

Dr. Paul Meier and Dr. Frank Minirth: The Freudian Connection

(The following is excerpted from the book *Prophets of PsychoHeresy II* by Martin and Deidre Bobgan. The book, which is now out-of-print, critiques Dr. James Dobson's promotion of psychology and self-esteem. This section of *Prophets of PsychoHeresy II* is not included in the new edition retitled *James Dobson's Gospel of Self-Esteem & Psychology*.)

Dobson interviews Dr. Paul Meier, Dr. Frank Minirth, and Don Hawkins on the topic of their book *How to Beat Burnout*. Meier and Minirth are two psychiatrists who head the Minirth/Meier Clinic in Dallas, Texas. There are a number of additional Minirth/Meier clinics elsewhere as well. At the time of the interview Hawkins was a cohost of the Minirth/Meier radio broadcast. Together with Dr. Richard Flournoy, they wrote the book *How to Beat Burnout*.

At the beginning of the program Dobson mentions how honored he is to have them and says:

The profession of psychiatry and psychology has come in for criticism within the Christian movement. In recent years there's been a book that I won't even name because I don't want to give publicity to it, which I think has made some unfair statements. You really do put the inerrancy of the Scripture in first place. Above the psychiatric concepts it is really the beginning point.¹

Unfortunately Dobson doesn't even name the book and only alludes to one of what he regards as "unfair statements." It seems that if Dobson is truly interested in protecting the church, he would not only name the book, but deal specifically with what he regards as unfair statements. How can anyone examine the evidence under such conditions?

We understand how Dobson thinks that Meier and Minirth are giving first place to the Scriptures. Dobson could say the same thing about himself. But as we show earlier, Dobson may intend to put the inerrancy of Scripture in first place, but in practice he does not.

Meier and Minirth's Faith in Psychological Myths.

We shall not repeat here all that we have said in a prior critique of Meier and Minirth.² However, we do wish to note the following that was said on the Dobson interview:

[Five stages of grief.] Whenever we get angry we go through the five states of grief. . . .

[Cure rate.] We have patients by the hundreds that we treat for agoraphobia, panic attacks, anxiety disorders and they're a hundred percent curable. They all get over it.

[Birth order.] Most of the anxiety disorders that we treat . . . are the oldest boy or the oldest girl.

[Anger turned inward.] Burnout and depression are usually caused by emotions turned inward.

In a separate interview with Dobson, Meier says, “Ventilating it helps you get over that anger.” Meier also mentions the defense mechanisms of denial and projection.³ In a later interview between Meier and Dobson, discussing the topic “Coping with Anxiety,” Meier makes some of the same comments as those above. Dobson’s response to Meier is, “You’re doing an awful lot of good.”⁴

We deal with the above topics in *Prophets of PsychoHeresy I*, in which the above comments are evaluated negatively. In the conclusion to the section on Meier and Minirth we say: We have shown throughout this section that Meier and Minirth are heavily dependent upon Freud, that at times they inaccurately use Scripture to support their personal psychological opinions, that they unjustifiably claim research support for their conclusions, and that some of their major therapeutic claims are in clear contradiction to what the research reveals.

Unfortunately, in their attempts to biblicize psychology, Meier and Minirth have ended up psychologizing the Bible. And further, they have demeaned the Word of God by sometimes twisting the Bible to make it fit their preconceived, unproven psychoanalytic opinions. They have confused the issue even more by using the defunct medical model of human behavior and justifying their psychology with “all truth is God’s truth.” For those individuals who want fellowship with Freud with a biblical facade, Meier and Minirth would be a good choice.⁵

Psychological “Experts” Undermine Parents.

Dobson also interviews Meier in a separate interview titled “Christian Child Rearing.” The theme seems to be “parenting is difficult,” which we agree with. However, the underlying message is that Dobson and his guests on the program will help you parent. Meier and others give worldly advice, sometimes with a biblical facade and sometimes without. Dobson mentions a “Frustration of Parents” poll that he did in which the number one frustration was: “I don’t feel I know enough. I don’t feel confident enough to do this job of parenting. I’m afraid, unsure of myself.”

In response, Meier says:

You bet and it’s absolutely correct, too. How would you like to have your gall bladder removed by a surgeon that had never done surgery before? How would you like to get a pair of glasses from an ophthalmologist who had never recommended a pair of glasses before? Of course all of us would say I would never do that. Well, how would you like to be raised by parents who had never had children before. At least a third of the children in the world are. They’re raised by parents who had never raised children before and don’t know what they’re doing. And that’s why I’m so thankful for the books you have put out and the radio ministry that you’re having. . . . People are making a lot of mistakes in the name of love.

There’s a story about a little girl who loved her cat and she was a very nice little girl and she loved her cat a great deal. It was her pet cat. And she lived up north in Michigan. There was a snow storm and she looked out the window and saw her cat shivering out there in the snow. So she brought her cat in and put it in the oven and accidentally killed it. A lot of times we as parents love our children to death. We love them and kill them by making mistakes. I’m not saying that to lay a guilt trip on anybody. I’m the last one to lay a guilt trip on parents. And yet, at the same time, we need to look at the truth. We all as parents make mistakes.⁶

Meier says that he doesn’t want to lay a guilt trip on parents, but as a matter of fact he does. He insists that parents don’t know enough, don’t feel confident enough, are afraid and are unsure. Then he gives examples that have nothing to do with the subject when he compares child rearing with gall bladder removal and a prescription for eye glasses. This is a gross error continually made by Meier. He

is confused about the difference between the tangible and the intangible, the physical and the behavioral. He passes his confusion on to others and communicates that if we wouldn't have a gall bladder removed without a trained physician, then we wouldn't raise children without the psychological professional. Building upon this erroneous reasoning, the listener concludes that she needs Dobson, Meier and other such professionals to help her.

As a rule we would say that establishing fear in parents is not only counterproductive, but insupportable. Children are extremely resilient. Using extreme cases and intense emotional examples is harmful, not helpful. Furthermore, Meier seems to forget that most parents have had many years of training to become parents. Their entire childhood taught them how and how not to be parents. To preach that most parents are unequipped to raise children is to put parents into a helpless position and to rob them of any good sense they learned while growing up. Furthermore, parents who are Christians have biblical principles and standards to use in child rearing. Listening to Dobson and Meier makes one wonder how Christian parents managed throughout previous centuries without the twentieth-century psychological "experts."

Today, people trained in psychological counseling are considered experts in all matters of living, including child rearing. Thus Dobson and Meier should explain why, with all their so-called expertise, psychotherapists as a group are so (to use their term) "dysfunctional."⁷ Dr. Bernie Zilbergeld says:

If counseling does indeed produce great changes, the results should be easy to observe in therapists, for they have received more therapy than any other group of people and they have also had extensive training in methods of personal change, methods they could presumably use on themselves if they wished to.⁸

Unfortunately these are the very same people who propose to tell parents how to rear their children.

As we have shown elsewhere, many of Meier and Minirth's ideas on child rearing are Freudian. Dr. Louise Bates Ames, co-director of the famed Gesell Institute of Child Development, says:

I am afraid that the whole environmental school which has dominated child care in America in the last twenty-five years has made parents too anxious, too insecure and too guilty. . . . They created the attitude that the child's psyche is fragile, which it is not. Most of the damage we have seen in child rearing is the fault of the Freudian and neo-Freudians who have dominated the field. They have frightened parents and kept the truth from them. **In child care I would say that Freudianism has been the psychological crime of the century.**⁹ (Emphasis added.)

Martin Gross says, "This environmental system is based on the psychodynamic theory in which the unknowing parent forces the child to repress its unconscious drives."¹⁰ Gross concludes, "*Modern research indicates that the skeptics have been right all along: that environmental or Freudian theory is false.*"¹¹ (Emphasis his.) Gross also says:

In the raising of children the parent is generally the most knowledgeable guide. This reassuring philosophy is repeated by no less an expert than Dr. Spock himself. "The more people have studied different methods of bringing up children the more they have come to the conclusion that what good mothers and fathers instinctively feel like doing for their babies is usually best after all."¹²

Gross further declares:

The modern sin of parenting has not been one of psychological ignorance. It has been quite the opposite. By absorbing the half-truths, shibboleths and outright fallacies of the

Psychological Society, the parents of the last thirty-five years have unfortunately put into massive practice an idea whose time should not have come.¹³ (Emphasis added.)

A writer to the editor in *Science News* says:

Our culture is obsessed with redefining all natural developmental processes, making them look like a laundry list of pathologies. Normal childhood fears have become phobias, temper outbursts are now oppositional disorders, worry is overanxious disorder and wanting one's mama around is separation anxiety.

Next come the statistical horror stories, followed by political sanction of more "health" care and treatment facilities.¹⁴

Misuse of Scripture.

In discussing an 8, 9 or 10-year-old pathological liar, Meier says:

I would recommend you get him in for some counseling. Proverbs says in a multitude of counselors there is safety. A lot of people are embarrassed to get counseling. You don't need to be embarrassed to get counseling.¹⁵

Here is an instance of misuse of Scripture. Proverbs is **not** referring to psychological counseling. In fact, if psychological counseling were available at the time, the Israelites would have surely been warned against it as they were warned against other practices of the nations around them.

Notice how Proverbs is sandwiched between the two sentences recommending counseling (meaning psychological counseling). And since Dobson does not protest, he must agree with Meier's obvious interpretation and application. Had we been interviewing Meier we would have pointed out what he did and made it clear that we disagree with what he recommends.

Psychological Faith Systems.

In another Focus on the Family interview, advertising *Worry Free Living* by Meier, Miniirth, and Hawkins, Meier speaks of anxiety and defense mechanisms as follows:

That tension between the Holy Spirit pushing the truth up and our depravity pushing the truth back down is what I call anxiety. . . .

The function of a defense mechanism is to deceive ourselves so that we won't ever grow Christ-like, so we'll keep lying to ourselves about our depraved thoughts, feelings and motives. It's the cause of anxiety.¹⁶

Absolutely no psychological or psychiatric book would contain such statements. Meier mixes the biblical and the psychological to make the psychological seem acceptable. However, instead of strengthening or illuminating Scripture, he strengthens the grip of psychology and distorts the meaning of Scripture.

To support his amalgamation, Meier says:

I was teaching a course at Dallas Seminary on defense mechanisms and I taught them the forty that we know of from psychiatry research and a student for his thesis went through the Scriptures and gave examples of all 40 of them in the Scriptures.¹⁷

That's easy to believe because it's possible to find examples from Scripture to support any psychological system one is wed to---especially if you are willing to bend Scripture to fit the system.

Just because psychological systems and personality theories **seem** to explain the person and his behavior, that does not mean that the explanations are accurate. When we consider that there are numerous competing systems, each of which pretends to explain personhood, something must be amiss.

World-renowned scholar and philosopher of science Sir Karl Popper examined these psychological theories. He says:

These theories appeared to be able to explain practically everything that happened within the fields to which they referred. The study of any of them seemed to have the effect of an intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of verifications of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it.¹⁸ (Emphasis his.)

At first glance this looks like promising evidence. However, Popper insists that constant confirmations and seeming ability to explain everything do not indicate scientific validity. What looks like a strength is actually a weakness. He says, "It is easy to obtain confirmations or *verifications*, for nearly every theory—if we look for confirmations. . . . Confirming evidence should not *count except when it is the result of a genuine test of the theory.*"¹⁹ (Emphasis his.)

The theories of counseling psychology and their underlying psychologies are not factual or scientific. While they may include some factual observations they are basically philosophical systems which require faith. Thus when Dobson, Meier and others present their own personal combinations of psychological opinions and gimmicks, they are presenting a faith system. However, because their readers and listeners think those people are presenting scientific fact confirmed by the Bible, they are drawn unwittingly into another faith system. But it is not the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Endnotes

1. James Dobson, Paul Meier, Frank Minirth, and Don Hawkins, "How to Beat Burnout." Focus on the Family Radio Broadcast, CS 315.
2. Martin and Deidre Bobgan. *Prophets of PsychoHeresy I*. Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publishers, 1987.
3. Paul Meier interview, "Christian Child Rearing," Focus on the Family Radio Broadcast, CS 145.
4. James Dobson and Paul Meier, "Coping with Anxiety," Focus on the Family Radio Broadcast, CS 487.
5. Bobgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-334.
6. Meier, "Christian Child Rearing," *op. cit.*
7. Bernie Zilbergeld. *The Shrinking of America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983, pp. 163-165.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
9. Louise Bates Ames, quoted by Martin Gross. *The Psychological Society*. New York: Random House, 1978, p. 247.
10. Gross, *ibid.*, p. 250.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Eugene J. Webb, Letter. *Science News*, Vol. 135, No. 5, 4 February 1989, p. 67.
15. Meier, "Christian Child Rearing," *op. cit.*
16. Meier, "Coping with Anxiety," *op. cit.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Karl Popper, "Scientific Theory and Falsifiability." *Perspectives in Philosophy*. Robert N. Beck, ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1975, p. 343.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345.

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