

Pastoral Interview and Position Paper

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### Discussion

This Paper begins with the writer conducting a phone interview conducted on March 31, 2020 with the Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Christian Church, Rev. Dr. Fred Provencher. After shared greetings, writer asked Rev. Provencher, what is his educational background in psychology and counseling? Rev. Provencher states that he has a B.A. in history from Rutgers University, an M.Div. from Denver Seminary, and a D.Min. in preaching from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Rev. Provencher states that although he does not have a formal degree in psychology, both counseling and psychology were an enormous portion of his course load when attending school for his Masters in Divinity. Writer asked Rev. Provencher, what non-pastoral social service experience does he have? Rev. Provencher states that he was a history professor at Rutgers University in Newark, NJ before being called into ministry fulltime in 1994. He states that “shaping the minds of youths has always been a passion of mine.”

Writer asked Rev. Provencher, what is his perspective regarding psychology? Rev Provencher states “I believe psychology, which is a study of the mind and behaviors is a necessary field of science, however I also believe that there is nothing science can prove that is greater than what God can do.” Writer asked Rev. Provencher to explain what his perspective of psychology is based on. Rev. Provencher states “that’s simple, the word of God. The bible is the final authority for faith and practice of the Church. It is properly understood and received by the community of faith and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are the Church’s true, trustworthy and faithful guide.” Writer asked Rev. Provencher, to what degree do you use psychological findings and insights in your preaching, teaching and counseling ministries? Rev. Provencher states “My goal is not to disprove the merit or usefulness of psychology to my congregation, but to preach the unerring word of God and lead them to salvation through Jesus

Christ. To quote 2 Timothy 3:16, the word of God is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” He continues on to say, “We have several successful ministries within Cornerstone that include men, women, children, as well as divorce and grief counseling. We base our teaching, counsel, and preached messages on God’s unfailing word, which is the bible to transform lives, and to win souls for Christ.” Writer asked Rev. Provencher does he consider the bible to be his theoretical approach? Rev. Provencher states “the bible is the only approach necessary to reconcile people to God and salvation which comes only through Jesus Christ.”

Writer asked Rev. Provencher, would he or his ministry staff refer a Christian to a non-Christian psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychotherapist? Rev. Provencher states “We don’t refer, neither do we encourage those seeking counsel in our congregation to non-Christian therapist. Our church has an outstanding success rate of congregants that have been healed, and transformed by counsel through the power of God’s word, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and seeking to live their lives according to Christ’s example.” Writer asked Rev. Provencher, what is the relationship between counseling, discipleship and evangelism? Rev. Provencher states “counseling is how we address the problems and behaviors of the sinner. Discipleship is when that person comes under the understanding that Jesus is the way and is open to learn, be assisted, and fed through the word of God, and evangelism is that sinners life surrendered to the will of God and actively spreading the gospel to those that don’t know God through the bible and their personal witness.”

Writer concluded the interview by asking Rev. Provencher, does he feel competent in dealing with the counseling situations? Rev Provencher states “I feel extremely competent in myself and my associates to counsel our congregation because we follow the bible, believing that

every word is true and inspired by God and is without error. We seek to please God in every service we provide for his people and it is my belief that once they are reconciled to God's image and purpose for their lives their heart, mind, and soul are healed, and that is true counsel."

The next portion of this paper begins with a phone interview conducted by this writer on April 6, 2020, with Rev. Alfred Steele, Senior Pastor of Seminary Baptist Church. After shared greetings, writer asked Rev. Steele, what is his educational background in psychology and counseling? Rev. Steele states that he has a Bachelor of Theology from Northeastern Bible College, and states that while he has no formal training in counseling, during his studies he has taken Psychology I and II, and a course in pastoral counseling. Writer asked Rev. Steele, what non-pastoral social service experience does he have? Rev. Steele states " I worked at Straight and Narrow Rehabilitation Center, I served as Chaplain at the Passaic County Jail for 10 years, I have served the City of Paterson as a Councilman, and Council President, I have served in the New Jersey General Assembly from 1996-2007, and I have served as an Executive Board Member in the Paterson Branch of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Writer asked Rev. Steele, what is his perspective regarding psychology? Rev Steele states "I believe that all knowledge is useful to improve us so I don't that there is any research whether it's science or biblical that we should disregard. I believe it's important that we study psychology to help meet people where they are at." Writer asked Rev. Steele to explain what his perspective of psychology is based on. Rev. Steele states "I base my perspective on my experience at my secular job at Straight and Narrow in which I worked with people in recovery. They struggled with substance use and mental illness and although I was in the pastoral care department, listening to the clients and what they were experiencing allowed me to learn and become more open to their needs whether spiritual or a higher level of psychological care". Writer asked Rev.

Steele, to what degree do you use psychological findings and insights in your preaching, teaching and counseling ministries? Rev. Steele states “I believe God made us in such a way that when one part of the body is affected, it has an effect on all of the other parts and I want to see the whole person healed delivered and set free. We have to use psychological techniques to find the best method to meet people where they are which then allows us to use the word of God to bring forth new life and renewal of the mind through Christ Jesus and reconciliation to God.” Writer asked Rev. Steele, how much counseling do they do at the church? Rev. Steele reports that his counseling is biblical and from a pastoral position, and he has three licensed counselors on his staff that counsel in all areas including family, marriage, grief, and personal counseling. Writer asked Rev. Steele, what theoretical approach does him and his staff take? Rev. Steele states “ we take a holistic theoretical approach so the personal in counsel can receive transparency, which allows the person to be open and honest, confidentiality, which allows the person a trustworthy environment, and the application of practical reality, in which the person can be free to discuss any topic real to their need and circumstance so that treatment of the true issue can take place.”

Writer asked Rev. Steele, would he or his ministry staff refer a Christian to a non-Christian psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychotherapist? Rev. Steele replied, “Yes, and we have.” He states “There are people who come for counseling that need a higher level of expertise. Principles do not change and the ultimate goal of both psychological or secular counseling, as well as biblical counseling is to provide the best treat for the client that is being served.” Writer asked Rev. Steele, what is the relationship between counseling, discipleship and evangelism? Rev. Steele states “counseling is an opportunity to give proper guidance to the person seeking direction, discipleship is learning, so it is to help develop that person to be the person they have the discipline to be, and evangelism is the use of ones desire to reach beyond themselves to share

the good news which is the gospel of Jesus Christ that they have received and pour it into the lives of others.”

Writer concluded the interview by asking Rev. Steele, does he feel competent in dealing with the counseling situations? Rev. Steele states “I believe like many other professions, pastoral and church counselors should be required to complete continuing education courses. I believe it’s important to not allow our experience to be the only thing we depend on when counseling others. Yes, I feel competent to counsel, and I will always be seeking to learn more as well.”

This writer assesses that the integration model used by Rev. Dr. Fred Provencher most closely represents Biblical Counseling. This writer arrives at this conclusion as evidenced by his stern stance during the interview that “the bible is the final authority for faith and practice of the church.” This writer’s assessment of Rev. Provencher’s use of Biblical Counseling as the integrated approach that he closely represents can also be supported by the undeniable presence of the three assumptions of Biblical Counseling which include: God is Maker of all, The Lord is judge of the living & the dead, and Christ comes to us for our salvation (Greggo&Sisemore, 2012). This writer feels that Rev. Provencher’s answers conveyed that there is only one way to healing, and mental wellness and that consists of a client aligning their life with the bible (God’s word), and conforming to the example that was set by Jesus Christ as the only way to achieve optimal health and salvation.

This writer feels that the possible limitations to Rev. Provencher’s position on integration is his counsel will only reach those that are in the Christian faith. His leadership qualities, wisdom, and record regarding the success rate of his methods is incredible, yet they only apply a level of success to those that subscribe to his beliefs. Another limitation that this writer assesses is the stance of being unwavering about the belief that science adds no significant contribution to

mental wellness will limit the true miracles that can be achieved when theories and techniques are integrated with biblical concepts, techniques and principles because many clients that desire counsel may present symptoms of mental illness that are beyond their ability to comprehend the totality of conforming to the word of God.

This writer assesses that the integration model used by Rev. Alfred Steele most closely represents the Integration Approach. Writer supports this assessment as evidenced by Rev. Steele's statements and beliefs aligning with the author of (Gregg& Sisemore's, 2012) Integrative Approach chapter, stating "Integrative counseling calls for adaptability, fluidity and sensitivity to the current moment, and for an ability to see different realms of authority in relation to the particular situation being faced". It is very difficult for this writer to identify the possible limitations of Rev. Steele's approach, because this is also the writer's preferred approach. This writer believes that a perfect balance of theology and psychology will result in optimal wellness for the client.

In conclusion, this writer believes that the models of integration represented by each pastor is useful. Rev. Dr. Fred Provencher models biblical counseling and has a large congregation that is thriving under his leadership and values. Rev. Steele has an equally large congregation which thrives under his leadership and values as well. It is this writer's opinion that Biblical Counseling is amazingly affective in the Christian context, but it limits the number of clients that can benefit from their counseling service if the client is not Christian or open to becoming Christian. This writer feels that this model of integration is too limited in its interpretation of all the elements needed to achieve mental wellness, and imposes constructed ideals of what is best for a client. It is this writer's experience that anything done to an extreme

can result in error. A balance is what's needed to gain the respectful integration of psychology and theology.

References

Greggo, S.P., & Sisemore, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Counseling and Christianity: Five approaches*.

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.