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Clinical Ethics and a Christian Worldview: Imago Dei in Clinical Practice

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RUNNING HEAD: Ethics & Christian Worldview

Clinical Ethics and a Christian Worldview:
Imago Dei in Clinical Practice

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Paper submitted to Christian Association for Psychological Studies for 2008 annual meeting,
Phoenix, AZ.

Summary

Worldviews address five questions of what exists, how we know it, how things work, right and wrong, and who we are. A Christian worldview can subtly or profoundly change our approach to ethical clinical practice. This presentation explores how each aspect of a Christian worldview may shape our practices. (49)

Abstract

Worldviews address the answers to five basic questions that all humans address at some level: what exists, how we know it, how things work, what is good and bad or right and wrong, and who are we? These questions correspond, respectively, to the philosophical domains of metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, ethics, and anthropology. Bufford (2007) proposed that a Christian worldview foundation had implications for clinical supervision. In this presentation we will explore the implications of a Christian worldview for our approach to professional ethics. It is proposed that each domain has implications, some subtle and others profound, for how we understand ourselves, our clients, and our work as Christian professionals.

Christians believe in a spiritual reality—that God exists and is actively involved in our world and with us. Thus we can invite God’s active involvement. With appropriate informed consent we can invite God’s involvement publically with our clients’ participation if we deem it therapeutically appropriate (McMinn, 1996).

Christians believe that God is all-knowing and that he reveals wisdom at his discretion to those who listen to his voice. Thus we can invite God to reveal things to us that are not humanly knowable, or that we may not know due to our personal human limitations. With their consent we can invite our clients to do the same.

While much of our understanding of how the world works comes from human efforts, including those of science, a Christian perspective on the working of our world nonetheless may subtly affect our understanding of such things as the consequences of (seemingly) harmless sins such as casual dishonesty or casual sexual intimacy. These will at times affect the goals and interventions we propose for our clients.

Indicated in the previous paragraph is the idea that a Christian view may affect our understanding of what is good and bad, right and wrong. At times we may seem to be swimming upstream, but others often share many of the convictions that we hold. While setting goals and planning interventions will need to be accomplished in a respectful and collaborative way, our convictions will nevertheless shape the proposals that we make and influence our clients' choices.

Finally, a Christian view of who we are as persons includes the notion of bearing the image of God. As McMinn and Campbell (2007) proposed, the image of God may be thought of as including structural, functional, and relational dimensions. One example of a way in which the notion of image of God will affect our work lies in the recognition that God takes personally what we do to and with each other (Mt. 25:31-46).

(434)

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Presentation Title: Clinical Ethics and a Christian Worldview: Imago Dei in Clinical Practice

Track Choice # 1: Clinical Practice Track

Track Choice # 2 Church, Spirituality, and Pastoral Care

Learning objectives:

1. As a result of this presentation, each participant will learn to identify the key elements of a worldview.
2. As a result of this presentation, each participant will learn to identify distinctive Christian positions on each worldview element.
3. As a result of this presentation, each participant will learn examples of ways in which A Christian worldview affects our approach to clinical practice.
4. As a result of this presentation, each participant will learn how the image of God as it relates to worldviews.
5. Participants should be able to give examples of ways in which the notion of image of God affects our clinical practice.

Intended audience: Intermediate

Presentation format: Paper (poster option acceptable)