

POSITION PAPER NUMBER TWO: THE FALL'S RELATIONSHIP TO  
PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

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GCN 618: Theology In Mental Health Counseling

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April 19th, 2023

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Psychopathology is the study of mental disorders, their symptoms, causes, and treatments. Different perspectives, including psychological, biological, and social, are used to understand the etiology and manifestation of mental disorders (Shultz, 2005). The theological perspective has also contributed to the understanding of psychopathology. In particular, the concept of the Fall has been used to explain the existence of mental illness and suffering. In his video, "Towards a Christian Psychopathology," Eric Johnson discusses various ideas on the relationship between the Fall and psychopathology (Johnson,2019).

From my understanding the concept of the Fall refers to the biblical account of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, resulting in the separation of humans from God and the introduction of sin and death into the world. According to Johnson, the Fall is central to understanding the origin and nature of mental disorders. He presents three main ideas on the relationship between the Fall and psychopathology: the Fall as a source of mental disorders, the Fall as a modifier of mental disorders, and the Fall as a catalyst of mental disorders.

Johnson argues that the Fall is a source of mental disorders because it resulted in the disruption of the harmony between humans, God, and nature. This disruption created a "fallen world," characterized by evil, suffering, and death. Johnson contends that mental disorders are one manifestation of the brokenness of this world. He states that "mental disorders are an inevitable aspect of the human condition after the Fall" (Johnson, 2016, 12:17).

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This idea is supported by the literature. For instance, the cognitive-behavioral perspective acknowledges that negative and irrational thinking patterns contribute to the development of mental disorders (Beck, 1967). From a theological perspective, the Fall could be seen as the root cause of these negative thinking patterns. Similarly, the existential perspective acknowledges that human suffering is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition. The Fall could be seen as the origin of this suffering, which manifests in various forms, including mental disorders.

Johnson's second idea is that the Fall modifies mental disorders by amplifying their severity and complexity. He contends that the effects of the Fall, such as sin, guilt, shame, and fear, exacerbate mental disorders, making them more challenging to treat. Johnson states that "sin makes mental disorders worse, and mental disorders make sin worse" (Johnson, 2016, 22:06). He also notes that the Fall has created a stigma around mental illness, making it more difficult for individuals to seek treatment and support. Research has shown that individuals with mental disorders are more likely to experience stigma and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). Moreover, religious beliefs and practices can either exacerbate or alleviate the stigma associated with mental illness (Huguelet et al., 2006). This concept emphasizes the brokenness of the world, which can be seen as contributing to negative attitudes towards mental illness. If mental illness is viewed as a consequence of sin or moral weakness, it can perpetuate stigma and discrimination. However, as Johnson points out, the Fall can also be seen as an opportunity for Christians to extend grace and compassion towards those who are struggling with mental illness.

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Johnson's third idea is that the Fall is a catalyst of mental disorders. He argues that the effects of the Fall, such as trauma, abuse, neglect, and social injustice, can trigger or exacerbate mental disorders. Johnson contends that "mental disorders are not merely the result of personal choices or biological factors, but often the product of social, cultural, and historical factors" (Johnson, 2016, 28:26). He also notes that the Church has a responsibility to address these societal issues and provide support for individuals affected by mental illness.

This idea is supported by the literature as well. Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse and neglect, increase the risk of mental disorders later in life (Felitti et al., 1998). Moreover, social and cultural factors, such as discrimination and marginalization, can contribute to the development of mental disorders (Breslau et al., 2011). From a theological perspective, the Fall could be seen as the origin of these societal issues, and the Church could be seen as a source of healing and support for those affected by them.

Johnson's ideas on the relationship between the Fall and psychopathology resonate with my personal beliefs. I agree that the Fall is a source of mental disorders because it disrupted the original design of the world and created a fallen state characterized by evil and suffering. Moreover, I agree that the Fall modifies mental disorders by amplifying their severity and complexity. The effects of sin, guilt, and shame can exacerbate mental illness and make it more challenging to treat. However, I also believe that mental disorders are not necessarily a result of personal sin or disobedience. While sin can contribute to mental illness, it is not always the sole cause. For instance, genetics, brain chemistry, and environmental factors can also contribute to

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the development of mental disorders. Therefore, it is important to approach mental illness from a holistic perspective that acknowledges the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that contribute to its development.

Furthermore, I believe that the Church has a responsibility to address the societal issues that contribute to the development of mental disorders. The Church should be a source of healing and support for individuals affected by mental illness and provide resources and education to address the social and cultural factors that contribute to its development. In conclusion, the concept of the Fall has contributed to the understanding of the origin and nature of mental disorders. Eric Johnson presents three main ideas on the relationship between the Fall and psychopathology: the Fall as a source of mental disorders, the Fall as a modifier of mental disorders, and the Fall as a catalyst of mental disorders. These ideas are supported by the literature and resonate with my personal beliefs. However, it is important to approach mental illness from a holistic perspective that acknowledges the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that contribute to its development. The Church has a responsibility to provide support, resources, and education to address these factors and promote healing for those affected by mental illness.

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