**Final Paper**

Hannah Borstad

School of Social Work, Southern Adventist University

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Dr. Corneliu Rusu

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**Christian Nationalism**

 My faith is the guiding force of my life. I appreciate that I live in a time and place where I can openly express my faith without fear of governmental intervention. I do not wish to live in a country governed by a religious leader. I think that many people forget that faith is personal and interpreted differently by everyone. Living under a Christian government in no way guarantees the improvement of society. It historically leads to systematic oppression even of people who claim Christianity. Therefore, I find Christian Nationalism to be a threat to my own expression of faith. I do not wish to be told by governing authorities how to worship my God. I also do not want the teachings of Christ, which are about the heart more than the behavior, to be forced upon all people by an overreaching governmental leader. Yes, I would love for everyone to come to saving faith but mandating adherence to Christian teachings is not the answer.

**Gender**

 Gender is a hot-button issue in our society. In my practicum/ job, I work with people from various gender expressions. As social workers, we must provide for our clients regardless of their personal beliefs or affiliations. Although I do not identify as an ally, I respect my coworkers and clients affiliated with LGBTQIA+ community. For example, I helped decorate for our pride celebration and helped my clients find resources that respect their identity. I take a genuine interest in my client’s lives and listen to their struggles with living out their gender expression in public. I had to help one client find a job that was not client-facing due to his fear of public criticism. Regardless of my religious convictions, I care about each person and seek to serve them just as I would any other client. My faith compels me to care for and show kindness to all people, regardless of their gender identity.

**Marriage**

 I enjoyed the discussion of marriage this semester. Marriage can be a contentious topic and is interpreted in countless ways. As a Christian, I view marriage as a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman for life. For my clients, marriage is not something that is seen as necessary. I have found it interesting that people value parenthood as a rite of passage into adulthood, but not marriage. They do not consider marriage to be an essential cultural phenomenon or of value. Relationships come and go quickly without concerns about the future. When I asked clients about marriage, they often responded that they had not considered getting married or do not want to be limited to one person sexually. This interesting cultural shift seems to impact the children of these short-term relationships negatively. My clients were all from single-parent households that relied on government assistance for survival. Thus, when my clients needed support or a safe place to live, their custodial parents did not have the resources to help them. They had to turn to programs such as ours for a place to live and a supportive community. I see this pattern continuing with my clients who are parents.

**Sexuality, Contraception, & Abortion**

 Much like my discussion of marriage, sexuality seems to be of little concern for my clients. I speak with each of my clients about contraception and safe sex practices. I have had countless conversations with clients and handed out condoms, but I have still had several clients get pregnant over the year I have worked with them. I expected them to be scared about the pregnancies due to being homeless, unemployed, and disconnected from the father of the child. To my surprise, they were all very excited about their pregnancies and had even planned them. I tried not to show my surprise. I tried to be encouraging and supportive. I connected them with resources and checked in throughout their pregnancies. When asked why they were excited, they usually answered that the baby gave them a purpose in life or would allow them to get more welfare benefits. None of them considered abortion or had a plan for birth prevention in the future. This experience has changed my perspective in many ways toward unplanned pregnancies. I expected to do more consoling for women who found themselves to be pregnant. Instead, I have spent more time trying to help them understand that parenting is difficult, and they need to prepare for the future. After many of my clients had their babies, I better understand their reactions. They had extensive resources after birth, such as more SNAP benefits, Section-8 housing, TANF, and TennCare. Their needs were met by government assistance, and they received hefty refund checks at the end of the year. I am happy they are provided for, but I fear for the children who are brought into the world to provide for their parents. I hate to see young women feeling like they need to have babies to have their basic needs met. I think sex has become rewarded in a way that puts children at risk and perpetuates a cycle of single parenthood and poverty.

**Science and Religion on Healing Mental Health**

 I enjoyed exploring this topic further this semester. My husband and I have discussed this topic extensively over the last year. We have many friends who are licensed counselors and believers. I have enjoyed discussing the role of religion in mental health with them. There are so many Biblical counseling programs that are offered by seminaries, but they seem to neglect the scientific side of mental health. Science and faith do not have to ignore one another, but I believe people are given a disservice when only religion is utilized for mental health healing. God gave us minds to explore and discover more about our bodies and world. We should use the discoveries of science to promote healing. As a believer, my faith is the basis of my desire to help others heal. Therefore, any therapeutic services provided to others will be inevitably tied to my faith. Though services may follow scientific methods, I am influenced by my culture and background just as the client is. We have to learn to integrate our faith into practice in ways that promote healing and respect the background of our clients.