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**The Use of the Concept of Divine Love when
Counseling those Trapped in Addictive Behavior**

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Introduction

The paper seeks to provide support for the effectiveness of the use of divine love in counseling people with addictive behavior by evaluating what divine love therapy entails and how it impacts the one being counseled. The paper will also present a case study of a church in south Dallas primarily focused on caring for homeless people most of whom have addiction problems.

I. Addiction as an Attachment Disorder:

Flores (2004)¹ argues that addiction can be viewed as an attachment disorder. He argues that since it is biologically impossible to regulate our own affect for any extended length of time, individuals who have greater difficulty establishing emotionally regulating attachments will be more inclined to substitute drugs and alcohol for their deficiency in intimacy. He says that because of a person's difficulty maintaining emotional closeness with others, certain vulnerable individuals are more likely to substitute a vast array of obsessive-compulsive behaviors (i.e. sex, food, drugs, alcohol, work,

¹ Flores J. Philip, *Addiction as an Attachment Disorder*.

gambling, computer games, etc.) that serve as a distraction from the gnawing emptiness and internal discomfort that threatens to overtake them. Consequently, when one obsessive-compulsive type behavior is given up, another is likely to be substituted unless the deficiency in self-structure is corrected.

Studies in attachment theory and self psychology have shown that dysfunctional attachment styles interfere with the ability to derive satisfaction from interpersonal relationships and contribute to internal working models that perpetuate this difficulty. Experiences related to early developmental failures leave certain individuals with vulnerabilities that enhance addictive type behaviors and these behaviors are misguided attempts at self-repair. Deprivation of age appropriate developmental needs leaves the substance abuser constantly searching for something that can be substituted for what is missing (Flores, 2004).² Flores carefully examined the 12-step recovery process developed in the late 1930's by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in the "Big Book". His review of the "Big Book" and the recovery process itself as it takes place in thousands of meetings throughout the world shows that the founders of the process had instinctively developed an approach to recovery which assumed attachment disorder was part of the problem.

Doweiko discusses addiction as a disease of the human spirit and discusses spirituality and its connection to addiction, that recovery from addiction as understood by early pioneers of

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was "a spiritual process through which the individual recovered the spiritual unity that he or she tried to achieve but could never find through chemicals" (Doweiko, p.37).³ Sussman⁴ talks about the role of spirituality and mentions that spirituality provides the positive attitude about life which gives the shift away from self to the well-being of others. It brings about mindfulness larger than self. Sussman says that spirituality is antagonistic toward self-seeking behavior and negativity which are characteristic of an addictive mindset.

² Ibid.

³ H. Doweiko, *Concepts of Chemical Dependency* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2009).

⁴ S. Sussman, "Addiction, Religion, Spirituality, Treatment," *Substance Use & Misuse* 45, no. 14 (2010).

II. The Church as a Place of Help.

Studies show that some individuals have found support and assistance from clergy, church groups, and congregations. Others have had less positive experiences when religious organizations are punitive toward individuals with addictions (McNeece and DiNitto,).⁵ The experience individuals have with religion may result in individuals thinking less about religion if the religious organizations is more about rules and less about spirituality. Canda and Furman⁶ describe spirituality as a process of human life and development focusing on the search for a sense of meaning, purpose, morality, and wellbeing.

Some people claim that the Church puts too much emphasis on the concept of sin, and that, if the church did not scare people with talk of sin and hell but rather focused more on love, the world would be a better place. While this argument has merits it does not mean that everything should be acceptable in the name of Christian love.

The Christian position appears to be that love is a discovery rather than a craving. This gives ground for therapeutic motivation in a reality outside the individual. The Christian view of love can allow for impartial reflection on the person's ego, ideal, their wishes, hopes, and desires, and the best strategy for seeking a fulfilling life. A Christian philosophy is one of several which psychologists can consider when forming their therapeutic objectives.

III. Love as a Motivation for Positive Attachment

Therapy generally begins with developing a relationship and subsequently problem solving by tapping into the client's stated motivation. Motivation is often viewed as the absolutely necessary precondition for therapeutic change, sometimes in and of itself sufficient. Different therapeutic schools assume different motivations for change. It is assumed that human behavior is chosen, motivated by basic needs, and tied to an inherent desire to reduce discomfort by building problem-solving skills (Clough, JPT, 2006).

⁵ C. Aaron McNeece and Diana M DiNitto, *Chemical Dependency: A Systems Approach*, 3 ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004).

⁶ E. R. Canda and LD Furman, *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work: The Heart of Helping*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

William R Clough in his paper; “To be loved and to love”⁷ argues that a major task in therapy is to tap into intrinsic motivations for healthy change; to help people to fall in love with what they can, at their best, become. He says that the Christian Scriptures offer a definition of love that can encourage healthy growth without the narcissistic overtones of self-esteem, which psychology can fall into, or a mechanical set of doctrines into which Christianity can fall and that a purely materialistic worldview grounds love in the individual, while from the Christian point of view, love can arise from both within the individual and from external reality. It is part of the nature of God and it is intended to be lived out rather than described. Clough says that love, even in its simplest form, is not necessarily unreservedly positive. Strong attachments entail selfish interest and fear of loss or abandonment and can be repressed, distant, uneasy, or unsure.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth⁸, developed attachment theory by studying attachment in children exposed to strange situations and concluded that attachment is dependent on the temperament of the child and parent as well as the social and physical conditions and the relationship could be either secure, avoidant or anxious-ambivalent . Studies have shown that these patterns of attachment is not limited to human relationships alone but is rather also representative of relationship of individuals to God. Pargament (1997)⁹ sees Religion as a “frame of reference, a blueprint of oneself and the world that is used to anticipate and come to terms with life’s events” (Pargament, p.100). A client’s religion helps to bring the worldview of the client into dialogue with relationships and events (Pargament, p.104). Rowatt and Kirkpatrick (2002)¹⁰ in their study of attachments to God, created an attachment to God scale. They concluded that people’s attachments to God correlate with their quality of life and their relationships to others. They found that, loving images of God,

⁷ William Clough.

⁸ Bretherton, I. (1992). The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, pp. 759-775.

⁹ Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Guilford.

¹⁰ Rowatt, W. C., & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2002). Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(4), 637-651.

intrinsic religiousness, and doctrinal orthodoxy, anxious attachment to God are significant predictor of negative or positive effect, and neuroticism (Rowatt and Kirkpatrick, p. 648). Reinhold Niebuhr¹¹ observed from a theological point of view what attachment theorists observed directly. He concluded that when human self-awareness is not properly dealt with, it makes anxious-ambivalent attachments inevitable (Niebuhr, 1964, p.182).

Clough argues that because love involves desire to take care of another, it can reduce anxiety. Loving involves another. Feeling loved involves another as well. If one experiences one's self loved by a powerful and benevolent other, in this case God, one's "freedom and finiteness" are bounded by love. They are contextualized, and anxiety is put to rest. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18).¹² John appears to present the idea in the scriptures that being attracted by the proper things will lead to a better life, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23[b]). In 1 John 4, he urged Christians to love one another because God first loved us. We love because he first loved us. One can conclude therefore than when one feels the love of God truly, one is bound to respond in love. People, who feel loved, become more loving.

IV. The Goal of Divine Healing Therapy

According to Gratton (2000)¹³, since the fall of mankind, human have shown a striking tendency to forget who they really are. Humans were created to thrive in loving relationships with God and each other but after the fall, human beings have developed a "false self," a counterfeit of the deeply buried image of God. The core of this false way of living is always a sinful refusal to surrender to God's will. The "true self, and its desire to live in transforming friendship with God, remains buried in the depths of our souls" (Gratton, p. 67). This situation is not limited to the addict alone but to all humanity in our

¹¹ Niebuhr, R. (1964). *The Destiny and Nature of Man*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

¹² William Clough

¹³ Gratton, C. (2000). *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*. New York: Crossroad.

fallen state. What the addict needs to know is that a loving God is willing to restore him or her back to His true image.

The goal of divine love therapy should be spiritual transformation which can be defined as a renovation of the human heart. As one draws near to God, one begins to awaken to one's true identity through the grace of God and gradually the false self fades away. As conversation and communion with God deepens, a person through the help of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit continues on a journey of surrender to the will of God and His love which leads to healing from addiction. What divine love therapy should be is given spiritual direction to the addict with the goal of facilitating spiritual growth and not just the alleviation of symptoms and resolution of problems. One may be tempted to ask what exactly spiritual direction is.

According to Barry and Connolly (1982)¹⁴, “spiritual direction differs from moral guidance, psychological counseling, and the practice of confessional, preaching, or healing ministries in that it directly assists individuals in developing and cultivating their personal relationship with God . Sperry's model provides a direction for what divine love therapy should involve. He argues that traditional psychotherapists are likely to employ various psychotherapeutic interventions in their work with disordered clients or patients with symptoms toward the end of reducing symptoms and/or impairment, personality change and/or fulfillment while spiritual directors are more likely to use listening, instruction in prayer, and other spiritual practices as they work with relatively healthy spiritual seekers in achieving spiritual growth.¹⁵ In Sperry's model, spiritually-attuned psychotherapists are afforded much freedom and flexibility in the employment of therapeutic goals and techniques. Benner ¹⁶says that “counseling is problem centered, spiritual direction is Spirit centered. The goal is growth in one's relationship to God and not resolution of problems” (Benner p. 88).

¹⁴ Barry, W. A., & Connolly, W. J. (1982). *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. New York: Seabury Press.

¹⁵ Sperry, L. (2001). *Spirituality in Clinical Practice: Incorporating the Spiritual Dimension in Psychotherapy and Counseling*. Philadelphia: Brunner-Rutledge.

¹⁶ Benner, D. G. (2002). *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

VI. Case Study of a Church in South Dallas

I have spent the last ten months at RCCG, the winner's assembly in south Dallas observing and learning how the church uses the love of God to reach out to the homeless most of who are addicted to drugs. The odds are stacked against this church being successful in the area for various reasons. First the Pastor is an African immigrant whose background is totally different from the largely African-American crowd that he ministers too. There is a huge cultural barrier to cross and more so the church is not exactly financially buoyant. Nine years on there are many success stories among the hundreds of homeless people with addiction problems that have passed through the church. One of such successes is pastor Yvester Johnson.

Yvester Johnson¹⁷ went to college to play basketball. He had extraordinary leaping ability, and his superior shooting skills made him a high-school star. About halfway through his freshman season at Western Oklahoma State College, his girlfriend summoned him home to Sapulpa, Oklahoma, to see their baby son. Three weeks later Yvester was addicted to crack cocaine and decided to trade dorm life for street life. Between highs and the many more lows, he vowed that he'd get it together; thinking basketball would be there when he got back on track. But it never happened. Months turned to years and then decades in a crack-induced cycle of addiction, homelessness, and despair. It was years later as he slowly started to revisit what he'd learned as a child about Jesus Christ that he began the process of cleaning up and putting his life in order. Most people who spend decades on the streets as Yvester did, end up dying there, but he's been clean for nine years now and, at 53, he's dedicated his life to helping the homeless and hopeless find their own way out.

Yvester believes it is the love of God shown through His grace that took him from the streets. He had a troubled childhood and basketball was his escape route from the problems at home. Playing basketball however came with some other issues. As a young athlete, playing on winning teams, drinking beer and smoking weed was just part of it. He admits it wasn't uncommon for alcohol and drugs to

¹⁷ Yvester Johnson's story has been previously published in an article in Manna Express in 2007 (www.MannaExpressOnline.com). His story is told here with his permission from excerpts of the interview with manna express and from personal conversations with Yvester Johnson and Pastor Raphael Adebayo.

accompany post-game celebrations for the young athletes. He readily participated in the revelry. It too was an escape. Being a winner at basketball was balm for Yvester's emotional wounds. At home, he felt worthless; his mother drove home that message. On the court, he was somebody. Friends and family esteemed him, and he fed off of their affirmation. Drinking and drugs were the icing on the cake. First, there was weed, then lines of powdered cocaine, then crack rocks. He eventually got addicted to crack and ended up on the streets. On the streets, Yvester rubbed shoulders with murderers, molesters, and the mentally ill. For 24 years, he drifted among women, family, and homeless shelters. He was a street person addicted to crack, supporting his habit by doing odd jobs and keeping the company of women who collected welfare checks. Once they got paid on the first, he would "go get high off of however much he could buy," he says. "In between, you'd try to pull yourself together a little bit until you got some more money to get high again." He wanted to be free from drugs, but getting off the drugs was more difficult than getting on. He felt hopeless, not able to understand how he'd ended up in his situation. Every time he'd get himself cleaned up, the voices that told him he was worthless would pipe up again and drugs would lure him back, and he'd have to start from square one trying to pull himself together.

As a young boy, Yvester had been introduced to Christ through a basketball mentor, but nothing much came of it until he decided to turn to his Bible to seek help for his addictions. He began to involve himself with ministries through homeless shelters in Oklahoma, Arizona, and Texas, all the while battling drugs. Yvester believes being weaned from drugs is a long, difficult process. "I told God, 'I'm not going to give you my all until I'm done with this addiction,'" he says. Yvester says the first hit of crack is the most potent. "You gotta have it," he says. "It takes you to a state of instant gratification, and you keep trying to get it." Nothing else in his life provided the high that he got from drugs, so he kept going back for more.

Yvester thought that in order for him to be fully changed, he'd need to be completely sober. He considered it an all-or-nothing deal. "I didn't understand it was a process. I thought if I didn't get it right the first time, the addiction would come back worse." In 2001 however, he was fed up with himself. "I was tired of being tired," he

says. “I’d lost everything. I lost my family, and I lost their trust.” Yvester landed in Austin after a chance encounter with his father. He continued the cycle of connecting with family members until they got tired of him. He eventually ended up in a homeless shelter where he eventually met the now-deceased Duane Severance, a well-known minister with a heart for Austin street ministry. Under Severance’s guidance, Yvester found a more solid footing in ministry and found sobriety through the Salvation Army’s Adult Rehabilitation Center. By 2004, he was completely clean. “Duane would say, ‘Yvester, you’re reeking! Let’s go get a shower,’ and then he’d pray with me and read Scriptures about how God had brought people out, and I began to see that the more I could get of Jesus then the addiction would break,” he recalls. Duane showed Yvester that God loved him despite it all.

Yvester spent the next six years working in ministry with Austin’s homeless and working to stay drug-free. “When you have an addiction, sometimes the sickness tries to develop again, but then I would go to the Word of God. It isn’t easy, but I get on my knees and pray,” he says. And he found strength by going back to his favorite Scripture, [Romans 8:28](#): “*All things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.*”

He realized that everything he’d been through was for a reason—so that God could mold him into what He wanted him to be. Yvester once told Duane that if he could kick his addiction, they could change the world together. But Duane told him, “Yvester, you can’t change the world until you change yourself.”

For Yvester, that meant dealing with the demons that had haunted him for years, the verbal abuse from his mom, how his dad had treated his mom, the disappointment from how he’d been looking forward to playing ball at the University of Oklahoma but ended up back home, drug-addicted. He started to view the let-downs as the tools God used to shape him.

In 2010, Yvester came to Dallas to pursue more ministry opportunities. He found them through Raphael Adebayo, senior pastor of RCCG, the Winner’s Assembly, a 9-year-old church and outreach that targets South Dallas’ homeless and drug-addicted. Pastor Raphael opened the church to Yvester and picked up from where Duane stopped. He saw potential in Yvester from their first encounter and

his belief in him gave Yvester the motivation and drive to be the success that crack had made impossible. Ministering with Yvester brought a level of insight and understanding of addiction and associated behaviors that Pastor Raphael couldn't have grasped otherwise, having never been a user. Yvester is now a full-time staff member and pastor at the Winner's Assembly. He's excited about his new identity in Christ. He's driven to encourage others who live the life he once lived. He spends his days ministering and evangelizing in shelters around town. "Nine years sober, Yvester says there are still things that happen that can be discouraging, and in the past drugs would have brought temporary solace. But he draws from the love of God and what made him a successful athlete which was training and working hard to get better. Today, that means for Yvester staying rooted in Scripture.

There are other success stories with addiction at the RCCG winner's assembly, One of such is the current choir director Mr Led and brother Darrel who was also hooked on crack and eventually became homeless after his home was foreclosed and his business collapsed. After many years of back and forth with the church, Darrel now teaches Bible study on Tuesday in the church and has his casket making business back. There were days of tough love but what has proved effective for these people, is the knowledge that despite it all God's loves them. They were able to find their self worth back from that knowledge but it also had to be exemplified by the church. The winner's assembly provides free dinner every Tuesday after Bible study that draws the homeless to church. They have homes that help stabilize the homeless addicts for a while and that combined with discipleship has proved effective in helping these people get back. It is not all success stories however as some people come just to take the free meals and go but there are those who have stayed and just like it is with all the different treatment methods those who are consistent tend to show better results.

Conclusion

Divine love can be used effectively to counsel people struggling with addiction but it has its limitations just like all other therapy do. The key is to know that the goal is a transformation of the person through the power of the Holy Spirit in bringing the addict to the knowledge of a loving God.

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