created us for his glory (Is 43:7)
God is love (1Jo 4:8, 16)

What is love?

Delight in the other
Desire for the other’s good
Desire for fitting union with the other
  Face-time/joint attentional focus
  Sharing of thoughts, feelings, desires, story

And God created us for his glory (Is 43:7)
What is the Nature of the Trinity

A vigorous, loving communion
Fallen opposite: co-dependence

Three vigorous personal agents
Fallen opposite: narcissism

God desires that the church be the image of the Trinity

“Let us make humans in our own image, after our likeness
(Gen 1:26)
The Beauty of God

Sovereign Majesty

Perfect righteousness

Perfect love and compassion

Our healing is promoted as our communion with the triune God is experienced: a perfect Father, brother, lover, and indwelling helper
Humans are created good

Humans flourish in a relationship of dependent worship and love with God

All created structures are good

Self-love is redeemed by becoming theocentric

Gratitude for one’s strengths and gifts
A Christian Model of Psychopathology

Sin

Suffering

Biopsychosocial Damage
Union with Christ is foundational to Christian psychotherapy and counseling.

What is union with Christ?

God the Father identifies us eternally with his Son in his humanity.

Christians are perfect and complete in Christ the moment they surrender their life to God.

Christians are united to the story of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation.
Union with Christ’s Life

Christ is the perfect human
He’s the word of God to us
Christ suffered the punishment due for our sins
So there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Ro 8:1)
Christ has taken away all of our shame and guilt (both true and false shame and guilt)
Believers have been raised from the dead to walk in newness of life (Ro 6:4)

This new life spreads through new thoughts, new feelings, new experiences, new memories, new relational patterns, new self-understanding, and new story.
Our true self is seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6)

He and the Spirit are praying for us continually (Ro 8:26, 34)
The local church is a divine laboratory in which God’s redemption is realized collaboratively. We practice loving, forgiving, and being forgiven in this space. All aspects of church life have a therapeutic dimension and ought to be related to the healing of individual Christians and the body of Christ.
A Christian Personality Model

A conflict model based on the division caused by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection

Our sinfulness has been crucified and Christ is raising our true self from the dead

So our fallenness is passing away (1Jn 2:8, 17) and more and more we are becoming a new creation (2Co 5:17)
Differentiating the old self and the new self

Old self is all that is fallen: sin and damaged creation (brokenness)

New self is all that is being redeemed: created goodness and redemptive blessings

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<th>Structural Features</th>
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Redemptive differentiation
Redemptive Integration

Redemption brings everything within into increasing and harmony in union with Christ and communion with God

Increasing harmony among our beliefs, desires, motives, emotions, actions, and relational patterns

Brokenness is reclaimed as “weakness” that glorifies God

Even my sin gets brought into my new self understanding
A Future with God

No more suffering

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev 21:4)

We will be like him and have no more sin (1Jn 3:2)

Perfect justice will be realized

We will dwell in unqualified bliss