

Position Paper #1

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Biblical anthropology is the study of humanity through a Christian perspective.

The Imago Dei translates to the Image of God and as Christians, we believe that we are created in His image. Genesis 1:27 states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (New International Version, Gen 1:27). As counselors with a Christian background we are to counsel our clients with the knowledge that they were made in the image of God.

In Virginia Todd Holeman’s text, *Theology for Better Counseling: Trinitarian Reflections for Healing and Formation*, she mentions how as counselors we are to walk in a sense of holiness that allows us to show compassion to our clients and present them with the necessary tools. We are not called to police our clients, except in times when needed as mandated reporters, but are called to provide support and guidance. Holeman states, “We believe that relational holiness is revealed in how one relates to God, in how one manages one’s emotional reactions, and in how one relates to others, especially during difficult interpersonal exchanges” (Holeman, 2012). Through my practicum and internship, I have only encountered two Christian clients that purposely follow the Christian faith. Most of my clients have never mentioned how Christ shows up in their lives or their interest in Christianity. Personally, I never found issues in counseling my secular clients because I felt as though I could relate to them. However, after taking this and other Christian courses throughout the program I’ve been faced with my avoidance of such topics.

I’m reminded of a client who wanted to incorporate God’s expectations of her in our sessions and how I feared saying the “wrong thing”. I feared that I was not secure enough in my faith to “preach” to her and give her the exact scripture that she needed to change her life. I’ve had conversations with professors and my supervisor and have come to accept that I am here to

give my clients the tools and support they need to help themselves and I am not to control the outcome of their lives. I am not required to pull out Bible verses that will magically change everything, however, I can let my clients know that they are worthy and have a purpose. I can remind my Christian clients that they are human beings created in the image of God who possesses wisdom and creativity to solve their problems.

Holeman declares, “ I am transformed so that through the grace of God I can be formed in the image of Christ and participate in expressing God’s love for the world” (Holeman, 2012). There will be challenging times when a client does not “act” as we desire them to or how we expect them to after a few sessions. We may be Christian counselors, however, we will be reaching a diverse clientele that most often will include clients who do not share our faith. We must be flexible in our approach and respectful in our demeanor. Holeman also states, “We can accept others for where they are and who they are instead of trying to make them into our own image. We no longer need to demand conformity from others as a way to reduce our anxiety” (Holeman, 2012). There have been instances when my clients want to change their loved ones to match the idea they have of them in their heads. Together we have come to terms with the fact that some people will disappoint you and that our clients should never shrink themselves for the benefit of others out of fear.

Holeman states, “We are not called to judge our clients, so direct confrontation skills may not be the best way to go. But we can become curious about how a client justifies to himself or herself some troublesome behavior (like having an affair) and the desire to follow Jesus as Lord, or how he or she reconciles harmful interactions with others and his or her understanding of Scripture” (Holeman, 2012). As counselors, we learn how to ask questions that make our clients question their motives and desires. Clients may question if what they’re doing will lead to the

outcome they desire or if the outcome they desire is even moral. Furthermore, they may even question what they deem as morality. If they are in the Image of Christ, then they must begin on a path to being more Christ-like.

According to King & Whitney, humans are created to thrive. In their text, *What's the 'Positive' in Positive Psychology? Teleological Considerations Based on Creation and Imago Doctrines*, King & Whitney reiterate that those created in the Image of God exist as unique individuals who are in communion with God and others in a mutually beneficial relationship. Throughout history, human relationships have experienced trials. King and Whitney explain, "In this way, the Imago is directional and emphasizes that humanity was created with the capacity to grow, change, and develop towards God's intentions for us" (King & Whitney, 2015). Humans can thrive by being more Christ-like in their interactions with each other and themselves.

Although we are made in His Image we do sin and fall short of the glory of God. Our lives are an ongoing process. There are times we will fail and times we will succeed. Although we are created in His image, we must also know that we cannot control our clients. We do not have the power to see how their future will be carried out but we can try to stop patterns we've seen emerge. Through counseling we acknowledge the client's past, focus on solutions to the current problem and plan for the future. We know that our clients have worth and that they deserve to be counseled with empathy. There will be times when I may come across a client I may not desire to work with due to their circumstances. However, I need to address my biases and determine if I have a valuable reason as to why I'm referring a client out. If I say that a client is made in the Image of God then I am saying that they are an individual with the chance of straying away from sin and closer to the heart of God. I am also saying that even though they might not be Christians, I can treat them the way I would want to be treated by Christ.

References

Holeman V. T. (2012). *Theology for better counseling: trinitarian reflections for healing and formation*. IVP Academic.

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