

The Holy Spirit, Common Grace, and Secular Psychotherapy

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This paper seeks to demonstrate how the Holy Spirit, through common grace, may be actively working and using secular psychotherapy in light of the dual reality of belief and unbelief in this world. The Triune God desires to bring a world fallen in sin to his desired goal of reconciliation with Him through the redemptive work of Christ. The Holy Spirit works through common grace in order to help people experience the goodness of God to draw them to him. As such the Holy Spirit may work through secular psychotherapy to bless people in general, restrain sin in this world, prepare for salvation, or aid in the progressive sanctification of believers. The Holy Spirit's activity through secular psychotherapy entails for Christian counselors and scholars a challenging call to engage wisely with secular psychotherapy in order to bless humankind, to be a witness, and to use potential blessings for the sake of distinctly Christian psychotherapy.

Today, not many would associate secular psychotherapy with the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, secular psychologists deny God—Father, Son, and Spirit—as a reality, and may ignore and exclude the supernatural from all that is related to helping people. The definition of counseling and psychotherapy by Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2004) affirms this absence,

We define counseling and psychotherapy as a process that involves a trained person who practices the artful application of scientifically derived principles for establishing professional helping relationships with persons who seek assistance in resolving large or small psychological or relational problems. This is accomplished through ethically defined means and involves, in the broadest sense, some form of learning or human development. (pp. 8–9)

Various Christian counselors, on the other hand, will also deny the fact that the Holy Spirit is at work in secular psychotherapy. The reason, however, is not a dismissal of the supernatural, but rather the realization of the utter naturalistic and humanistic nature of secular psychotherapy, which often opposes fundamental Christian principles. The result of this kind of thinking leads to a gap between Christian and secular forms of psychotherapy, hostility of many Christians towards secular psychotherapy, confusion as to the value of secular psychotherapy, and division between Christian counselors who avoid and warn against secular therapy and those Christians who use and advocate secular psychotherapeutic theories and interventions.

In this article, I would like to bring clarity to the topic of the value and use of secular psychotherapy for Christians. I believe that secular psychotherapy may be of value, precisely because the Holy Spirit may use it to bring about blessings. Bacote (2005) says, “The Spirit’s work of animating life, restraining sin, and moving creation to its *telos* is central to a theology of public engagement” (p. 150). More specifically, it is my conviction that the Holy Spirit distributes certain blessings through secular psychotherapy as an aspect of common grace. Christians may use these blessings in order to help believers with relational, intrapersonal, and even spiritual problems. They may also engage with secular psychotherapy at a scientific and philosophic level in order to find insights that bless humankind. Keeping in mind that common grace has historically been thought of as serving to allow God’s redemption plan for humankind to unfold, I will explain how Christians can discern whether the Holy Spirit might be working through secular psychotherapy and to what end. I will also discuss implications with regards to using secular psychotherapeutic principles and practices for the sake of Christian soul healing.

Common Grace Explained

Let me begin with a brief introduction to *common grace*. The concept of common grace provides insight into the mystery of goodness in and through people who have turned away from the Creator God; therefore, it gives insight into potential blessings that come through secular psychotherapy as well. The term common grace itself is not literally found in Scripture, but is certainly implicitly present. Though theologians may have alluded to this concept, Calvin was the first to make more explicit reference to the term common grace and give the subject some thought (Kuiper, 1928). However, not until Kuyper (1902) developed the concept, did it become a topic of much discussion.

Common grace has its origin in paradise when humans did not immediately die physically after they had turned away from God. Though God had said that death would be the consequence of disobedience, God offered undeserved grace and allowed human beings to continue to live and enjoy his goodness until sin would forever be destroyed (Gen 2:17 ff.; Gen 3:15; Mt 13:41, New International Version; Berkhof, 1932; Clines, 1976; Wenham, 1987). After the Flood, God's grace to creation and to the human race in general, was explicitly reconfirmed (Gen 8:20–9:17; Berkhof, 1932; Kuyper, 1902). Consequently, life, beauty, and blessings are still a reality by virtue of God's common grace despite the fact that much is distorted and broken because of the Fall. Berkhof (1932) defined common grace as follows:

[It] curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of man. (p. 434)

Likewise, Kuyper (1902) explains in his magnum opus that the overarching work of the Holy Spirit through common grace is the retardation of sin in the human heart, of the death of the human body, and of the full curse over nature. Kuyper (1902) furthermore distinguished between the constant nature of common grace by which the curse in creation and the human race is retarded and the progressive manner by which God arms human life against suffering and provides means for a fuller and richer life.

Since the Reformation common grace was commonly discussed as a part of the study of the Holy Spirit, that is, pneumatology (Bromiley, 1979). The Spirit is seen as the one who applies the works of God

and of the Son to mankind (Owen, 1852). Hodge (1876) says, for example:

The Bible therefore teaches that the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, of holiness, and of life in all its forms, is present with every human mind, enforcing truth, restraining from evil, exciting to good, and imparting wisdom or strength, when, where, and in what measure seemeth good.(...) This is what in theology is called common grace. (p. 667)

Common grace is a very important topic and serves several purposes. First, common grace demonstrates that God still desires to manifest certain aspects of his character (Kuyper, 1902): his longsuffering and mercy, for example. Second, common grace is meant to bring glory to God for his goodness (Calvin, 1559/1960). In addition, God's glory is shown when men and women develop and exercise dominion over the earth, demonstrate the wisdom of their Creator, and demonstrate Godlike qualities of skill and moral virtue and authority over the universe (Grudem, 1999). Moreover, common grace upholds God's honor over and against Satan, it maintains God's counsel with regard to the order of creation, and it serves to execute his decrees (Kuyper, 1902). These God-exalting purposes result in bountiful benefits for humankind. Thus, through common grace people can enjoy and participate in the comforts and joys of life, in the arts and sciences, in natural love, and even in human virtuous living.

The Dual Realities of Common Grace and Special Grace

Common grace is a concept that can only be truly understood in light of *special grace*. Those who believe in Christ Jesus do so by virtue of special, or particular, grace, that is, the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for repentant sinners. Common grace does not exist independently of what God has done on the cross: "the design of God in the work of Christ pertained primarily and directly, not to the temporal well-being of men in general, but to the redemption of the elect" (Berkhof, 1932, p. 438). From a Reformed perspective then, the blessings of common grace, though any and all may enjoy them, are ultimately meant to glorify God and serve believers. Velema (1957) explains that common grace serves particular grace (its blessings serve believers in God's kingdom) and that particular grace indirectly serves common grace (believers' Christian orientation ensures the best use of common grace). Therefore, the blessings of common grace are primarily meant to allow for a world

in which God's redemption plan can unfold, which is that people are being saved and growing in a life dedicated to loving God and neighbor. Thus, common grace becomes even more meaningful when it is used in the service of life in the Kingdom. Secondly, common grace benefits unbelievers as well, as they enjoy life, blessings, and the qualities that are possible due to the restraint of sin and to God's patience in postponing the end of this world (2 Pet 3:9). Common grace may also have a preparatory effect on non-Christians as the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to bring them to saving faith (Kuyper, 1889/1975). Common grace is thus intricately connected to the work of Christ and particular grace.

The concepts of common grace and special grace thus presuppose a dual reality, namely one of belief and one of unbelief, or in Augustinian terms, the duality of the City of God and the City of (godless) Man (Augustine, 5th century AD/1958). Faith in Jesus Christ, given as a result of special grace, divides humanity (Van Til, 1959). Kuyper (1898) realized how deeply this division affects science (science understood in the broader sense as a body of reliable knowledge that can be logically and rationally explained):

We speak none too emphatically, therefore, when we speak of two kinds of people. Both are human, but one is inwardly different from the other, and consequently feels a different content rising from his consciousness; thus they face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses. And the fact that there are two kinds of *people* occasions of necessity the fact of two kinds of human *life* and *consciousness* of life, and of two kinds of *sciences*; for which reason the idea of *unity of science*, taken in its absolute sense, implies the denial of the fact of palingenesis [new birth], and therefore from principle leads to the rejection of the Christian religion. (p. 154)

This is especially true for a non-material science such as psychotherapy since it is more dependent on non-observable presuppositions (for example ideals and values for intra- and interpersonal living) (Slife & Reber, 2009; Jones & Butman, 1991). The fact that secular people have turned away from God and do not submit to his design and goal for human life leads them to interpret the world differently, engage in science from a naturalistic viewpoint, and have anthropocentric goals and values that often conflict with God's intent. In a sense, fallen man, loyal only to himself, considers himself to be the sole definer of truth and, as such, is opposed to God and to the people of God

(Frame, 1995; Van Til, 1959). Though it is too simplistic to say that all of what unbelievers produce is false, it is correct to say that, in essence, they know nothing truly (Frame, 1995).

However, because of common grace the division between believers and unbelievers is not as big as it could have been. Van Til (1973) argues that, while not overriding it, common grace limits division. Thus, sin and common grace are "limiting or supplementative concepts; they modify one another" (p. 174). He explains how common grace narrows the division:

[It] keeps the man who will be rational anyway, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, from expressing his hostility to God in the field of knowledge to such an extent as to make it impossible for himself to destroy knowledge. And in restraining him in his ethical hostility to God, God releases his creatural powers so that he can make positive contributions to the field of knowledge and art. (p. 53–54)

Common grace as a limiting concept helps Christians to steer clear of two extremes—namely, assimilation to fallen thought on the one hand (special grace is ignored and the concept of common grace taken too far), and isolation from broader cultural activity on the other (common grace is ignored and the division between belief and unbelief taken too far). If special grace is ignored, uncritical use of secular psychotherapy may be the result. In the worst case this means that the blessings of common grace are not used specifically to help Christians grow closer to God, to restrain unbelievers in their sin, or to lead them to faith in Christ. Interestingly, these last three problems arise also when common grace is ignored, that is, when it is denied that God bestows blessings through secular psychotherapy. Furthermore, the latter may lead to an avoidance of engagement and confrontation with the secular psychotherapeutic status quo. Keeping common grace and the dual reality balanced thus preserves the uniqueness of Christian beliefs, ensures awareness of a world opposed to God, and guarantees that all that is good and beautiful, though apparently secular, is not underestimated (Bavinck, 1894).

Specific Blessings of Common Grace through Secular Psychotherapy

What are some of the blessings that the Holy Spirit brings through common grace? Because common grace extends to all mankind, and is very diverse in its expressions, the Spirit's work in common grace may be said to be one of his most far-reaching activities (Palmer,

1974). Common grace is found in the unorganized aspects of life, such as nature and food, as well as in the more organized aspects, such as the arts and sciences. Secular psychotherapy falls within this more organized context in which people intentionally seek to make use of experiences and empirically derived principles in order to bring change in a person's situation. I will next examine different realms, based on Grudem's (1994) classification, that demonstrate how the Holy Spirit bestows blessings through common grace in general, and more specifically by means of secular psychotherapy.¹ In discussing these various realms as they pertain to secular psychotherapy, attention will be paid to two aspects: namely, what its benefits are to people in general and the societies in which they live (the secondary purposes of common grace), and how the Holy Spirit may work through it for the sake of the church and its members (the primary purpose of common grace). This section describes examples of what it would be like if common grace unfolded freely. Due to the dual reality of belief and unbelief, however, these examples are not always reality, and so in a later section, reasons for caution will be examined.

First, in the physical realm of life, the Holy Spirit is the one who generates life and makes life possible for human beings in general, as well as for animals, as they all receive numerous blessings, such as dwelling places, agriculture, sunshine, rain, kindness, food, fruitful seasons, and gladness (Gn 17:20; 39:5; Job 33:4; 34:14, 15; Ps 33:6; 104:29, 30; Ecc 3:19; Is 42:5; Mat 5:44, 45; Lk 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16,17; 1 Tim 4:10). Though undeserving, people can enjoy these blessings by virtue of God's grace. It is in this context that psychotherapy can even take place.

Second, in the intellectual realm God's common grace is seen in the fact that people in general are still able to grasp truth and possess a certain wisdom and knowledge. Calvin often spoke highly, though not uncritically, of the intellectual skills of secular philosophers (1559/1960). He believed that anything true, even when spoken by non-Christians, comes from God. Exodus 31:3 and Job 12:20 and 24 are examples of passages in the Bible that confirm that man's ability to understand and to reason are both from God. And, whereas John 8:44 depicts Satan as the father of lies, and as having no truth at all "because he is fully given

over to evil and to the irrationality and commitment to falsehood that accompanies radical evil" (Grudem, 1994, p. 659), even those who are not followers of Christ are not given over to this total irrationality and are able to grasp some truth (John 1:9) and think through complicated matters in a truthful way. Thus, common grace allows truths to be scientifically discovered, even by non-Christians, so that they can be used in psychotherapy (Mat 2:1-2; Neh 9:20; Powlison, 2000; Poitier, 1999). Believers can also benefit from these truths. This is necessary, because, as Tan (1991) argues, whereas Scripture "does provide sufficient answers to life's major issues and problems and serves as a comprehensive guide to counseling, it does not cover every detail involved" (p. 42). The Holy Spirit may use psychotherapy as an aspect of God's grace to serve believers in exploring and even understanding areas that are not described in Scripture, such as the importance of early childhood experiences. This may help people understand some of the reasons for their behavior, relationship patterns, and thinking processes.

Third, in the moral realm, God gives grace to people so that they do not live as evil as they would if sin would fully reign. According to Hodge (1863), all people "have some emotions regarding sin, duty, and self-interest" (p. 449). In other words, due to their God-given conscience people are able to attain some measure of morality as they live, sometimes extraordinarily, virtuous lives. The Bible gives numerous examples of those who perform good deeds, though they are lost (1 Sam 16:14; II Kngs 10:30; Mk 10:18-21; Lk 6:32, 33; Rom 2:14; Heb 6:4). Accordingly, the Holy Spirit may use psychotherapy to restrain sin and promote moral good. A general goal of psychotherapy is to stop harmful ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling (Gottschalk, 1989). Therefore, through psychotherapy, substance abuse, violence, and other destructive problems may decrease, benefiting children, families, and society. These are important aspects of moral living. Moreover, secular therapists showing compassion and perseverance in helping people feel better, may even awaken the conscience of Christian therapists in making them realize their lack of compassion and empathy for people and so motivate them to have a change of heart. Furthermore, through the secular interventions designed to counter the above-mentioned problems that Scripture describes as immoral, Christians can be helped towards living a more sanctified life. Lastly, there is a recent and increased interest in the study of character and virtue as legitimate topics of psychological inquiry (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Not only could this result in an increased awareness of morality in general, it could also

¹Note that in some of the following examples of common grace scriptural references to the agency of the Holy Spirit are explicit, whereas in others the Spirit's agency can be assumed due to the resemblance in the activities where his role is described explicitly.

motivate Christians to be more zealous in their calling to live more virtuous lives.

Fourth, in the creative and vocational realms, people benefit from common grace as they enjoy various talents, passions, and skills. Calvin (cf. Kuiper, 1928) already pointed to the fact that the arts and sciences often come through unbelievers who were endowed with God's excellent gifts, and Kuiper (1889/1975) affirms this experience by referencing Scripture as he points out how, according to the testimony of Scripture, the Holy Spirit gives people, believers as well as non-believers, gifts and talents that are important for society (Gn 4:17–22; Ez 3:7; Ex 31: 2–11). In the creative and vocational realms, secular psychotherapy has continued to develop and to be critical of itself in a desire to continue improving. This desire for excellence is derivative of God's desire for excellence (Is 28:29; Phil 1:10–11; 4:8). Different licensure boards and ethical committees have high standards for the integrity and professionalism of therapists. Licensing exams, long-term supervision, interdisciplinary consultation, and the like, are meant to contribute to the effectiveness and professionalism of the therapists and therapy. Guidelines that have been developed are designed to enhance the quality of the care any person receives and protect from harm. Even Christians find that they are respected by secular psychotherapists in their Christian convictions (Yarhouse, 1999). In addition, different techniques and approaches have been and are still being researched for their effectiveness (Plante, 2011). Many people have benefitted from all this work. Counselors in the church, who are often less well-trained, can benefit from these aspects of professionalism (Ez 1; Is 44:28, 45:1), for the sake of being more effective in helping people towards godly change (Hart, Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2005; Crabb, 1977).

Fifth, in the societal realm God has provided grace in the institution of human governments who execute secular laws, thus restraining sin and ensuring a certain kind of order (Gn 9:6; Rom 13:1, 3). Educational institutions, businesses, corporations, and voluntary associations can be thought of as having this effect as well (1 Tim 2:1–4; Grudem, 1994). Secular psychotherapy aids in the fight against various destructive patterns in society, for example, spousal abuse, abuse in its various other expressions, and mental illnesses (Bavinck, 1904). As a result, organizations and institutions have emerged that are active in the fight against these dynamics and provide help to victims (Lk 18:1–8). Society as a whole can benefit from these blessings. Moreover, the church may not always have the resources to help their members in some of these areas. Therefore,

the church can benefit from these programs that seek to help people live more effectively.

Finally, common grace can also be seen in the religious realm. Spirituality and religion, in a general sense, are universal (Rom 1:18–25; 2:15; Acts 17:22). This is the result of mankind being created in the image of God (Plantinga, 2000). Therefore, non-Christians, though falling short of saving faith, may demonstrate various expressions of faith and may be open to spiritual issues (Acts 8:9; 1 Sam 16, 19, 28; Calvin, 1559/1960). A positive shift is taking place in the secular psychotherapeutic world in that awareness is being raised about how to use the client's spirituality, without altering it, to potentially enhance treatment outcomes (cf. Sperry, 2001; Schreurs, 2002; Johansen, 2010). As a result, Christians could potentially grow in their faith as the Holy Spirit uses secular psychotherapy to instill a greater knowledge of the truth and a deeper relationship with God. The Holy Spirit may also use secular psychotherapy in a preparatory sense (Acts 17:23–28); though secular psychotherapists do not have the intention to convert people to Christianity, Christians who made use of secular psychotherapeutic services while they were non-believing, may see in hindsight how the Holy Spirit used the positive or even negative experiences of secular psychotherapy to eventually bring them to faith in God.

For all these reasons, Christians "must be careful not to reject the good things that unbelievers do as totally evil" (Grudem, 1994, p. 665), because by doing so, they may neglect and undermine the work of the Holy Spirit through common grace. What is more, Christians have an obligation to interact with what is happening in secular psychotherapy.

Call to Engage with Secular Psychotherapy

In a challenging statement, Hoekema (1994) points out the call that flows from the concept of common grace:

One of the implications of the doctrine of common grace for us is that we must work and continue to pray for a better world. The sentiment of many evangelical Christians seems to be, "This world is in the hands of the devil; let's just write it off as a total loss. Why paint the ship when it's sinking? Why vacuum the rug when the floodwaters are rising? This world is bad and it's getting worse; let's just forget about it and focus on evangelism." (p. 200)

The conviction to be actively involved because of common grace leads to the honoring of the work of God's Spirit. Calvin (1559/1960) says, "if we regard

the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God" (II.2.15). He urged believers to use the talents and skills of unbelievers to benefit believers (II.2.16). What is more, he even warned against suffering punishment due to neglecting the work of the Holy Spirit found, for example, in the arts and sciences (II.2.16).

Christians can engage with psychotherapy in several ways. First and foremost, Christians are called to make use of the gifts of common grace in order for believers to live life to the fullest extent possible. This means that techniques and principles of secular psychotherapy that can be used to help Christians solve their problems in a God-honoring way are employed when possible. Primarily, the call is to engage with secular psychotherapy in order to use its blessings for the service of believers. Ideally, a distinctively Christian practice of psychotherapy is developed in which the Bible is foundational, Christian resources are used, and potential good from secular psychotherapy is made use of. This will lead to uniquely Christian goals, values, processes, techniques, and interventions. Secondly, engaging with the good that the Holy Spirit brings through secular psychotherapy in order to benefit humanity in general is a task that Christians need to take seriously (Mat 5:13–16). Christians are called to participate in the world, to let the light of special revelation shine on the works of common grace, and thus to work as servants for God's kingdom (C. Plantinga, 2002). In doing so, they participate in the fight against sin, sorrow and suffering, and they take captive every insight to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5; Murray, 1977).

The stance Christians should take towards secular psychotherapy involves critique, analogical comparison, dialogue a careful evaluation of the presuppositions, translation, reconstruction, and being God's representative (Crabb, 1977; Dueck, 1989; Johnson, 2007). It should be noted, however, that the level of involvement with secular psychotherapy depends on the individual calling of Christian scholars and counselors. Though no one should reject the good that the Holy Spirit may bring through secular psychotherapy, the call to fully engage with the field is not everyone's.

Some may want to work to develop distinctively biblical methods of Christian counseling, which is a necessity for the church. Others may, after careful analysis, want to incorporate principles and techniques from secular psychotherapy into their Christian practice. Still others may choose to work within the secular realm with its limitations. They do so, first of all, to be a

witness to fellow psychotherapists and, as far as possible, according to the ethical standards of the field, to their clients. Moreover, aided themselves by the revelation of particular grace, they work together with secular psychotherapists in order to help transform the field (consider, for example Worthington's research on forgiveness (Worthington, 1998). In relation to the latter, it is necessary for Christians not only to work within the boundaries of the field, but also to do high-quality independent Christian research, without the constraints of secular presuppositions, yet measuring up to their scholarly standards, so that the development of a distinctly Christian psychotherapy can become a reality.

Objections to Christians Engaging with Secular Psychotherapy

Thinking about the vastness and extensiveness of the Holy Spirit's work in this world, and even in non-Christians, is an exciting theme that can motivate the praise of God and the search for and participation in God's work in this world. Yet, this fact does not translate itself into clear practice. Especially in the area of psychotherapy the challenge of rightly using common grace cannot be underestimated, since as an applied science, psychotherapy concerns itself with transforming people according to assumptions about what constitutes a good life. As mentioned before, these assumptions will often conflict with Christian principles. For example, whereas secular therapy might value autonomy and self-assertion, some of the Christian values are interdependence, submission to God, and denying oneself. Psychotherapy, thus, is not a scientific practice that is merely concerned with earthly things, but is necessarily, though mostly not intentionally, concerned with spiritual things. Not everyone, therefore, is convinced that engaging with secular psychotherapy is a good thing. The potential ways the Holy Spirit might use secular psychotherapy, as mentioned above, are examples of ideal situations. However, in reality scenarios may turn out differently, that is, not as positively. Thus, several objections have been raised regarding the Christian use of secular psychotherapies. These objections highlight the reality of the division between the City of Humanity and the City of God. Important to note is that although some of these objections may seem to be too extreme and readers may not agree with everything, the division between belief and unbelief, between serving God and serving what is not God (Dt 32:21; 1 Cor 8: 5,6), points to the fact that caution in these areas is fitting, to say the very least.

In the intellectual realm, with reference to episte-

mology, there are two objections. First, the unredeemed are alienated from their Creator, and, therefore, even if they were to observe something rightly, they would interpret it wrongly. Therefore, the opponents of secular psychotherapy would say that any insights coming from secular psychotherapy cannot be trusted or used (Mack, 2002). Second, the Bible is believed to be sufficient (Mack, 2002). The rival system of secular psychotherapy is so full of distortions that it cannot possibly be a product of common grace (Adams, 1986). Therefore, secular knowledge does not contribute anything of foundational value (Kuiper, 1928).

In the moral realm (as well as in the religious realm, discussed below), the danger of secularism comes strongly to the foreground. The observation is correct that even though secular psychotherapies have tried and claimed to be as value-neutral as possible, they are not (Johnson, 1997). According to Browning & Cooper (2004) the dominant social and cultural ethos of our age *will* leave its imprint, be it intentional or not. The result of implicit presuppositions is that clients will be treated according to the various secular assumptions of different psychotherapists. The objection that flows from this observation is that clients are generally not provided with a type of soul care that is in accord with God's view on people, resulting in change according to God's intention (McMinn, 2001). Furthermore, the purpose of many psychotherapists is not to harm their clients. However, what defines harm is interpreted variedly. Bringing up ethics, let alone Christian ethics, may be seen by secular psychotherapists as depriving clients of freedom and equality (Tjeltveit, 1999). However, Christians reasoning from a bigger (that is, God's) picture would consider it harmful not to bring up issues of morality. As it is, the moral values of the Christian faith are distinctive, yet in secular psychotherapy they are often left out, not represented correctly, or replaced by different values of the great variety of secular psychotherapeutic schools (Tan, 2011; Browning & Cooper, 2004).

In the creative and vocational realms, Christians working within a secular psychotherapeutic framework and setting are limited in their expression of Christian principles. This is caused by peer pressure (Anderson, Zuehlke & Zuehlke, 2005), as well as by the profession's prescribed ethical guidelines. These guidelines may inhibit Christian counselors from doing evangelism or setting explicit moral standards (Sanders, 1997).

In the societal realm, the objection is raised that organizations and institutes, in their attempts to help hu-

man beings change, do not actually supplement, but rather replace, the church (Rieff, 1966). Because of the gospel, the church is supposed to have the sole right to answer humanity's core problem, yet, when organized psychotherapy presumes to have other answers, it competes with the Christian faith (Rieff, 1966). Furthermore, insurance issues and professional boundaries may make true care for a person difficult. Time is money, and therefore, symptoms are being treated only superficially, and the root issues are not addressed.

Finally, with regard to the religious realm, secular psychotherapy is naturally most limited. Psychotherapy could be seen as a religion in and of itself (ex. Rieff, 1966), yet one that is anthropocentric, rather than theocentric, in nature. Consequently, the objection is voiced that all the so-called wisdom of secular psychotherapy will not bring people to God (cf. 1 Cor 1:20), but rather may even lead them further away from God. Many of the founders of secular psychotherapies have been antagonistic to religion (Shae, 2005). Furthermore, when psychotherapeutic techniques are successful, the well-meant intentions of secular psychotherapists can actually lead a person to a false illusion of health and independence, and one's spirituality may be damaged, ineffective, or even destroyed as a result (Crabb, 1975; Dean & Ice, 2000). An additional danger of getting involved with secular psychotherapy is syncretism. There is a risk that theological concepts will be explained in psychotherapeutic terms, which reduces and obscures theology, and forms a danger to real godly change (Spero, 1992). Even the positive change of therapists using and not altering clients spirituality is limited, because secular therapists would never be able to understand and use Christian principles, or other religious principles, optimally. Thus, in light of these objections, developing Christian psychotherapeutic theory and practice proves to be a very important task. This implies redefining psychotherapy as a practice in which Christians are not merely aided in resolving psychological and relational problems, but learn to see and deal with their problems in light of God's design and intentions for human functioning and relating, which leads to true healing of the soul ('psycho-therapy').

Discerning the Holy Spirit's Work in Secular Psychotherapy

However, developing a Christian psychotherapeutic practice is not the purpose of this paper. The point of this paper is to demonstrate that though the risks and dangers of engaging with secular psychotherapy are real, they should not keep Christians from making use of what the Holy Spirit may offer through it by

virtue of common grace. Though the call to engage with secular psychotherapy may be complicated and require thoughtful contemplation and careful action, Christians, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can and should be active in discerning when and how secular psychotherapy may benefit believers, and how they can engage with it to improve the field. Yet how can they do so in a way that does not lead them to underestimation (i.e. disregarding the work of the Holy Spirit) nor to overestimation (i.e. seeing everything uncritically as the Holy Spirit's work) of the potential good of secular psychotherapy?

The blessings of common grace exist primarily to allow God's redemption plan to unfold. God's purpose is to save people into an eternal life-giving relationship with him (Lk 19:10; Acts 17:24–31; 2 Pe 3:4:9). Two important facts, then, deserve attention. The Holy Spirit's use of secular psychotherapy through common grace, first, is meant to assist Christians on their journey with Christ, and, second, to prepare unbelievers for such a journey (Rom 1:19, 20). A general principle may be inferred from these facts. The Holy Spirit empowers those who are saved to do the works Jesus did (Jn 14:12), gives them understanding regarding the things of God (Jn 14:26; 16:13–14), and transforms their moral and spiritual character (Rom 8; Gal 5:18–25; Erickson, 2003). Through common grace, the Holy Spirit does these things for the unbeliever in a derivative and potentially preparatory way. Looked at from the other side, when anything leads away from salvation or sanctification, that is, intentionally leads away from God or is contrary to God's ways of living for believers, the Holy Spirit is not at work mediating the blessings of common grace. A tentative conclusion can be made regarding the Holy Spirit's work in and through secular psychotherapy that will promote greater discernment among the people of God regarding such matters. In order to discern the Holy Spirit's work through common grace, it should be assessed whether the move towards greater mental health as a result of secular psychotherapy contributes to: a) Christians working out their salvation by progressing in their relationship with the triune God, and b) non-Christians being helped in ways that do not impede their movement towards this true God, and perhaps is preparing them for such movement. The latter may sometimes only become clear in hindsight.

To flesh out this principle, I will give a few, relatively simple, examples. First, imagine a situation in which a secular therapist offers psychotherapy to a person who is not a Christian. This person has sought help because he realizes that his anger problem ruins his relation-

ships, his job opportunities, and his own well-being. The psychotherapist successfully helps the client by understanding possible sources of his anger and by teaching him strategies to manage his temper. According to the principle, it is reasonable to assume that the Holy Spirit may have used secular psychotherapy by virtue of common grace to restrain his sinfulness. The person is brought to greater wholeness. Furthermore, if this person eventually becomes a believer, the work that was done by means of secular psychotherapy will have been preparatory for the true sanctification of this person's anger that God would seek to bring about in Christ. The latter can, however, only occur through special grace. Were special grace used (either by the therapist or client) to enlighten the anger issue, the client's inner orientation would have been exposed. The extent to which his anger was sinful or spiritually appropriate would have been revealed and addressed.

Next, imagine a Christian person, who is depressed and seeks out a secular psychotherapist. The secular therapist successfully helps him feel more positive by replacing irrational thoughts with constructive thoughts. The therapist, sincerely attempts to integrate the client's spirituality, even using Scripture for cognitive restructuring. The result is that this person not only feels better psychologically, but simultaneously his relationship with God and others improves. The Holy Spirit thus used a form of secular psychotherapy to help in the advancement of sanctification. Were special grace employed however, the client would have been helped even more, for example, because the therapist could have prayed with and for the client, could have helped him to find hope and comfort in Christ, and could have guided him in discovering his identity in Christ.

A third example is that of a Christian therapist who seeks to help a Christian woman become more assertive by using secular strategies, which eventually leads her to file for a divorce. Her husband has not harmed her in anyway and has not behaved immorally, but this woman is not in love anymore and simply desires to be free from the constraints of marriage so she can start a new life and develop herself. Though assertiveness is potentially good, the Holy Spirit was most likely not at work since the Scriptures reveal God's call to faithfulness in marriage. Rather than using secular techniques as aspects of common grace to help this woman grow in sanctification, the therapist did not discern the faulty secular assumption of self-fulfillment, thus hindering the woman's spiritual development. Sin was not restrained, but rather encouraged.

A final example is that of a Christian counselor who uses the good of secular psychotherapy by virtue of common grace in the service of helping another Christian grow in particular grace, in living a more whole and holy life. Imagine a Christian counselor helping a fellow Christian struggling with anxiety. Not only does the counselor use strategies derived from secular psychotherapy, she actually thinks through them and alters them where possible so that they are even more powerful in the light of Christian truth. In addition, she uses distinctly Christian theories and interventions to help this person, by not only reducing the anxiety, but also by motivating him or her toward greater trust and dependence on God. And thus, by virtue of the principle mentioned above, Christians can discern, wisely recognize, and make use of the work of the Holy Spirit in secular psychotherapy by means of common grace.

How Common Grace Informs Christian Engagement with Secular Therapy

What should Christians do with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit can work through secular psychotherapy by means of common grace? First, on a more scientific and philosophical level, Christian professionals should engage with secular psychotherapy in order to participate in research and to bless human kind with insights that help people solve problems. Furthermore, they can discern and explain to Christians their underlying presuppositions of secular psychotherapy, such as implicit values and goals that potentially conflict with a Christian framework (for example, the sometimes unbridled focus on self-esteem and self-assertion). Finally, engagement with secular psychotherapy may also aid in the development of a distinctly Christian psychotherapy in which Christian principles, processes, and purposes can freely be practiced in order to guide believers into living the kind of fullness of life that Christ intends to bring (Jn 10:10).

Second, on a practical level, if no good Christian counselor is available, or Christian expertise in a specific problem is lacking, a certain level of freedom exists to use secular psychotherapy. In order to assess the likelihood that the Holy Spirit works through secular principles, the Christian counselor who refers or the Christian who seeks help can ask questions of the secular therapist. Information about goals, values, techniques, and a willingness to be in dialogue with the Christian therapist who referred or a pastor who wants to be involved, will help ensure that secular psychotherapy is used for good. A willingness of other Christians, professional or not, to walk closely with a client

through this process, may prove invaluable. This kind of concern for each other is a sign of true Christian community.

Finally, greater unity and appreciation is possible among Christians who are working in different contexts of counseling and psychotherapy. Rather than hostility toward one another, Christians can acknowledge how the Holy Spirit can use both biblically-derived and naturalistically-derived principles and techniques for the good of his people, and for the salvation of the world. Dialogue can sharpen and benefit all Christian counselors in spite of, or rather because of, their different callings.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate how the Holy Spirit may be actively using and working within secular psychotherapy by virtue of common grace. The Holy Spirit, as the agent of the blessings of common grace in the different realms of life, has been the starting point. However, life in this world as we know it is divided into two movements, belief and unbelief. The Triune God desires to bring a world fallen in sin to his desired goal of reconciliation with Him through the redemptive work of Christ. The Holy Spirit works through common grace in order to help people experience the goodness of God and to draw them to him (Jn 12:32-50). The Holy Spirit's activity through secular psychotherapy means that Christians can make use of secular psychotherapy in different ways, such as participating in research, contributing to the field, receiving psychotherapy, referring, and taking the good of secular psychotherapy to incorporate it into Christian practice. The guiding principle in all of this is that God desires all people to live according to his design for life, namely to love God and neighbor; when specific aspects of secular psychotherapy contribute to a movement away from God, the Holy Spirit is not at work. The work of the Holy Spirit through secular psychotherapy entails a call for Christians to use the good of psychotherapy to bless people in general, to restrain sin in this world, to prepare people for salvation, or to aid in the progressive sanctification of believers. May this increasingly be the case as Christians engage secular psychotherapy fruitfully as part of the important aim of unitedly helping people deal with their problems in light of the fullness of life that God intends.

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