

**Position Paper # 4**

Benita Park

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling

GCN 618: Mental Health & Theology

Dr. Julio Orozco

April 27, 2023

## Position Paper # 4

*4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15:4, NIV)*

As a follower of Jesus, my professional counselor identity extends beyond upholding the ACA code of ethics or developing greater professional skills. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, my faith informs the very core of who I am, which then extends to both my personal and professional life. My spiritual identity in Christ is the very anchor that grounds all other aspects of my identity, therefore my formation of counselor identity is closely tied to my spiritual formation (journey of being conformed to the image of Christ). Both involve a process of engaging with values, attitudes, and actions to integrate them into a larger identity system (God).

### **Imago Dei**

My faith informs the very way I view all of humankind and thus my perspective on counseling. One of the most central tenants of the Christian faith is the concept of the Imago Dei, meaning we all contain a spark of the Divine in us. The concept of the *Imago Dei* provides a unifying starting point between mental health and theology for effective and compassionate counseling. Since we are all created in the image of God, how we interact and treat others is of primary importance. The Trinity exists as reciprocating selves pouring out other-centered love in a mutually giving and receiving relationship. This concept of the Trinitarian God affirms both the lovingness and connectedness of the persons of the Godhead and thus we too are to relate to others in the same manner. To apply this to counseling would mean that my ability to relate

rightly with my counselee would involve a deep understanding and practice of this relational aspect. The extent to which I can reflect the love of the triune God to clients is an integration of my faith. Just as God welcomes us into a relationship with Him, I view counseling as a way to demonstrate the love of God.

### **Personal Holiness**

A counselor holds the responsibility of being present for the most vulnerable, dark and wounded parts of an individual's soul. While knowledge and proper implementation of clinical skills is important, the most powerful impact is most often due to a strong therapeutic alliance, which extends beyond relational skills. The very character of the counselor(who they are) is just as important in creating a strong, trusting relationship. As I look to grow professionally as a counselor, I must carefully attend to the formation of my own soul. In concordance with Holemnan (2012), I view personal holiness as central to my identity as a child of God, and if holiness should affect how we live, then holiness can be a metagoal in theologically reflective counseling. Holiness is not limited to my individual relationship to Jesus Christ. It also includes my ability to relate rightly with others and thus offer compassion and hope to my clients.

Many presenting problems in counseling center on relationship problems, therefore, expanding my capacity for holiness can go hand-in-hand with therapeutic outcomes. In addition, if I can encourage and help my clients to live truthfully, faithfully and justly in their relationships with others, then we are helping clients to live a more holy life that honors Jesus Christ. Ultimately, my desire is to relate responsibly to my clients and offer a different perspective of what a healthy, loving relationship looks like. Creating a new paradigm of love and relationships may then translate into improvement in their lives. It may take the form of better parenting

strategies, improved marital dynamics, increased self-control over addictive behaviors or improved self-regulation over relationship-threatening emotions such as rage (Holeman, 2012).

### **Bringing God's Kingdom Here and Now**

The Kingdom of God starts here and now and it extends beyond personal salvation. We work with the Holy Spirit to implement His Kingdom in this world. We work to bring the love, power and healing wisdom of the gospel to bear the ills of our day (Wright, 2018). I see counseling as a means of co-creating a kingdom of shalom and love (the original Eden) with an emphasis on empowering relationships that facilitate human development and wellness.

Beyond the individual one on one counseling environment, the counseling profession as a whole is an aspect of working towards social justice and bringing human flourishing to all. This involves a contextual and culturally sensitive approach to the counseling profession, which ties in with the humanity of Jesus. Jesus' humanity affirms the particularity of ethnicities, each culture, food, music and ceremonies truly matter. While particularity matters, the ultimate goal is universality in which the kingdom of God will consist of every tribe, tongue and nation.

McCaully (2019) states that ethnicity is eschatological. This means we must view the diversity of our clientele as a beautiful aspect of the coming kingdom of God. Since the very diversity of all cultures reflect specific aspects of God, our Blackness, Whiteness, Asianess..all of it matters. McCaulley (2019) states that the nature of the gospel demands that my blackness endure and be visible into eternity. As counselors, we need to embrace the particular ethnicity of our client, with a curiosity about how their particularities reflect the image of God.

## References

Holeman, V. (2012). *Theology for better counseling*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

McCaulley, E. (2019) *Towards a Black Anthropology*. 2019 Theology conference. Esau

McCaulley | Towards a Black Anthropology | 2019 Theology Conference - YouTube.

Wright, N.T. (2018). *How the Spirit Convicts the World – John 16:1-15*. [Video]. Gordon College. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BywAf4iXT6Q>

,

(