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The Need for Ecumenical, Denominational and Empirically-Supported Christian Psychotherapy Approaches in Public Settings

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6) The mother is a support rather than a block to her daughter's development. 7) Parental blessing and a sense of purpose can overcome sibling rivalry. 8) The body is not the prison of the soul but is integrated with it. 9) Freedom can be found in life and not in suicide and death. 10) Life is not tragic but hopeful, and people can and do change.

The radical conception that God created nature and is thus able to change what seems to be immutable natural laws is incompatible with that much more deterministic view that nature creates the gods and in fact governs them. Freud correctly understood that the latter deterministic alternative was immutably tied to an oedipal conflict. "Earth and Sky foretold that Cronus would lose his rule to his own son" (Apollodorus, 1.1). Freud had no ultimate faith in the transformative powers of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and thus was not able to use Biblical master stories as a basis for psychoanalysis. "Like Sisyphus pushing his rock, Oedipus and Laius must contend forever. At one point in the cycle the father must be slain by the son, at another, that of the return of the repressed, the father returns, the return is only illusion, for the cycle will begin again" (Yerushalmi, 1991, p. 95). That ever-repeating cycle represents Freud's tragic and ultimately Greek understanding of the psychological processes intrinsic to a deterministic universe.

May contemporary psychology recover an understanding of the Biblical message of freedom necessary to overcome the deterministic and tragic view in the classical Greek world view and in the oedipal configuration (Kaplan, Schwartz & Markus-Kaplan 1984; Kaplan & Schwartz, 2008). This should be done in a non-theological way. The Biblical foundation stories shine in comparison with Greek foundation stories. If we offer them as alternative master stories, it seems to me that we avoid the conundrum of "separation of synagogue/church and state" (also see Kaplan & Schwartz, 2006/2008; Schwartz & Kaplan, 2004, 2007). Then truly, the words of the prophet Malachi will ring out:

And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,

And the heart of the children to their fathers...

What could be better than that?

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Northwestern University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Psychology at The University of Illinois, Urbana. Dr. Kaplan adds, "I am the proud father of Daniel Kaplan and proud father-in-law of Reva Nelson, and have two wonderful grandsons named Levi and Isaiah." His email address is Kalkap@aol.com.

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The Need for Ecumenical, Denominational and Empirically-Supported Christian Psychotherapy Approaches in Public Settings

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James Skillen has written an important and broad-ranging article about the place of Christian counseling in public settings. I will focus my brief comments on what I regard as some of the implications of the fol-

lowing statement:

You ought to be able to conduct your counseling and psychiatric practices in a thoroughly Christian manner within a public or semi-public accrediting system that provides public-legal protection and equal access for a diverse range of professional and disciplinary approaches. You should not have to stuff your practice into a private box if it is distinctively Christian any more than another professional should have to stuff her practice into a private box because it is too Freudian, or too behavioristic, or too atheistic.

I agree with Skillen that Christian psychologists have the right to practice a distinctively Christian psychotherapy approach in public settings—as long as they do so in an ecumenically and multiculturally sensitive manner. In most public settings, psychotherapists will encounter clients from a diversity of religious, racial, cultural, and lifestyle backgrounds. There is widespread professional agreement, including ethical guidelines to this effect, concerning the importance of respecting clients' values and working within their belief systems (APA, 2002; Tjeltveit, 1999). In my view, therefore, Christian psychotherapists not only need to understand how to apply their Christian approach in an explicit or denominationally specific manner with Christian clients who share their beliefs, they also need to be capable of practicing in an implicit or ecumenically sensitive manner with clients from diverse Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, and non-religious traditions (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Tan, 1996). An ecumenical approach can be helpful during the early stages of therapy with all clients and over the entire course of therapy with clients whose beliefs differ appreciably from the therapist's (Richards & Bergin, 2005).

The foundations of an ecumenical therapy approach are attitudes and skills that are required of all effective multicultural counselors and psychotherapists (e.g., Sue & Sue, 1990), but an ecumenical approach goes beyond multicultural approaches in its emphasis on specific attitudes and skills required for working sensitively with the religious and spiritual dimensions of clients lives. As Allen Bergin and I wrote elsewhere:

Therapists with good ecumenical skills: (1) are aware of their own religious heritage and values and are sensitive to how they could impact their work with clients from different spiritual traditions; (2) are capable of communicating understanding and respect to clients who have spiritual beliefs that are different from their own; (3) understand how their own spiritual beliefs could bias their clinical judgment; (4) are sensitive to circumstances

(e.g., value conflicts) that could dictate referral of a religious client to a therapist with more religious expertise; (5) seek knowledge about their clients' religious beliefs and traditions; (6) avoid making assumptions about clients based on religious affiliation alone but seek to understand each client's unique spiritual worldview and beliefs; (7) understand how to sensitively handle value and belief conflicts that arise during therapy; (8) make efforts to establish respectful and trusting relationships with professionals and leaders in their clients' religious communities; (9) seek to understand the spiritual resources in their clients lives and encourage their clients to draw upon these resources in their efforts to cope, heal, and change; and (10) use religious and spiritual interventions that are in harmony with their clients spiritual beliefs when it appears such interventions could be helpful to their clients (Richards & Bergin, 2005, p. 157).

Psychotherapists can develop such skills by engaging in activities that help increase their understanding of and empathy for a diversity of religious and spiritual traditions; for example, reading books and taking classes about the world religions, attending religious services of various religious traditions, becoming familiar with the sacred writings of the various world religions, and attending workshops about different spiritually-oriented psychotherapy approaches.

Having emphasized the importance of applying Christian psychotherapy approaches in public settings in a multicultural and an ecumenical manner, I would like to close by once again affirming my agreement with Skillen's view that there is a need for distinctively Christian psychotherapy approaches in the public domain. According to demographic statistics, there are approximately 260 million Christians in North America, which is close to 85% of the population (Barrett & Johnson, 2002). This is not, of course, to suggest a uniformity of belief among Christians because there are numerous divisions within Christianity. Nevertheless, psychotherapists in public settings are much more likely to encounter a client from some Christian denomination or sub-tradition than they are clients from any other religious or non-religious tradition. The values and beliefs of Christian clients typically conflict in major ways with those assumed by most mainstream secular psychotherapy traditions, which are grounded in the naturalistic-atheistic worldview (Bergin, 1980). Christian psychotherapy approaches can provide a more culturally sensitive treatment framework for Christian clients, particularly for those who are devout.

The relatively small amount of outcome research to date on Christian approaches suggests that they are as effective, and sometimes more effective, than secular ones (McCullough, 1999; Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007; Worthington & Sandage, 2001). Although this is encouraging, the number of well-designed outcome studies in this domain remains embarrassingly small. In order to achieve the kind of equality and influence for Christian psychotherapy approaches that Skillen envisions, I believe that a greater number of rigorously designed empirical outcome studies must be done in this domain. As the practices and claims of Christian psychotherapists are submitted to such scrutiny, I believe that their credibility, acceptance, and distinctive influence within public settings and within the mainstream psychotherapy profession will continue to increase.

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Political Realities Underlying Skillen's Principled Pluralism

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James Skillen eloquently presents a reasonable argument for pluralism in the standards and regulations of professional organizations related to counseling and the study of psychology. He apparently wants to pave the way for "a distinctively Christian development of psychologically related professions in the American public square." Thus, he is saying that if we are going to take the trouble to propose and elaborate a "Christian psychology," let us make sure that there will be freedom to implement it in American society.

What objection could there be to such a proposal? In presenting his argument, Skillen seems to imply that someone would be against the idea. Such an opponent can be imagined, but does s/he actually exist? What would enhance this abstract essay would be concrete examples of specific issues that necessitated it. Are there factions within professional organizations, e.g. the American Psychological Association (APA), who wish to bar any counseling or psychotherapy that is explicitly Christian or based on any other particular faith? Surely, within the context of contemporary "culture wars" there are individuals or even groups that are seeking to silence or marginalize a Christian voice in the mental health professions. There are always "hot topics" that bring such politics to the surface. It would be helpful to identify them.

Skillen touches on potential controversial issues at the end of his paper, but does not develop them. For example, what if a Christian counselor disapproved of homosexual practice? Should such an opinion be declared, as if required as part of an informed consent to treatment? Or would such a biblically based attitude be contrary to established professional ethics and thereby be disallowed and, by extension, such a counselor be sanctioned or have a license revoked?

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