

TheoPhostic Counseling: Divine or What?

by Gary Almy, MD

Dr. Ed Smith has elaborated a system of psychotherapy that he believes is a direct revelation from God. As would be expected, he is zealous in its promulgation. It will be attractive to Christians interested in "Christian counseling" because Dr. Smith makes extensive use of scriptural quotations and stories in his writing.

TheoPhostic Counseling cannot be a revelation from God; it could, however, be a revelation from Satan. That this is possibly the case is evidenced in three general ways. *First*, Dr. Smith builds his system of therapy upon a common but fatal misunderstanding of biblical anthropology and sanctification. He also depends on an understanding of "mind," "heart," "soul," and "spirit" that is entirely idiosyncratic and fundamentally wrong. *Second*, the system of therapy he builds is substantially Freudian in its processes, even though he uses Scripture and his own invented jargon. *Third*, Smith advocates a concept of truth that allows him to believe in his new brand of psychotherapy as God-given and to accept what his clients "discover" in their past as truth. In spite of his zeal and his confidence that God has revealed TheoPhostic counseling to him, it is just another version of the same old serpentine lie that the insight-oriented psychotherapy industry has been pandering for the last century.

Anthropology: Smith believes that the mental and emotional problems of man are the cause-effect result of early life experiences of environmental trauma. For Smith the sins of man come from the outside and his salvation comes from the inside. This is exactly the opposite of what scripture teaches. He speaks of "echoes of long suppressed (possibly repressed) memories" that are "buried deeply in the inner recesses of the mind." He laments that "often a person will not make the connection between their present state of being, current troubled relationship, compulsions, addictions and other symptomatic behavior and their unresolved historical woundedness," and he emphasizes "revictimizing the person with their trauma." For Smith, people surely were born originally innocent and have problems or cause problems because they were victimized. He seems devoid of any meaningful understanding of original sin and the sin nature. From this fundamental basis all else in his system follows. It would

seem unlikely from his writing that Smith truly understands the fundamental problem of man and how he is saved by God from eternal punishment.

Sanctification: In a section heavily laced with Scripture, most of which is interpreted to suit his personal notion, sanctification is presented as a work performed by man. He says that "my soul/mind stays the same unless I choose to renew it"; that sanctification "is not a process of becoming more like Jesus because we are already as much like Jesus as we will ever be," but is "a revealing of what already is"; and that "transformation occurs when we reprogram the conscience with truth." This is an example of a very common problem even amongst evangelicals. All too many have a notion that sanctification is a work solely of man that he does upon himself. This leads to all manners of methods and techniques by which men seek to purchase from a market place pre-packaged fruits of the spirit already ripe and shiny. This is part of the appeal of Dobson and others who offer ladders of virtue, which people are to climb using their own determination and will power. This is a very attractive heresy in our age.

Mind-Heart-Soul-Spirit: Here Dr. Smith simply has not done his homework very well. He elaborates a concept of these terms from his exegesis of Scripture, which is incomplete and erroneous. His version, however, is fundamental to the methods of TheoPhostic counseling. The most important flaw is his assertion that man can know with his "mind" the content of his "heart-soul-spirit" with reliability and credibility. He, as expected, then asserts that the mind of man can re-program the heart-soul-spirit and achieve the goals of therapy. This of course is in violation of Jeremiah 17:9-10. This is the same error found in all the other insight-oriented psychotherapies and gives rise to the various methods and techniques of gaining such insight as Freud and Smith advocate. Smith speaks of "flowing" and "drifting" where Freud spoke of free association. His view of heart-soul-spirit also dovetails with his view of sanctification and undergirds the works methods of the TheoPhostic counseling he advocates.

Building on the above basic notions, Smith then elaborates a theory and method of counseling. His theories and methods are Freudian, except that they are decorated with scriptural vocabulary.

Environmental Determinism: Mentioned above is this fundamental notion of environmental determinism. It has been a lie from the beginning and has plagued the church since the days of Pelagius. Freud advanced this idea in his theory of early life trauma. He did not see man as "originally innocent" but that has been the post-Freudian twist on his ideas. This view, of course,

supports the search for the original traumatic experience, the core experience, the perpetrator, the oppressor; leads to notions of victimization; and results in little more than a desire for revenge and empty bitterness. It also leads to the popular, but wrong, notion of unilateral forgiveness so common in Christian counseling circles today. In this view of environmental determinism, man is not responsible for his troubles or his troublesomeness; it is somebody else's fault. Smith evidences this in the quotes mentioned above.

Psychic Determinism: Smith has accepted "whole-hog" the Freudian conception of the dynamic unconscious. To a large degree this depends on his fatal misunderstanding of heart-soul-spirit, what it is, how it works, and how accessible it is to man. He speaks of man being in "bondage" to "long suppressed (possible repressed) memories," "historical wounds we carry," and "the root lie" needing to be discovered and exposed. He says, "The memory producing the pain is buried deeply in the inner recesses of the mind," and, "Until we find freedom from the historical wounds we carry, we will struggle with the symptomatic lies these wounds manifest." The methods he advocates are all designed to get inside the unconscious, discover what is there, and change it. Again this is all dependent on a wrong view of what Scripture says about our out-of-awareness mind.

Insight: Smith says we need to "identify the historical memory picture which matches the emotional echo," to find the "mentally encoded account of the memory event buried deeply in the inner recesses of the mind." He instructs people to immerse themselves "deeply into the painful memory and tell themselves the lies which are causing so much pain." He believes that "until the root is discovered and exposed, very little change will occur in the person's present life." He also heavily depends on the Freudian notion of the cryptic expression of the repressed unconscious in dreams, emotions, affects and relationships. As such, he notes numerous methods by which he gets "clues" to what the "root issues" are. He lists as clues "headaches" and says that "every emotion we feel in the present is a preconceived interpretation" and that "you must act as a detective and follow the clues left behind at the crime scene." He identifies specific emotions as tip-offs and says that "each of these categories [of core traumatic experiences Smith calls "lies"] produce their unique emotional discomfort." He advises that we "listen closely to their words and phrases and watch their non-verbal actions" and notes that "often present feelings are 'secondary emotions.'" Freud called these "screen memories." Smith also advocates the same emotionally-laden cathartic experience championed by Freud. Smith, like Freud, says that the more dramatic and emotional these "release the pain" experiences are, the more

"true" and right-on they are. For Smith credible, reliable insight into the unconscious is not only possible and desirable; it is essential. This is one of the pillars of the insight-oriented psychotherapy industry. Scripture says exactly the opposite!

Therapist: Smith develops an entire rationale for the necessity of a specially trained, specially gifted, elite sort of therapist who is absolutely required for troubled people to get at the core of their problems and transform themselves. He says, "Finding a memory picture is not too difficult in most cases. You will have to work your way around the client's misunderstanding of what he believes is the source of his feelings"; "Sometimes it takes a lot of work to get to the original lie"; and, "You will have to act like a detective." In addition, Smith exposes how he gets the client to buy into his system of therapy. In the "Preparing the client" section, he reveals that he is "Confident in its effectiveness," "informs the clients of all the great results," creates the client's "sense of expectation," and "provide[s] the client with an overview of the process." These represent the standard methods for convincing customers used throughout the psychotherapy industry. Smith also lists numerous special techniques he has discovered to allow him to get at the repressed "lies" supposedly causing the client's problems. These are too numerous to list, but the impression is created that someone with special skill is absolutely required if anybody is going to get better.

Pleasure Principle: Smith claims that Christians should never experience "negative emotions" and that "there is no instance in life where these negative emotions are righteously appropriate." For Smith such emotions are to be viewed as "symptoms" of mental problems. Again, using numerous Bible verses, he evidences a minimal understanding of the conscience and entirely misses the idea that "negative emotions" could be a signal given to us by God to indicate that we are in trouble with Him! Smith's goal, then, is to therapize away "negative emotions," a notion not at all surprising given his wrong view of sanctification. His view also evidences a misunderstanding of God's purpose in suffering.

Like the psychotherapy industry, TheoPhostic Counseling would lead people away from spiritual growth and maturity, since sanctification always involves "negative emotions" and suffering.

Truth for Smith is what works, what feels right, and what leads to a "good outcome" for his clients. He is not concerned with and openly devalues "logic" as getting in the way of the search for insight into the unconscious and makes such statements as: "I do not ask how true it logically may be, but rather how

true does it feel"; "You do not want them to reason out the truth/lie or use their logic"; "The problem with believing a lie is it may as well be the truth because the consequences are the same"; and "When you sense a person is creating truths for themselves, you will need to intervene and have them refocus on the darkness of the lie, memory and emotion." With TheoPhostic Counseling people are led from rational logical thinking into the darkness of their original memory and led to embrace their faulty thinking. Smith says, "Keep them out of this room of logic"; "I suggest statements that contain his thoughts and words and ask him how true they feel"; and, "Now I encourage them to immerse themselves deeply into the painful memory."

For Smith "the only logical source of truth is divine." In other words he uses the ancient maxim, "All truth is God's truth," the same way many Christians use it: If man thinks something is true, then God must think it is true, and thus it must be "of God" because God is truth. Relying on this false application of an attribute of God, Smith not only justifies his system of therapy, but claims that, when he leads people to the "dark rooms" of their soul and instructs them to "listen for the voice of Jesus," what they hear is truth that will immediately "heal" them. He says, "I am excited that Christian counselors have a divinely dynamic method of helping people find instant release from the painful memories that bind them," and, "I do not limit my thinking to how God should act or heal. I simply watch the bottom line . . . the truth is He is God and He is capable of doing it anyway He chooses."

God can, of course, do what ever He chooses. If, however, Scripture is true and reveals to us the attributes of God He wants us to know and be sure of, we can be certain that God would never operate in the ways that Dr. Smith says He does in TheoPhostic Counseling. Similarly, we can be sure from Scripture that Satan could operate in the ways Dr. Smith advocates. Dr. Smith has surely been deceived. His teaching is false and false teachings are to be exposed.

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