

Healthy Minds and Mental Illness: A Brief Review

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This article describes background research for a proposed project initiated under Cranes Club Europe.

The project, "Healthy Minds," aims to assess the mental health needs of the Unificationist community -- its prevalence, attitudes and support available. I review:

- Reverend Sun Myung Moon's (SMM) words about mental illness (MI). Quotes were found mostly in the *Cheon Seong Gyeong*; the

source speech was then identified on Tparents.org, which hosts a comprehensive database of SMM's speeches translated into English listed by year and month.

- The basic premises of the Divine Principle (DP) and Unification Thought (UT). Do they offer insights which may be helpful for sufferers and therapists in our movement?

An attempt is also made to integrate the words of SMM and the content of DP and UT into the more conventional psychiatric view of MI.



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The words of Rev. Moon

Although he did not say a great deal about mental illness, quotes from the 1950s until the last years of his life confirm that SMM saw MI as a "spiritual problem," i.e., as the result of the influence of evil spiritual beings. The speeches from which these quotes are taken were given to various audiences; the earlier ones are to smaller groups of followers in Korea, the later ones in the United States not only to leaders, but also to the broader audience of members who would regularly gather to hear him when he spoke. I am unable to find comments about mental illness in any of his speeches to the general public.

If his view of MI seems very limited, the spiritual aspect is arguably the only one about which SMM could have had any informed knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that although an expert on love, SMM often made statements about fields in which his knowledge was lacking, and some of his comments may not even have been meant to be taken literally (for example, when he says, "with just a look, you can cure leprosy and other disorders").

Divine Principle as a model of health

The core teachings of DP, upon which Unification Thought (UT), the teachings/philosophy of SMM systematized by Dr. Sang Hun Lee is based, are:

- The Principle of Creation, God's ideal
- The Fall
- Restoration

The ideal of the three blessings and a *Cheon Il Guk* made up of individuals who have fulfilled them, is a basic pillar of the Principle of Creation. "Mind-body unity" must be achieved by developing and maturing the three core functions of the mind, intellect, emotion and will, if one is to fulfill the first blessing. But in mental illness one or all of these three parameters are disrupted.

Disturbances of emotional response make it extremely difficult for those with mental illness to develop mature and loving relationships; some lucky individuals with psychotic illness may find a supportive life partner, and have children, but many will not. And the disturbance of will resulting in a lack of "will power" brings up the vexing issue of responsibility and is the reason why many mentally ill are seen as having character and moral flaws and weaknesses. And, of course, while the life of a mentally ill person is greatly affected by the choices he or she makes while exercising free will and responsibility, the ability to make good choices is greatly influenced by illness. It tends to be a vicious circle.

The question is: are we emphasizing a lifestyle that is only attainable by some? Or is mental illness "just" an extreme manifestation of "fallen nature" -- we are all mentally ill and the path of restoration is open to and "walkable" by all? This is indeed an unresolved and debatable issue, and even Western psychiatry with its DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) classification system of mental disorders is not united as to whether mental illness is a distinct entity or something at the end of a spectrum (as in some cases of hypertension and diabetes, for example). Nevertheless to classify all as having degrees of "mental illness" does not deal with or explain how or when the border is crossed into a clinical problem -- be it psychosis/delusions or "clinical depression."

Unification Thought suggests the root causes of mental illness (with the key to "healing" / "cure" denoted in parentheses) to be:

- The Fall (the Blessing)
- Evil spiritual influence (*ansu* and liberations at Chung Pyung)
- "Fallen" dysfunctional families (family therapy)

In effect, the treatment of (cure for) mental illness is none other than the "path of restoration" that all of fallen humankind should walk, with "family therapy" an additional tool used in some form by most Unification counselors and therapists. Popular approaches are "intergenerational family trauma therapy" and "family constellation therapy."

Underlying these particular approaches is an assumption that even deceased family members have an enormous effect on our behavior by exerting a spiritual influence on family dynamics. But instead of (or in addition to) trying to "liberate" spirits by *ansu*, an attempt to relieve or mitigate spiritual influence is made by utilizing the above-mentioned therapies. This approach is also widely used by non-UC therapists (who may not acknowledge or understand the influence of the spiritual dynamic, at least not as understood by Unificationists).

While undoubtedly almost any family could benefit from therapy (especially anywhere communication is improved), efficacy of this specific type of family therapy -- at least alone -- in severe mental illness has not been properly evaluated, and it is generally not accepted as legitimate by mainstream psychiatry.

Additionally, it must be stated that it is an oversimplification to consider that mental illness can be solved simply by creating healthy families and may foster an attitude which places an unwarranted burden of guilt on the family members of the mentally ill. Herein is a regression to the thinking exemplified by the now debunked "refrigerator mother" theory of R. D. Laing (referring to mothers of schizophrenic patients). The mentally ill can be found in the most "ideal" of families.

Conventional psychiatry will admit that much remains puzzling and unsolved about mental illness, but generally acknowledges the following etiological factors, whereby any combination may play a role in any individual case:

- *Biological*: including a strong genetic component. The case for a strong biological component and genetic susceptibility in MI is pretty watertight, given what we have learned from advances in genetics and neurochemistry, as well as insights into the functioning of the brain in health and disease, gained from new technologies such as MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).
- *Environmental*: poor social support, substance abuse (especially cannabis), city living, background of migration.
- *Psychological*: trauma, neglect, (grossly) dysfunctional family background.

The Unification perspective puts emphasis on two further components:

- *Original sin*, which, according to *Divine Principle*, "is ingrained in our lineage and is the root of all sins." The exact mechanism by which original sin exerts its influence is disputed even within Unificationist circles (e.g., whether it is "in our DNA" or a collective inheritance of shame and guilt resulting in dysfunctional families), but the Blessing ceremony, a ritual whereby original sin is forgiven and dissolved, is generally accepted as the *sine qua non* for resolving this issue.
- *Spiritual influence*: It is essential to recognize that this is a core belief of the majority of Unificationists, and is reinforced by the words of SMM. It is not at all surprising that a large part of the work of "healing" in our movement has been centered on the work of the medium for Dae Mo Nim (ascended mother of True Mother) and the Chung Pyung providence which SMM endorsed. It is beyond the scope of this brief review to assess the validity or extent of spiritual influence. Western psychiatrists (with rare exceptions) do not acknowledge this dimension, and some Unificationists struggle with the

emphasis placed on it.



It is an ambitious undertaking to develop an understanding of mental illness based on our belief system (a "Principled perspective"), and perhaps at most, we can attempt to integrate the understanding brought by insights from SMM through his words and teachings -- DP, UT -- with the very best, evidence-based findings and understandings of scientific, mainstream psychiatry. SMM himself recognized in a 1987 speech to Unification medical professionals that Western medicine has an essential role to play; we ignore or reject Western medicine at our peril.

Thus, a perspective which integrates and satisfies all differing points of view might postulate a biological malfunction -- abnormalities in neurotransmitters and neuronal pathways -- as being the final common mechanism producing the clinical manifestation recognizable as MI in a

genetically susceptible individual.

Multiple varying factors -- environmental, psychological, and (at least for most Unificationists) "spiritual influence" -- contribute to this final common pathway.

Therapeutic intervention may be offered at various stages, the emphasis in any given situation depending on the clinical picture, the beliefs and wishes of the patient, and the knowledge and skills of the therapist.

Thus, medications address the biological dysfunction at the neurotransmitter level; individual counseling helps optimize personal behavior and lifestyle choices; family therapy addresses dysfunctional family dynamics; and spiritual liberations tackle negative influences at that level.

Conclusion

A study of Unificationist teachings (words of SMM, DP and UT) leads to some mixed conclusions.

On one hand, DP/UT offers an idealistic and hopeful view of humankind's potential, as well as insights into the dynamics of the spiritual world; on the other hand, this view sets a very high standard (individual "perfection," the first Blessing) which is difficult enough for an individual of "sound mind," but as discussed above, may be unattainable for (and place unhealthily unrealistic expectations on) one who is seriously mentally ill.

We also need to acknowledge that embedded in the very core of the attitude of Unificationism to MI is the belief that its origin and course is greatly influenced by an evil spiritual world, and that this understanding is reinforced by the views of the founder, SMM. How much this premise is accepted by individual Unificationists varies, and any attempts to confirm or refute spiritual influence are fraught with challenges. However, it is entirely reasonable to demand evidence that spiritual liberations in Chung Pyung bring about a level of clinical improvement equivalent to wisely used psycho-pharmaceuticals.

It should remain the domain of the individual patient, his family and therapist to decide how much of a role each aspect will play in an individual case, but imperative that any decision-making is based on informed choices; what is practiced and recommended must be effective and ideally supported by solid evidence. There must be mutual respect, understanding and cooperation among therapists employing differing approaches, and a great deal of work needs to be done to improve understanding between Unificationists (patients and providers) and conventional psychiatrists.

Western psychiatrists have a hard time with the notion of spiritual influences, but those who are "humane" and ethically-minded will at least respect the religious beliefs of their patients, no matter how eccentric they may find them. Unfortunately, the attitude towards Western psychiatry among Unificationists is often one of suspicion, prejudice and even a degree of ignorance. We need to acknowledge, for example, that the lives of many have been dramatically improved by the judicious use of medication.

The many counselors and therapists within the Unification movement working in the field of mental health must strive for professionalism and the highest standards, recognize their limitations, and be prepared to refer as necessary. Ideally, any UC therapist or counselor would have a solid scientifically-based education and understand the findings and implications of what modern medicine teaches us about

the workings of the brain, to which he/she can bring his/her particular aspect of therapy, delivered with a compassionate and parental heart.

Catriona Valenta obtained her medical degree from Glasgow University, Scotland, and completed post-graduate training in Family Practice before taking a career break as a full-time missionary in the United States. Shortly after joining her husband in Germany in 1985, she worked for the U.S. Army Europe as a Civilian Medical Provider until retiring from clinical practice in 2010. She maintains an active interest in the changing field of medicine, and while being very grounded in science, strives to be open to the more indefinable spiritual aspects of healing.