

Position Paper 2

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Three key concepts discussed by Johnson, Eric are language and how it defines the image of God, sin, and suffering. According to Johnson, E., to be created in the image of God is explained depending on an individual's worldview, which depends on one's culture and language. Johnson, E. notes that to understand another human's beliefs, we must learn to speak their language and understand their culture; we may need to develop our language skills in another language and even learn how to translate work from one language into our language (2019). In conjunction with Johnson, E. scripture also tells us that language is different and needs to be understood and valued; undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning (1 Corinthians 14:10).

As Christians we speak one common language, which is the language of the gospel. As counselors we speak another language, which is the language of psychology. According to Johnson, E., as Christian counselors we speak both the language of the Gospel and the language of psychology, known as the language of Psychopathology. According to Johnson, Psychopathology is the study of the disorders of the soul; our approach is going to treat humans as personal agents, made in God's image, as well as organisms (2019). According to Entwistle, D., religious beliefs for many people, convey a worldview that is an orienting force in their lives. It is therefore important for clinicians to understand the things that give their clients meaning, value, purpose, and direction (2009). Through the lens of Psychopathology as described by Johnson, E. we can approach our clients holistically. By having a holistic approach, we will be able to treat our clients biologically, psychosocially, and spiritually. A holistic psychology of persons allows the clinician to explore spirituality not simply as a utilitarian force for personal betterment, but as a legitimate encounter between persons, religious communities, and God,

while simultaneously recognizing the biological, psychological, and sociological forces that are the bread and butter of psychology (Entwistle, D., 2009).

According to Johnson, E. if an individual is only viewed by their biological and social environment, it undermines human freedom and responsibility, and doesn't honor us as human beings made in the image of God having some measure of freedom (2019). Although we were created in the image of God, given the power of free will we will often fall short of God's glory, therefore causing us to be less in his likeness. Jesus was a perfect image of God here on earth. In his likeness Jesus offered himself sacrificially for the atonement of our sins yet to come. To be connected to God is to know and understand that although we cannot be like God, we can have a spiritual connection to God through Christ Jesus.

According to Romans 8:29 Jesus Christ is the firstborn Son to whose image many others will be conformed. Theologically, this is fitting since Jesus is the perfect image of God. Jesus is the fulfillment of human identity, and as people are progressively conformed to the image of Christ their human identities are also realized in him (Peterson, R., 2016).

Through this understanding we can be image bearers of God, as well as identify our clients as children of God, made in his perfect image; inclusive of our and our client's flaws and imperfections.

Johnson, E. notes that understanding sin is important because it helps us to understand Jesus's sacrifice and our relationship with God. According to Johnson, E. sin negatively affects our relationship with God and compromises our ability to relate to others; it is like a hole in our nature (2019), and we try to fill this hole with earthly pleasures or possessions. From this perspective, sin is a betrayal of humanity's station, a perversion of humanity's God-given

identity and its place in God's ordered creation (Peterson, R., 2016). As counselors, understanding sin gives us a look into our client's unconscious thoughts and feelings. As noted by Johnson, E. sin is usually unconscious and when it is conscious we make excuses for it; it becomes a vice, and eventually develops into a sinful nature. When we understand sin from this perspective, we are able to work with a client who has a sinful nature and understand that the sin did not progress out of desire, but rather developed over time due unconscious circumstances.

In addition to understanding sin, it is also relevant to understand how the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins is a reflection of love. For upon the cross we encounter the depth of God's mercy for those who were once children of disobedience and his love for those once enslaved [...]. The cross is hope, joy, peace, and love [...] (Bird, M., 2016). There is an astonishment in the love of God the Father, through God the Son, which can only be understood by His sacrifice on the cross. Through this understanding we as counselors can see how the Father loves us, and how we are called to love others. We will not always work with clients who are "lovable", but through the understanding of God's sacrifice and love we will be able to provide a safe and nurturing space for healing, just as God has healed us. God does not measure the depth of sin, sin is sin; therefore we cannot compare our sin to that of another, especially our clients.

Lastly Johnson, E. discusses suffering and how suffering can lead to further problems in our lives that can turn into disorders. According to Johnson, E., suffering can be defined as strong negative emotion, or psychological or physical pain. Suffering raises questions such as, does God really love me? Why does God allow bad things to happen? Why did God allow this to happen to me? Johnson, E. goes on to discuss a female client that he counseled who was molested by her older brother for eight years, beginning around the age of six or seven. This

portion of the video was difficult for me as I too was molested by my older brother for two years, and it began around the age of eight or nine. I too questioned where God was, why did God allow this to happen, and what did I do wrong; and often I found myself asking God to make it stop. He goes on to add that now in her 40's the client is asking why didn't God show up; turning 40 myself and engaging in my courses at Alliance, I too wonder why didn't God show up. Although I understand that God does not like sin, that he does not cause sin, and that he uses everything for his goodness; it does not mean that there are times when I am not weary. Johnson, E. notes, everybody suffers differently, but everybody suffers, no one is protected from suffering (2019).

In an article *Where was God* by Turell, S. and Thomas, C., they discuss sexual assault amongst women and Christianity. They discuss how it is important to reframe the mind regarding sin and suffering.

For many Christians, salvation equates with promises of safety and happiness. [...] people tend to believe that because they are Christian nothing bad should happen to them. Conversely, if bad things happen, then that person must not be a good Christian, walking righteously, or really be saved. This concept of mandated suffering is problematic for victims/survivors, because it implies that one should be content even while suffering and not try to heal. Reframed interpretations and teachings can help the victim/survivor understand that there is a middle area- she can be saved and still have bad things happen to her, and that suffering is a part of life but sustained suffering is not mandated (Turell, S. & Thomas, C., 2001).

For many years I struggled with accepting that a God who was supposed to love me so, could allow such a bad thing to happen to me. It was not until I learned that God hates sin and that free

will allows for all of us to sin, that I could begin to understand that God did not cause or allow what happened to me. As noted by Turell, S. & Thomas, C., God does not stop us from choosing sin and God does not stop people from choosing to do bad things, because free will is free will, it never changes. It's unconditional (2001). Unfortunately suffering is a part of all of us. It is important to understand that although we suffer, our suffering does not define who we are. When working with clients it is important that we help them to identify where their suffering comes from, how to accept their suffering, and ways to heal from that suffering.

In conclusion, Christian professionals should engage with secular psychotherapy in order to participate in research and to bless human kind with insights that solve problems (Kim-van Daalen, L., 2012). Although we will be working within a secular setting, we do not need to set our values aside. We can work with varying clients through the lens of Christ, respecting their different worldviews, without imposing our own. We can show the image of God through our empathy, encouragement, and guidance with our clients. The guiding principle in all of this is that God desires people to live according to his design for life [...]. 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 (Kim-van Daalen, L., 2012).

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