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Worldview Foundations for a Christian Psychology

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Introduction

Cultural diversity is an important theme in contemporary preparation for clinical work. One of the ways in which people differ culturally lies in their worldviews. Culture, worldview, and religion are closely related though not identical. Here we will focus on worldviews as a way of articulating key aspect of culture that shape the way people think about problems in living, the ways in which they seek to fix their problems, and the goals they seek.

Basic beliefs about the nature and functioning of reality form the backdrop for all we do, including our research and therapeutic activities. In forming a Christian psychology, we need to pay close attention to our worldviews or we may find ourselves in unintended agreement with those who are covertly or openly hostile to Christian views.

Worldviews include beliefs about what exists, how we know, how things work, what is good and evil or right and wrong, and who we are. In the material that follows we will explore basic notions in each of these five domains and illustrate how they lay the foundations for both psychological science and psychological practice.

- Everybody has a worldview, though some of us may not know it.
- Worldviews matter—sometimes people fight and die over worldview differences: Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East, Muslims, Hindus and Christian in parts of Southeast Asia, and so on.

Christian Worldview Beliefs

- Christians generally believe in a reality that is both material and spiritual rather than a strictly material reality (God, Satan, angels, demons, heaven and hell).
- They believe in divine revelation as a way of knowing about life independent of scientific knowing.
- They believe that God is free to act both within the created order and outside of it (miracles, answers to prayers).
- They believe that right and wrong are rooted in the person, character, and revelation of God rather than simply a social convention.
- Finally, they believe that persons bear God's image; among other things this means that God takes personally what we do to each other.

Christian Worldview Implications

As a consequence of these foundational beliefs:

- Christians tend to think of science as a tool in service of godly stewardship over creation rather than as an exclusive approach to human knowing.
- In the therapy setting, Christian beliefs about who we are and about right and wrong shape our understanding of problems, sometimes in subtle ways, and sometimes profoundly.
- As a consequence of these foundational beliefs, Christians tend to think of science as a tool in service of godly stewardship over creation rather than as an exclusive approach to human knowing.
- In the therapy setting, Christian beliefs about who we are and about right and wrong shape our understanding of problems, sometimes in subtle ways, and sometimes profoundly.
- They also shape our attitudes towards ourselves and our clients in important ways.
- Problems, interventions, and goals and are worldview embedded

Worldviews and Practice of Psychology I

- Worldviews shape our views of what we consider to be problems (e.g., unhappiness, adultery, hearing God's voice in our heads)
- Worldviews shape our views of acceptable interventions (e.g., hypnosis, medication, therapy)
- Worldviews shape what we consider goal desirable goals (e.g., sexual abstinence vs sexual gratification)

Worldviews and Practice of Psychology II

- Trauma shapes our worldviews—see attached table
- Therapy may shape our worldviews--??
- When we encounter those with differing worldviews it is helpful to be
 - welcoming
 - inviting
 - curious/inquisitive
 - open
 - gracious
 - gentle
 - collaborative
 - flexible
- It is said of Jesus, our model and example, "A battered reed he will not break off, and a smoldering wick he will not put out" (Mt. 12:20).

References

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Common Scientific Worldview Beliefs

- What exists is strictly material ("Matter is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be" (Hawkins, 20xx)
- The scientific way of knowing is the preferred way, perhaps the only way
- Natural cause is the way things work
- Right and wrong are simply social conventions
- Persons are (merely) complex animals

Domain	Scientific Rationalism	Christian Beliefs	Practice Implications
What exists—ontology	Matter Relationship as a material reality	Matter and spirit: God, angels, demons Relationship as a spiritual reality	Everything we do is understood to have both material and spiritual consequences
How we know—epistemology	Science	Science Revelation	We seek spiritual wisdom and guidance for ourselves and for our clients to the extent s/he will embrace it
How things work—cosmology	Natural causes	Created causes Divine cause, spiritual forces	We pray for divine action/intervention
What is good/bad or right/wrong—philosophical ethics	Socially constructed	Divine decrees	We call clients to live by their moral beliefs in confidence that as they do so their beliefs and behavior grow Godward
What it means to be human—philosophical anthropology	Complex animal	Created in the image of God	We treat all human encounters as if with God himself

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