

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Christian Brethren Review* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_christian-brethren-review.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_christian-brethren-review.php)

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS REVIEW

**THE CARING CHURCH**

Editor: Harold H. Rowdon

---

The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship  
Number 35: July 1985

*ISSN: 0263-466X*

*Copyright © 1985 The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*

*No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*

**OBTAINABLE FROM:**

*The Paternoster Press Ltd,  
3 Mount Radford Crescent,  
Exeter, U.K.  
EX2 4JW*

*Typeset by Photoprint, 9-11 Alexandra Lane, Torquay  
and printed in Great Britain for  
The Christian Brethren Research Fellowship  
by A. Wheaton & Co. Ltd., Exeter, Devon.*

# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
General introduction	<i>Gilbert W. Kirby</i> 5
An overview	<i>Joy R. Guy</i> 11
Organizing a caring church	<i>Roger Forster and Ray Mayhew</i> 25
Running a Christian advice centre	<i>Fran Beckett</i> 39
Conducting a counselling interview	<i>Campbell Bell</i> 45
Covenant and counselling: some counselling implications of a covenant theology	<i>David Atkinson</i> 55
Book reviews	<i>Gwen Hicks,</i> 75 <i>Harold H. Rowdon,</i> 75 <i>Jim Harris,</i> 78 <i>Rosemary Jennings</i> 80
PARTNERSHIP	81

## PARTNERSHIP

Partnership is an initiative of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship which serves Brethren churches (and others which may wish to avail themselves of its services). In addition to publications, it arranges seminars in London and the provinces, conducts training courses, organizes surveys, holds conferences for students, operates a study/action group on world mission, collects information on resources, and liaises with other churches in Britain and with similar churches abroad.

### Executive Committee

The membership of the executive committee is:

John W. Baigent	G. John Polkinghorne
Graham D. Brown	Nigel Rankine
John Boyes	Harold H. Rowdon (Vice-Chairman)
F. Roy Coad	Philip H. Stunt
Jonathan Lamb	Neil W. Summerton
A. McIlhinney	James W. Tumbridge
Paul W. Marsh	Gerald T. West (Chairman)
Brian R. Mills	

### Trustees

The trustees of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship are:

F. Roy Coad	Nigel Rankine
Joy R. Guy	Harold H. Rowdon
Paul W. Marsh	Philip H. Stunt
Brian R. Mills	James W. Tumbridge

### Officers

<i>Executive Director:</i>	Dr. John Boyes 13 The Meads Northchurch BERKHAMSTED Herts HP4 3QX Tel: 04427 2654
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Mr. James W. Tumbridge 23 Percy Road Winchmore Hill LONDON N21 2JA
<i>General Editor:</i>	Dr. Harold H. Rowdon London Bible College Green Lane Northwood MIDDLESEX HA6 2UW

*Correspondence* on matters relating to the work of the C.B.R.F. should be sent to the Executive Director.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Gilbert Kirby

*Writing from a wealth of pastoral experience, Gilbert stresses the need for a church to be a caring community in which the varied needs of its members are met by concerted action. The qualities needed by one who is helping another, the nature of what is involved, the resources available and many of the practicalities in terms of technique and discernment are touched upon in an introductory way.*

### **The church as a caring community**

'The Church must be above all a caring community. It must accept people as Christ Himself accepts them, which is just as they happen to be' (Ruth Fowke in *Coping with Crises*).

In the UK and in some other countries particularly since the second world war, there has emerged a welfare system which embraces the needs of the young, the old, the sick, the mentally and physically handicapped and the under-privileged. The more idealistic see in this a demonstration of how Christian principles may be applied to the life of a community. Others see subtle dangers in a society where everything is done for people from the cradle to the grave.

There are, of course, many flaws in the system. Officials are often seen as rather remote and self-important figures. There are people who do not fit into any of the established categories of help. The system makes it relatively easy for scroungers and those who are work-shy.

In this comparatively new situation there has come into being a whole army of social and welfare workers, working within a new set of disciplines and often using new jargon. This development obviously affects the thinking of Christian people. The professionals have taken over many of the tasks in society formerly undertaken by the church. Of course, the church could rightly lay claim to having pioneered many aspects of the modern welfare state. The fact remains, however, that more and more matters which were once left to voluntary societies are now undertaken by the state. Happily, in many cases, there is good co-operation between statutory and voluntary bodies. Many Christian people are discovering their true Christian vocation in employment, after the necessary training, within the state system and make up in

terms of Christian love for what they may lack in professional expertise.

Clearly, duplication is to be avoided, but in many communities there is great need for certain facilities which it is within the power of the local church to provide: the church must let it be known that it is *there to help* and to concern itself for all age groups and for all sections in the local community. This may be done in a variety of ways:

### *Caring for the young*

The nursery school or playgroup organized by the local church may be an expression of our care for children, and at the same time a means whereby contact is established with local families — ‘mums and toddlers’ groups serve this function too. The Sunday school, together with holiday Bible clubs, is a further activity organized in the interests of children, and youth organizations, whether uniformed or otherwise, may also have their part to play, as will coffee bars and youth clubs.

### *Caring for the elderly*

The day centre for senior citizens may meet a local need and, at the same time, give an opportunity for evangelistic outreach. Occasional outings and other social activities for senior citizens are further means of expressing care.

### *Caring for people in general*

The church should be aware of local facilities provided either by the state or by voluntary organizations, and should seek to supplement these, and also to close any gaps that may exist in the services provided. In some areas there is a call for information services, a help service for the housebound, the provision of cars for those visiting hospitals, etc.; wives’ groups and men’s contact clubs will be appropriate in many situations.

Churches, in becoming involved in various forms of social services, are able to provide an auxiliary to the statutory services. In future, the church’s involvement with social work will be manifested increasingly through the personal involvement of its members through local institutions in their own neighbourhoods.

## **Caring people**

We must never forget that the church is made up of individual persons

and if it is to be a caring church, then its members must be caring people. In these days, we speak a great deal about *pastoral counselling*. This is just another way of referring to our caring concern. Let us look briefly at the nature of this ministry.

### *The counsellor's qualifications*

To whom do men and women turn in their need?

1. To someone they know and like.
2. To someone they respect and trust and who has credibility.
3. To someone who is interested in them as people.
4. To someone whom they feel is competent and experienced and who can respect confidences.
5. To someone who has clear insight into human nature, who is 'fully there'.
6. To someone who is without partiality, capable of objectivity and truly honest.
7. To someone who has time for them and is available to them.
8. To someone who is not easily shocked.
9. To someone who, whilst being first and foremost a man or woman of God, is also a man or woman who is 'worldly wise'.
10. To someone who clearly knows God, has a living faith and is prepared to rely upon the Holy Spirit.

If you want to help others you must be able to convey concern without control, interest without pressure, warmth without manipulation: as Psalm 37:30-31 (Living Bible) says, 'The godly man is a good counsellor because he is just and fair and knows right from wrong'.

### *The nature of pastoral counselling*

Pastoral counselling involves first and foremost an *understanding of people*. It represents a relationship in which one person endeavours to help another to understand and solve his difficulties of adjustment to society. The pastoral counsellor seeks to break through everything superficial and symptomatic in order to reach the real need. His responsibility is that of probing, recognizing and understanding, and he must take into account the background from which the person comes.

Pastoral counselling implies caring for human beings as persons in all the varied aspects of their nature, and endeavouring to help them to become integrated and mature persons. 'Broadly speaking, the special aim of pastoral counselling may be stated as the attempt to help people



to help themselves through the process of gaining understanding of their own inner conflicts' (Seward Hilter, *Pastoral Counselling*). The counsellor should be able to feel with the one being counselled, to *sense* where he is psychologically. As W. L. Carrington has pointed out:

The aim of pastoral counselling . . . is not to give advice nor is it to provide ready-made solutions to various personal problems . . . it is to create a *personal relationship* of such quality that the counsellee will feel able progressively to unburden his pent-up emotions, and let go his deeply buried psychic defences. In this way alone will most people gain the necessary insight, and sufficient awareness and release of their creative abilities. Then, they are in a position to look at their problems, and themselves, more objectively, and in further discussion with the counsellor to work out their future attitudes and actions. The experience of such help will generally enable such people to grow to greater maturity and social responsibility.

The Christian counsellor is concerned not only with man's relationship with his fellows, but even more with his relationship with God. He is a 'therapist of souls'. His greatest needs are empathy, compassion, care and love.

### *Equipment for the task*

The first task of a would-be counsellor is to learn to know what the world looks like through spectacles other than his own. He needs to develop a sensitive awareness of people as such. The counsellor has to create an environment in which the person concerned will feel comfortable enough to give expression to the feelings, problems and conflicts which he has come to talk about:

It is really impossible to exaggerate the tremendous disadvantage under which the preacher, educationalist or social reformer labours when he lacks a knowledge of human nature — its dynamic tendencies, its controlling sentiments, its conscience and its reason (J. C. McKenzie, *Souls in the Making*).

We are wise to use the insights of psychology into the nature and personality of man to 'know what is in man' (John 2:25) and to understand his motives, conduct, tensions and self ideals. Psychology will not replace vital Christianity in pastoral ministration, but it can inform and guide the search for a deeper understanding of the life of a man. 'The pastoral function,' writes W. L. Carrington in *Psychology, Religion and Human Need* (p.40), 'may be seen as the never-ending attempt to bring all the available resources of knowledge and inspiration to the fullest service of people, to help them to lay hold of the Christian gift of

abundant life from the beginning or at any period of life, or to recover it when they have lost it.'

The experienced counsellor will always have in mind a need to look for problem-relating insight whereby a person comes to understand himself more fully, and for a solution in which advice is given as to how the situation may be met in a more constructive and helpful manner.

The counsellor needs to respect the person being counselled, and to accept him as a person. Furthermore, he needs to be aware of his own attitudes and feelings, biases and prejudices. He needs to convey warmth to the person being counselled so that he may speak freely. A comfortable and relaxed atmosphere is essential. The person to be counselled should be encouraged to state his purpose in coming for counselling, and to share what is uppermost in his mind. The counsellor in turn must be a good listener, and give to the one being counselled his undivided interest and attention. Every reaction and gesture should convey both interest and sympathy — non-verbal communication. To ask a person to reveal confidences before his own confidence is won is to court defeat. It is essential to be careful about the manner and tone of voice in which questions are asked. It is the counsellor's task to help the person to bring into the open those thoughts, attitudes and feelings which are emotionally charged, and which centre around the problem and conflicts he has come to discuss.

Counselling is time-consuming — an interview would normally last not less than one hour, and might go on for longer. Usually one interview is insufficient and further appointments have to be made.

An occupational hazard of the counsellor lies in the fact that in counselling, the projection of strong feelings of either love or hate stemming from unresolved conflicts in a person's earlier relationship with parents is not uncommon and can be embarrassing.

### *Method and technique in counselling*

The first stage involves the unburdening of the mind whereby the person is encouraged to pour out, unreservedly, his fears and worries and tensions. The counsellor is simply a creative listener, seeking to accept and understand the feelings of the one being counselled without passing judgement.

The next stage aims at *clarification* whereby the one being counselled, by means of creative questioning, begins to recognize his own reactions, feelings and needs.

The third stage is reached when the counsellor is able to place the problem, by now isolated and identified, in a *Christian perspective*. The

one in need is brought by questioning and careful prompting to see for himself the implications of Christian truth for his or her own problem.

When a pastoral counsellor directs the attention of the one being counselled to spiritual things he is passing from pastoral counselling to pastoral *care*, and at this stage much wisdom is required. Personal testimony on the part of the counsellor can be of great help here. In the ultimate, the successful pastoral counsellor is the person whose attitude to life and to other people, as well as his own walk with God, reveals the tremendous depth of his understanding.

*Some practical points to watch*

1. Ensure against interruption — be ready to give undivided attention.
2. Never minimize a problem however trivial it may seem to you.
3. Do not give counsel until you are sure you understand the problem.
4. Be well informed and be knowledgeable regarding sources of helpful information and assistance.
5. Discern between the genuine and those who merely enjoy being counselled.
6. Be discreet in all you say — and especially so with the opposite sex.
7. Have suitable literature available either to give or lend.

As Christians, walking in the steps of the master, we shall soon discover that caring is costly, but at the same time, it is rewarding. We must always remember that, like Christ, our concern must be for the *whole* man — body, soul and spirit. Our caring is a measure of our credibility. The poor, the sick, the outcast, the downtrodden were objects of Christ's compassion. Jesus offered proof of his messiahship by his ministry to the concrete needs of the suffering and the afflicted (Matthew 11:5). The parable of the good samaritan demonstrates that our responsibility for our neighbours extends to anyone in need and leaps over the barriers of race and class at personal cost of time, money and danger. Faith without works is dead. The quality of our love for God is shown in our practical love for our fellow men and women (Matthew 25:34-46).

## AN OVERVIEW

Joy Guy

*Joy examines the church as a caring community against the background of the need to encourage society as a whole to be more caring.*

*The biblical view of man at each stage of his development is outlined. Ways in which the individual gifts of church members can be utilized are explored. The corporate influence the church can have in local, national and international contexts is examined. And the example it can provide as a society of redeemed people, without barriers of race, sex or class, is set forth as 'the greatest testimony to Christ's continued presence in the world'.*

The need for a caring Christian community demonstrating Christ's new society has never been greater than at present. It has been apparent for some time that the welfare state is creaking at the seams, that the expectations it raised were never matched by resources, and indeed were incapable of fulfilment in any case. In a reaction against the stigma of the poor house and the receipt of public assistance, the doctrine of universal provision seemed to offer a new chance of separating poverty and illness from loss of human dignity, and improved health and education—the hope of a more equal society. Unfortunately, the harsh questions about priorities and boundaries were never properly debated or defined.

A time of economic cutback always heralds a discussion of such topics, and recent years have been no exception. However, priorities in health and welfare are notoriously difficult to determine, and it is rarely that the most vulnerable and inarticulate are adequately protected. Political considerations, vested interests and a genuine concern for the damage sometimes caused by the unintended outcomes of intervention, often combine to undermine logical decision-making, and a tendency to inertia tempers change.

Neither the welfare state nor the occupational groups employed in it can match demand, or bear the total responsibility for caring. Emphasis is once again being put on voluntary help and community care. On reflection, few of the voluntary organizations would wish to go back to the patchy provision, overlap and confusion which in the last century led to the formation of the Charity Organization Society, and it is clear that society as a whole does not want to see an erosion of welfare benefits and a deterioration in standards of care.

## Community care

Community care is a panacea proposed every decade or so, and adopted or rejected mainly on ideological and political grounds; implementation is always patchy rather than based on a well thought-out and integrated strategy. For example, institutions founded as a necessary and enlightened provision for the ill and indigent, tend to become static and inward looking, and their administrations complacent or resentful, as society loses interest when problems are removed from sight. In due course, therefore, institutions may become a symbol of repressiveness and reaction, and institutionalization diagnosed as a sickness in its own right. The call goes up to liberate the inmates, and return them to the community. Sadly, warnings that this can only be successful if adequate domiciliary and other services are provided, and that there will always be a function for highly skilled residential care go unheeded; returning people to the community too often means returning them to unsupported and hard-pressed relatives, or to no care at all, thereby increasing the risk of breakdown. It can also lead to the indiscriminate closure of residential institutions as community and voluntary efforts are seen as cheap alternatives to them. The result is that resources are not committed to provide the services needed to help mentally and physically handicapped children and adults, and deprived families, to live as normal a life as possible, or to give young people opportunities and relationships which for some of them might prevent a delinquent career. In many instances, the caring community is a myth, as many of the old networks of extended families and small close knit groups have been eroded, as job mobility and unemployment led to anonymity, isolation and homelessness, and in many places such a community never existed at all.

The problem is very rarely financial, though frequently perceived to be such. Successive governments fail to curb public expenditure in real terms, whatever their philosophy and public stance, as savings and cuts in some areas are offset by increased expenditure in others. Our society prefers to see people fed rather than starving, and cared for rather than neglected. To rely on the goodness of human nature, however, is a very dangerous procedure. When under personal threat of falling standards of living or of cuts in education and medical provision, or loss of work, concern for our neighbours all too easily gives way to taking care of ourselves, and out of sight can be out of mind for 'comfortable Britain'. Human sympathies and imagination are imperfect at best. Public interest is aroused by exciting and prestigious advances in medical science, or the emotive issues in social welfare, and tends to ignore chronic and more intractable problems.

It should come as no surprise to Christians that there are no utopian answers, nor should the church be over-influenced by prevailing attitudes of optimism or pessimism, or current fashions in the sphere of welfare. The biblical commands of concern for righteousness, mutual care and compassion and the ordered society that should flow from these stand for all time, and are a responsibility placed on state, community and individual. The church has a duty to support the social institutions needed to create as just a society as possible, and to challenge policies which threaten this. It also has its own distinctive contribution to make.

### **The church's contribution**

The church's major contribution towards the development of a caring society, it seems to me, lies in the following areas: (1) providing a view of man and society based on biblical teaching (2) the use of the individual gifts of members, enhanced by their identification, development and refinement by the whole fellowship (3) the corporate influence it can have on local, national and international needs (4) its example as a society of redeemed people, without barriers of race, sex or class. This is not to ignore its central functions of worship and witness, without which the others will not, nor cannot be, effective — indeed, they are part and parcel of the same thing.

#### *A biblical view of man in society and its implications*

The Bible sees man as a unity of which body, emotions and spirit are a part. He is a created being, dependent on God, and made for a responsible relationship with God, and with his fellow men. Man's dependence on God is not a temporary thing, for this life only, but will continue through eternity. The Bible indicates that human groupings will also continue.

Through the fall, the relationship with God has been lost, man's capacity to live harmoniously with his fellows and the rest of creation has been flawed and social institutions now carry the seeds of corruption. But God still holds man accountable for his stewardship of the natural creation, for personal relationships and for seeking righteousness and justice in the world. Through the redemption and the re-establishment of a relationship with him, he gives the power to fulfil that trust, only partially now, but fully in the future.

The Bible never divorces doctrine from behaviour: Paul, for example, moves in and out of proclamation of the gospel, teaching about the second coming, commenting on conduct in relation to the state, race,

sex, money, and the single life, dealing with family and work roles and obligations, the state and appropriate attitudes and behaviour at different stages in life. Our choice of topics for exposition is usually more selective! The rich and complex account of human life in the Bible corresponds to experience, but it also challenges common, fallen ways of thinking and behaving. The body is not to be despised or abused, neither is it a cause for embarrassment, but is to be cherished and disciplined. Emotions are to be used positively, not ignored or unbridled. The Bible shows social institutions both acting well and facilitating growth, and also malfunctioning and causing damage.

Since man is created, it should come as no surprise that he shares many things in common with the rest of creation, including some mental processes as well as physical attributes. To be human is to be finite, and man's limitations and dependency are part of the creation with which God was well pleased and which in Christ, he entered. Fallenness and finiteness sometimes get confused.

Given this perspective, it is reasonable to regard research in the physical and social sciences as legitimate, remembering that they are about processes rather than purposes. The very complexity and, at times, the almost contradictory nature of their findings only makes sense when man is seen in relation to his creator and the doctrine of the fall is recalled. Much of the research and observation in the social sciences has been in the area of relationships, and acknowledging that these are damaged because of the broken relationship with God can liberate Christians to see where breakdown is most likely to occur, and with the Spirit's help to try to prevent or repair it. It was inadequate theology that led to the tendency to idealize some relationships — as between marriage partnerships and family members — and to neglect others, or regard them with suspicion. Sadly this meant that the church was ill-prepared when it could no longer deny that Christian marriages break down, that Christian parents fail to control or care for their children, that their children rebel, and that infidelity and promiscuity are not unknown among church members. The high breakdown rate among the church's leaders and the prevalence of mental illness among its members (when these were publicized) caused shame and shock. Slowly and painfully, it has been recognized that attention must also be given to emotions, intellect, bodily functioning and environment, as well as man's spiritual nature; a spiritual depression may result from ills of body and mind and the various reactions to them, and to past and present hurts, as well as from specific sins.

#### Relationships in early years<sup>1</sup>

It has been established beyond doubt that the quality of relationships in

early life is crucial for later development, and deprivation of meaningful relationships can lead to profound emotional damage. Indeed the Bible itself attaches great importance to arrangements for child birth and child rearing. A basic attitude to the world of trust or mistrust may well be generated by the degree of security experienced by the baby with a mother or her substitute(s). To place total responsibility for a young child's welfare on the mother, however, is to denigrate the role of the father, and of others. Only as she herself feels supported and cared for will the mother be able to communicate feelings of well-being to her baby and, very early on, the father's contribution in relating directly to the child will be important and become so to an increasingly large degree. The Bible stresses the contribution and responsibility of both parents, and this has implications for the wider church community in the support it gives them and the things it expects from them.

The church, too, should be a place where supplementary relationships can be provided, especially for one parent families or parents lacking help from their own families: older and single people share this responsibility, and while this is frequently acknowledged in dedication services, it is often forgotten afterwards. Families, as we know, are under great pressure, and special help is needed for Christian parents to find the right way for their's to function — we must realize that neither traditional roles, or their modern alternatives are necessarily the best ones for Christian parents to unthinkingly adopt.

Brothers and sisters and others in the peer groups are very significant figures for children. Early on, and usually within the family, they learn that feelings of love and hate are felt towards the same persons, and this is painful. They have to learn how to handle jealousy, anger, possessiveness, rejection, feelings of shame and hurt, how to own up to misdeeds, accept punishment, acquire a sense of what is fair and cope with the fact that life itself is often very unfair indeed. These things live on in adult memories, and shape later behaviour. How far do we take account of these things in our Sunday schools, and what kind of a model do we offer in our church life?

### Adolescence

It is well known that adolescence is an important time for establishing both the sense of being a person and sexual identity. It is also a notoriously difficult time for parents, especially since part of the process involves separating out from them. Other adults can be particularly helpful at this time and a prayerful — but not inquisitive or censorious — community, a great support. Much help can be given to young people in discussing sex, homosexuality, preparation for marriage or a single life; while some may choose to discuss these things with their parents,



others may find it easier with someone who is not so close to them. The myth still persists in some quarters that Christians will have direct and unmistakable guidance about their marriage partner which will automatically ensure happiness, and that singleness is an embarrassing misfortune, but thankfully it is fading. There are other, equally misleading, myths about the superior spiritual status of the single life, which can reinforce a tendency to selfishness and an unwillingness to face commitment.

In a time of high unemployment, the need to establish a sense of being a worthwhile person, which is not dependent on the role identity given by paid work and the potential capacity for high remuneration, is even more apparent than at other times. This, too, is an area in which the church has a positive duty to teach, to care, and to counsel.

### Loss of relationships

Since relationships are so important, so too are their loss, especially in the first few years of life. The church is in a unique position to offer comfort and practical help to those who have lost people close to them by divorce, illness, or whatever reason, and to be mindful of the scars and particular difficulties of those who have been bereaved in childhood, or have had to deal with the stresses of the divorce, and perhaps remarriage, of their parents involving a complex pattern of relationships.

Often practical help is needed, as well as an opportunity to talk about the one who has gone, to sort out ambivalent feelings of guilt and anger and hurt which are harder to cope with than assured mutual affection — facilitating the process of grieving which is so necessary, but seems so hard to tolerate. Help to those suffering bereavement, whether by death or separation, may involve advice on selling and buying property, negotiating grants and insurance benefits, and perhaps explaining to children what is going on, and including them in it. It needs to be remembered that close relationships outside marriage cause great hurt when they are terminated, and the casualties need no less understanding and support. The reaction of the world is to throw broken relationships away; a Christian response is to acknowledge our sin, seek forgiveness, commit to God the things that cannot be undone, and seek his help to build again. Here is a golden opportunity for offering a ministry which meets these needs, not only to church members but to others as well.

It is only comparatively recently that psychologists have begun to pay attention to the possibility of repairing early broken or damaged relationships in later life. Church members have always had the opportunity of offering much to each other, counting on the healing power of the love of God. It is not always easy to share one's vulnerability, even in

our fellowships, as trust takes time to build, but in the church, if anywhere, such sharing should be safe. The church can and should provide an opportunity to try out new roles and develop different characteristics rather than merely taking over the stereotypes and labels based on secular thinking or assessments based on self perception or that of school, colleagues or family. The New Testament example is of a group never doubting the possibility of forgiveness, growth, change, and restoration, which on that basis is exhorting, comforting, encouraging, confronting, and always loving.

### Middle life

The middle years bring their own joys and problems in relationships, needing endurance, patience, self control, wisdom in assessing oneself and others, and the grace of continuance in love. There may be temptations to discontent if expectations have not been fulfilled, and to complacency, ambition or neglect if they have; there are liable to be temptations, too, in the exercise of power over others or to bitterness at powerlessness. The lure of conformity to the world's standards is as strong as ever, and yet perception of this can be dulled. As children grow to adulthood and make their own choices, parents evaluate their performance in their parental role, reassess their attitudes to their own parents and take stock anew of the marriage partnership. Single people assess their compensations or lack of them and the way in which friendships and family relationships have been satisfying or lacking. Sometimes responsibilities for aging parents come when other responsibilities are at their height, early rivalries reappear and sudden illness, death or redundancy precipitate unexpected crises and put relationships under strain. For the Christian, whatever the experience of pleasure or of pain, it can, through the love of God, be turned to good, but the mutual love and support each gives to the other will often be crucial in determining the outcome. Achievement and success need to be differently defined in the church than they are in society at large — at no stage in life is it easy to ask for help — least of all perhaps in its prime.

### Old age

Elderly people are not highly regarded in the western world, and supporting them as their proportion of the population increases is likely to be thought of as a growing problem. The tendency for younger people to discount the life experiences and the variety and richness of individual differences in older people clashes head-on with the needs of the elderly to retain these differences and to continue to be allowed to grow, to change, and to contribute. Relationships between the old and the very young can be most precious, particularly where they can give each other

mutual support. The time and attention older people can devote to listening is specially valuable to those with whom other people are often impatient: older people deserve honour — not only for what they have done, but for what they are and what they continue to learn and to face towards the end of life. The temptation to hold on to acknowledged leadership and power in the church when it has been given up elsewhere may be strong, but equally the temptation to lay responsibilities down may prevail. The whole fellowship needs to be involved in determining the right and most useful contribution of older people, recognizing their released potential, as well as their limitations, and reassessments are needed as years increase.

Preparation for death — its anticipation, and discussions about it — should always be a part of church life: no Christian should be isolated from his fellows because of their fear, nor should he be denied the opportunity of sharing with, and receiving strength and comfort from, his fellow believers in so far as he wishes to and can be helped so to do.

### *The individual gifts of its members*

A great deal of discussion has gone on in recent years about the identification of gifts and the need to include all the gifts in the tally, not just the verbal ones of preaching, teaching and prophecy. Even so, it is not an easy task. Many people find it hard to take themselves seriously and to spend time thinking and praying with others about their aspirations and activities, strengths and weaknesses, and coming to a sober assessment of what they can offer. It is often only as the process is engaged in that talents and potential come to light.

A caring church is one which takes its members seriously because God takes them seriously.

The skills and knowledge used in secular employment and ordinary life experience are part of this assessment. So, too, are those talents which the needs of early specialization may have left undeveloped. Some people can cope with buildings, find their way round the legal or social security systems, mend pipes, shop economically, cook, clean, handle money, type, administer, plan kitchens, match colours and chair meetings. Some of these gifts will be used in other contexts and some will not, and their identification and exercise will enrich both the church and the individual. Inefficient central heating, poorly played instruments, faulty seating, difficult access, ugly décor, poor acoustics, badly kept accounts and tedious sermons mean considerable cost in human terms. Gifts not only need exercise and practice, but sometimes their development demands education and this may be a responsibility of the whole fellowship. It is particularly important to identify, develop

and use the gifts of those thought to be weaker members so that their contribution is genuinely useful and appreciated rather than meeting with disapproval or patronage. Their sensitivities may be disconcertingly accurate in assessing the real values and attitudes of the fellowship.

Responsibility for caring is not the prerogative of any one individual — some people are naturally more at home with children, adolescents, adults, elderly people or handicapped people, but the sympathies and understanding of everyone can be enlarged, if they are willing. At different times and in different circumstances, members will share with different people in the fellowship, and all should be ready for this privilege. Acknowledgement by each one of his own liability to temptation and propensity for sin, a real respect and valuing of others, a willingness to share in the painful experiences of another while not flinching at giving pain if it is essential to healing, all these attributes and qualities can form part of growing into the likeness of Christ. Wise counsel is given by those who fear the Lord, and obey his word.

There are many situations in which a common experience and mutual support are more helpful than particular expertise, but there are also situations in which know-how or practical advice and help are called for as well. Many problems have no easy solutions and many situations have to be endured. To know that someone continues to care, share and pray is a wonderful easing of such burdens, especially if it is tried and tested over time.

### The gifts of counselling

Some people in the church may feel called to exercise a special ministry of counselling, and the fellowship may recognize that they have a particular gift in this respect. Knowledge and technique are no substitute for godly discernment, but there are things which can be taught and learned which may help Christians to understand themselves and others better. It is very important that the activity of counselling is exercised within the whole body of the church and is subject to its leaders. It is easy to become excited about possibilities of miraculous healing or psychological techniques and to use them in an attempt to bypass the consequences and pain of human experience and to take short cuts. It is also easy to become unduly punitive or pessimistic about the possibility of change, to forget the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer, and to adopt unconsciously a deterministic philosophy. A caring church will recognize these things and continue to give support and counsel to those whom it designates as counsellors. The fact that those in leadership positions and those who exercise pastoral gifts can themselves be vulnerable, especially if they are isolated, and not 'allowed' common

human frailties, should be well recognized, and special attention given to their needs.

There are both advantages and problems in designating particular people as counsellors. The reawakened concern of the church for its pastoral care can only be welcomed, but there are some causes for concern in current trends in Christian counselling and their possible effects. One of the dangers may be that the distancing which takes place between counsellor and client can divide the church into helpers and helped. Another is that, in the exercise of this gift as of others, rivalries can occur. Issues of confidentiality also arise. However, if counselling gifts are subject to the same recognition and discipline as others, the dangers can be overcome.

Many courses of instruction and educational opportunities are available to help to develop the gift of counselling; all of them need evaluating. Sometimes the perspectives offered illumine problems and often challenge accepted Christian attitudes and biblical interpretation. This may lead to a need to modify and scrutinize these perspectives, or it may lead to a more accurate and closer examination of scripture. This is true not only of the insights and theories put forward by secular psychologies, but also of those which claim to be specifically Christian and biblically based.

### Church members in the caring professions

In the church, either locally or within a wider area, there will be some who have undergone professional training and are engaged in one or other of the caring professions. Greater use could probably be made of their skills, especially in an educational role, while recognizing that they have no monopoly of wisdom and at times may need support and comfort when feeling overwhelmed by insoluble problems and the impact of suffering. Especially while they are undergoing training and in the early years of practice, such people need an opportunity to consider the theoretical basis and value-assumptions on which they are operating, in the light of scripture. In the past, there were few evangelical theologians willing to give this kind of help, and, indeed, it requires not only scholarship but a readiness to acknowledge the reality of everyday life experience. Far more help is now being given, and church leaders need to know where to go or to send young professionals grappling with these issues.

### A Christian counselling service

There are real advantages in having a Christian counselling service available, staffed by people who have been systematically equipped for the job and carefully selected. Those who come for help to such a service

should be able to assume that Christian values will be shared, and counsel given in a Christian context. Such a service can also offer them confidentiality in a way which is not always easy to guarantee in a church context. In some circumstances it may take great courage and be a very positive step to seek help, which the church should encourage; it should not however use it as a way of off-loading its responsibilities, especially for intractable problems and less attractive church members. It can be a considerable relief to church leaders to share problems and have some direction on how to help; it can also be rewarding for counsellors to work with someone whom they know has a praying and caring community to support them. Counselling is a hard activity, and evaluation of problems, processes and solutions and the integration of psychological and biblical insights is not easy. The mutual support and help Christian counsellors can give each other is therefore particularly valuable. A Christian counselling service is not a total substitute for the statutory services, whether in health or welfare, which may be better suited to those who need specialist help. Some emotional disorders and mental illnesses as well as intractable behaviour problems and welfare provision may require the use of one of these other services. Church members can help a great deal by not stigmatizing, or ignoring from embarrassment, members who are in need of referral and treatment. Anyone may need such a service at any time, and ill-informed gossip, curiosity and isolation can be very hurtful. Unreal expectations can be unhelpful too, but there are times when the reinforcement of reasonable demands on the services by an understanding friend can work wonders, and the support of a concerned church will usually be warmly welcomed.

### *The church's corporate contribution*

In addition to the individual contribution of its members, the church has a corporate contribution to make to the wider community, and can have a powerful impact on local, national and international affairs. Some aspects of this are considered elsewhere in this journal. The particular way in which a *local* church will witness and contribute will depend on a number of things, including the needs and characteristics of the community, and its own size. Most churches have some money and some buildings, as well as the homes and material possessions of their members. Some may have land in places where play space is lacking, and housing at a premium. Where a community has no natural meeting point, the church may be an obvious focus. Retirement communities, inner cities, isolated suburbs, areas of high unemployment will throw up their own needs, while social trends towards fostering of children

and older people and to intermediate treatment or community service for offenders may present other opportunities of service.

There are many excellent reports available from select committees and other sources, whose recommendations require imagination, the right approach, and respect for people as individuals rather than vast amounts of money, and Christians should be able to adopt some of their proposals.

Few would now argue that the church can provide a total alternative system to the health, welfare and educational provisions made by the state, but in some cases that system can be supplemented, or gaps in provision filled at a regional or national level. The provision of hostels for terminally ill people, residential, permanent and temporary care facilities for mentally and physically handicapped children and adults, and housing for the homeless have all been traditional responses of Christian people through the ages to a needy society. Christian institutions, no less than others, have an inbuilt tendency to obsolescence, and staff will need to be aware of the best in contemporary thinking while mediating this through Christian experience, values and beliefs. Local churches have a particular responsibility to support the staff and become involved in such institutions where they are placed in their neighbourhood, as isolation is a very real danger.

If the church is to be salt and light, it will have to take seriously the actions and attitudes of successive governments as they affect the opportunities for people to live a godly and quiet life. Many things are known about the environment which promotes peace and good order and the kinds of social conditions which militate against them. At the present, there seems to be a great deal of disillusionment at the possibility of providing ideal conditions. This is a challenge to the churches to be positive in their approach, to be involved in re-creating networks and inspiring hope. There will be times when international and national problems demand a public stance as well as the private charity and devotion of individuals. The Brethren movement has been at times less well served than others in discussing, praying and seeking guidance on such issues.

### *The church as a society of redeemed people*

If the church is operating as the caring society it should be, it will itself be the greatest testimony to Christ's continued presence in the world. A group of ordinary people, for the most part made up of the least valued members of society, who love and care for each other irrespective of class, race, sex, culture, educational ability, achievement and personal attraction and which holds together through good and bad times, is

something every nation longs to know how to create, especially if such a group is concerned for others, open to all, and welcomes them to join it.

Since the church is a group, it will resemble aspects of other groups — family, work groups, local communities and organizations — and will have similar dynamics. This is not to reduce it, but to recognize that God made man, not to live alone, or even in pairs and families, but to belong to a wider community.

Groups go through various stages, and at different times will be pre-occupied with different things; some of these concerns will be to do with maintaining the relationship between members, and others with accomplishing tasks. As priorities vary from time to time, first one and then another of the members will find their gifts needed, or be given the capacity for meeting a particular need for which they had not previously been equipped. Among the things that will be needed for maintaining the group are the gift of welcoming new members and helping the church to alter in order to meet their needs and make way for their contribution, the gift of easing tensions in or motivating a stable group, the gift of helping to establish a different balance when members leave, numbers increase or decrease, and circumstances or environments change. Among the gifts that will be needed for accomplishing tasks are identifying things which need to be done, over what time span, and the best method of achieving them. It may be a task best carried out by one person, supported by the rest, or it may call for a small group operating over a limited period, or for the entire resources of the church in one way or another.

Leadership in such a group needs all the qualities stressed in the New Testament: humility, service, spiritual maturity and godly example. In particular it will involve discerning the mind of the Spirit for the church at any one time, and calling out and praying for the necessary gifts from members to answer that call. That all members matter to each other and need each other's contribution is a fact of group dynamics, not a pious sentiment or a condescending gesture to the less obviously gifted. Knowing the tendency of groups to establish and conform to their own norms, the leader will need special vigilance to make sure these are in line with those laid down for members of the kingdom, and exhort, discipline and call to repentance where necessary. Leaders will endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There are many things to help the church achieve this unity — not the short cuts to cohesion of muddling together against an outside threat, but the right identification of a common foe, joint goals, identical standards of behaviour and, above all, one Lord, one faith, shared symbols and corporate acts, and the same energizing Spirit. Given such powerful pulls towards unity, differences can be recognized, accepted, and even



embraced, so that they enrich rather than threaten, and unity is achieved, not by making people conform to each other's preferences and patterns, but by transcending all barriers as all the members are being transformed into Christ's image.

God's crowning act is the creation of such a caring society in spite of divisions, prejudices and limitations. What the world sees is work in progress, and despite the church's failures, the fact of its existence at all is a testimony to the reality of the one Lord and father who called it into being, sustains and will one day perfect it.

### NOTES

1. A fuller account of 'life stage crises' is to be found in part one of Ruth Fowke's recently published book *Growing through Crises*, (Marshalls, 1985).

# ORGANIZING A CARING CHURCH

**Roger Forster and Ray Mayhew**

*How is a local church to organize itself as a caring community? From their wealth of experience at Ichtus Fellowship, Roger and Ray provide us with a practical and suggestive set of ideas for integrating the local church's social and evangelistic ministries. They stress the need for adequate leadership and nurturing of believers in our churches, emphasizing the community aspect of our lives together as God's kingdom people. They then suggest a number of specific steps which we could take to more adequately fulfil our serving role in society.*

## **Introduction**

We are going to briefly examine ten biblical principles that must undergird any comprehensive approach to organizing pastoral care in a growing local church. The paper will be practical rather than theological — the biblical principles being illustrated by our own experience of an expanding local church in south-east London.

The boundaries of our enquiry do not permit discussions of 'Organizing an Evangelizing Church', but it must be pointed out that the two go hand in hand and no false dichotomy must be drawn between evangelism and pastoral care. Qualitative and quantitative growth are both essential. The healthy, caring church will be an out-going, evangelizing church. The body exists to make contact with the world.

## **Leadership**

### *Functional*

Howard Snyder maintains that there are only three fundamental structures in the New Testament church. These are: 1. the eldership structure. 2. the small structure, namely the loving, caring group, and 3. the large coming together. These are exemplified by the Jerusalem church with its body of apostles/elders, breaking bread from house to house, and three to five thousand people gathering in Solomon's porch.

All other structures that develop from this pattern would seem to be purely pragmatic. When the latter have served their purpose, or if they no longer relate people in any interaction of life, they become dispensable.

Within the fundamental threefold construction of the life of God's people the structure of eldership is of course the organizing element of the whole, and it is the elders' task to maintain — on the dual basis of the word and the Spirit — the areas of interaction and service of the members to one another and to the world. Acts 15 illustrates the pragmatic setting up of structures.

The elders must serve the interests of God's kingdom and its citizens by creating structures in which the diverse and even antipathetic elements in the body will be able to 'build up each other in love'. The word, no doubt Spirit-illuminated, was brought from Amos by James (Acts 15:13-18). The Spirit thought good and so did the elders, to suggest certain guidelines for fellowship at love-feasts (Acts 15:28-29). Consequently, a temporary and useful pattern was established for mutual care to reign in the church. Acts 6, with the appointment of ministers for widows' relief exemplifies the principle of spiritual creativity being used to meet a real problem.

This leads us to suggest that at least one or two of the eldership should be visionaries who can see the needs, and that there should also be others in the church who have the responsibility of fulfilling those needs. They must all have the ability to pursue these goals with vision and to lead others along with themselves.

It is essential that such an authority structure exists if organizing a caring church is to be a realistic aim.

### *Plural*

The New Testament pattern is that of leadership teams rather than one-man ministries. We need a diversity of gifts and ministries to meet the needs of the congregation (Ephesians 4:11-12; Acts 13:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:28).

### *Balanced*

Bill Gothard describes the seven spiritual gifts in Romans 12:7-8 (prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, administration and mercy) as basic 'motivational' gifts; the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 being classified as 'manifestations' (gifts of the Spirit to individuals) and those in Ephesians 4 as 'ministries' (gifts of individuals to the church). All are crucial in building up the body of Christ, and the motivational gifts are

of particular value in providing balance in local leadership. When there is an adequate release of prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, administration and mercy, both into the church and out to the community, we are approaching a holistic expression of a caring church.

### *Prayerful*

One of the primary leadership tasks is prayer (Acts 6:4). It is amazing how many practical pastoral needs are remembered as faithful continuous prayer is made for each individual in the congregation. Prayer is indispensable and undergirds all our caring activities.

### **Growth**

Any effective approach to pastoral care must be elastic enough to adequately minister to an expanding (not static) group of people. Whenever our Lord spoke of the kingdom he used models that imply growth, multiplication, movement — salt into the earth, seed into the soil, light into darkness, leaven into the dough. The Holy Spirit brings to our attention the numerical growth of the church in Acts beginning with a group of 120 and quickly moving into thousands. Some of us like small churches that are supportive, intimate and have room for our gifts. Others like larger churches that provide a diversity of activities and ministries. However, whether our preference is for big or small groups, to be biblical they must be *growing* groups; the small becoming big and/or forming daughter churches. Peter Wagner of the School of World Mission has suggested a three-fold structure of celebration, congregation and cell groupings that provides adequate pastoral care for an unlimited number of people. This reflects the New Testament structure mentioned by Snyder above and similar structures provided by Methodism with its system of societies, classes and bands.

### *Celebrational*

This is the large gathering in which the apostolic doctrine may be adequately dispensed within the context of worship. Worship is the ethos in which teaching is assimilated. This nurturing is done by those gifts to the body listed in Ephesians 4. The large gatherings of the people of God, convened by the leadership, have a number of therapeutic values, showing that God's people are not alone in the world, but are moving on in a vast movement of humanity. This identification

alone can heal many basic problems in the individual. Also, it produces the platform upon which needs requiring care can be discovered and met, as well as enough room in which a person feeling threatened by personal confrontation in a smaller group can taste the reality of the message which is proclaimed and the Spirit who is present.

### *Congregational*

Congregations should have a maximum size of 200. They should be as geographically spread as possible and have adequate opportunities to express their common life together. Congregations can participate in activities that the celebration group is too big for and the housegroup too small. ('Borrowit' schemes, houseparties, joint households, extended families, local expressions of evangelism etc.) Two years ago we set a target of planting ten congregational groups (or extension churches) in a three-year period. In most cases the nuclear congregation was formed by two housegroups that then began evangelism in the area. We are now over half-way towards our goal and find the small congregational pattern to be very effective evangelistically.

### *Cell groupings*

These are the smaller entities of house groups which provide mutual edification centred on the inspiration of the word of God. For these to function fully, the leadership of the group is important. A leader should aim to visit each person in their home regularly, help and instruct in the Christian life, help to discover and develop spiritual gifts, and to discern any practical needs. Fellowship meals and breaking of bread contribute the atmosphere in which people can be known and understood. The cell provides a pastoral unit and produces future congregational leaders. These latter can be developed alongside the pastoral figure of that group. The groups should be small enough for mutual support and action and should also facilitate communication which is a fundamental need in a human-being-related society. As the cell or house group is so vital it will be discussed as a separate principle later on.

## **Discipleship and nurture**

The primary mandate given by our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20 is to go into the world and make disciples. The words 'baptizing' and 'teaching' are participles that derive their force from the emphatic command to make disciples. The goal of pastoral care must therefore be disciple-

making (2 Timothy 2:2). In our own church at least four structures assist in producing disciples.

### *Adequate teaching and preaching*

To quote John Stott, 'I believe that nothing is better calculated to restore health and vitality to the church or to lead its members into maturity in Christ, than the recovery of true biblical contemporary preaching.' To effectively communicate to an increasingly visually-orientated society requires ample illustration of our preaching (visual aids, over-head projectors, drama, etc.). In family services special care must be taken to ensure that there is ministry to all age groups. Preaching that combines truth, clarity and unction will produce disciples.

### *One to ones*

These provide an opportunity for the new convert to sit down weekly with a mature Christian and study the Bible in a personal way relating the scriptural truths to daily living. In our own church we have about 80 people giving or receiving one to ones. This provides a foundation for Christian living in the lives of many.

### *Startrite classes*

These are small groups of new converts meeting weekly to cover foundational biblical truths and are essential in the process of making disciples. We can no longer assume that people have any biblical background whatever before their conversion. We therefore have over 100 people in such groups.

### *Grow-more classes*

As the name implies, these are small groups meeting for Bible study on an advanced level.

To provide such a plurality of activities is demanding, but crucial. Like Paul we must 'not shrink from declaring . . . anything that [is] profitable and teaching . . . in public and from house to house', nor to 'cease . . . to admonish every one with tears' (Acts 20:20, 31).

Particular care must also be taken to ensure that sufficient nurture and teaching is given to the young and elderly who may not be able to participate in the above discipleship structures. An analysis of the age

ranges represented in the church will enable the leadership to plan children's, youth or daytime activities to meet these needs.

Special care needs in the church should also be identified and provided for; these may include the handicapped, the deaf, the educationally sub-normal, single-parent families, the unemployed, etc. In our own work a branch of the Disabled Christians Fellowship meets monthly and a club for the unemployed, weekly.

## Servanthood

In the training of the twelve apostles our Lord exemplified the principle that discipleship must result in service. The disciple is trained to serve. Exercise is crucial to the body if health is to be maintained. Therefore, adequate pastoral care must provide opportunities to serve — be it preaching the gospel, washing feet (John 13), serving tables (Acts 6), making clothes (Acts 9), remembering the poor (Galatians 2:10). It is crucial that discipleship be expressed in servanthood. Here are just a few examples of the opportunities to serve that could be provided by a local church: workshops (dance, drama, audio-visuals), postal evangelism, social action in the neighbourhood, open-air work, door-to-door evangelism, magazine production, youth work, film work, catering teams, stewarding, etc. Such a variety of activities will ensure that believers with *various spiritual gifts* and of *every age* have an opportunity to serve.

## Administration

The word 'organizing' rings the note of spiritual apostasy in the hearts of some, suggesting man-centred activity rather than Spirit-inspired life. However, all we mean by organizing is the planning which will preserve and cause life to fulfil its purpose. For example, there may be plenty of life organically produced within a family, but if the mother does not organize meal times, places and menus, bearing in mind the individual needs of babies, invalids and others, then the life will hardly be preserved, and the family will be unable to achieve its proper ends.

### *Organization*

Israel was administered in thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, by able men who feared God and were trustworthy (Exodus 18:21). Organization became crucial in adequately caring for the numerically exploding

Jerusalem church (Acts 6). 'Administration' is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:7-8). An effective administrative structure must undergird an effective pastoral structure if needs are to be identified, communicated and ministered to.

### *Analysis*

We can pin-point weaknesses and plan for nurture and growth by analysing current growth trends, gains and losses, age groupings, and the geographical location of church members. We should record the various types of growth: biological, transfer and conversion. Statistical information, accurately recorded and visually presented (bar graphs, pie graphs, etc.), enable us to identify points of strength or weakness.

### *Planning*

Effective organization involves long and short range planning. In Ichthus we have set yearly goals which have been prayerfully placed before the congregation (numerical growth, finance, conversions, missionary support, needed personnel). Diary planning is important for the whole church — houseparties, socials, picnics, conferences, seminars, evangelistic missions, love feasts, etc.

## **Community**

A caring church will not just minister to and care for individuals, but will minister to and care for *individuals in community*. We must not emphasize the personal aspects of faith and commitment at the expense of the corporate. Snyder remarks that Israel lost their purpose, but remembered they were a people. We are in danger of remembering our purpose, but forgetting we are a people. The word 'saint' is used 62 times in the New Testament; 61 references are plural. Wesley remarks: 'Solitary saints are as unbiblical as holy adulterers'!

While a robust picture of community life exists in the New Testament, we would do better to draw out *principles* of community rather than legalistic patterns. Worthwhile experiments (with some notable failures) have taken place in recent years along the lines of extended families, community of goods, joint households, simple lifestyle, that have provided high levels of pastoral care. We would do well to learn carefully from them.

The contemporary needs become more obvious when we consider that as the moral/ethical basis of our society moves further and further



away from biblical standards, people will require, more than ever before, not just nurture as individuals but integration into a new community. Likewise, as loneliness and alienation increase in society in general and in urban areas in particular, higher levels of community than the normal church's two meetings on Sunday and one mid-week are capable of providing must exist. The implications of such an ideal need to be thought out, for *koinonia* in the church must not be reduced to providing tea and coffee after the meeting, but must — to be biblical — include deeper involvement in each other's lives on a spiritual, social and material level. In Philippians 4:14-15, 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 *koinonia* clearly relates to financial assistance. The needs to be catered for and the means to do this will be many-fold: some will need greater levels of 'care in community' than others (the widows in the New Testament were such a case). New converts with particular problems, singles, the elderly or handicapped may need the special care provided in the context of an extended family, and other groups and needs will provide various opportunities for the church family to think of other creative solutions capable of enhancing the depth of the new community.

## The kingdom

In our consideration of 'Organizing a Caring Church' we have concentrated on internal care. However, care, concern and compassion must also be directed outwards to our neighbour, neighbourhood and nation. Preoccupation with ourselves will produce spiritual hypochondriacs and an unhealthy body.

The church gets in trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the Kingdom business.

In the church business, people are concerned with church activities, religious behavior and spiritual things. In the Kingdom business, people are concerned with Kingdom activities, all human behavior and everything God has made, visible and invisible. Kingdom people see human affairs as saturated with spiritual meaning and Kingdom significance.

Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.

When Christians put the church ahead of the Kingdom, they settle for the status quo and their own kind of people. When they catch a vision of the

Kingdom of God, their sight shifts to the poor, the orphan, the widow, the refugee, 'the wretched of the earth,' and to God's future. They see the life and work of the church from the perspective of the Kingdom.

Howard Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (11)

According to Ray Bakke, the early church went 'job-hunting'. History tells us that the church at Antioch ran an employment agency (and a secondhand clothing facility!) They also went 'body hunting'; bodies dumped in refuse areas were buried — and the funeral service 'invented'. They went 'baby-hunting', sick or unwanted female babies were commonly thrown over the city wall. The Christians cared for them and 'invented' the orphanage. They went 'sick-hunting' expressing compassion and eventually developing the hospice and hospital. They went 'hunting the hungry' — by the early third century the church in Rome was feeding over 2,000 destitute people daily.

The structure, then, of a church will be out-looking rather than in-looking, that is, down and out rather than up and in! It will be impossible to divide evangelism from good works since evangelism is the best work we can do for anyone and our lips are a part of our lives, even if they are not all of it. There should be no false shame or dichotomy between our service and our proclamation. Added to this, our very actions of love will interpret our message, as it is necessary for most people to see something as well as hear it (save those who are educated in abstract thinking). So Jesus changes water into wine and shows his glory, feeds the 5,000 and presents his cross (John chapters 2 and 6). John Stott has written that our service to the world, namely good works, is like one marriage partner and our message like the other. They must always go along together, even if they are independent and stand in their own right. This may not be the whole truth since the previous two models suggest a closer identification, and perhaps Christ does too in Luke 4. If, then, we would serve the world, there must be channels through which service can come and by which service can be given to the community in need. This requires contact and communication, 24 hours a day (or at least 12!) so that needs (as they arise and are met, or communicated by police, social services, relief organizations, etc.) can be communicated to the whole body, or to those sections of it which have the appropriate gifts to meet the problem. 'We do not have problems, we *are* problems' says Paul Tournier, so consequently we are to meet the *people* involved. Only a realistic contact point and communication pattern can provide an adequate service and it must be staffed by sacrificial voluntary workers or else the community must provide a full-time man to be the point of reference and action. This is an essential a job as that of the pastors of the house groups, elders of the

church or the relatively few public teachers. Within the church of Christ today there exist both the manpower and monetary resources to serve the world with bread of both kinds (John 6:48-51). What is lacking is merely the structure by which this can be accomplished. By organizing such, we express our divine image. In working together with him, the church can creatively meet the world with care and 'salt' society.

## **Shepherding**

One of the most helpful models in developing pastoral care is that of the shepherd (Ezekiel 34, John 10). Some sections of the church are misusing the model and developing dictatorial structures of leadership and authority. Such is not our intention here. The good shepherd is the one who lays down his life for the sheep, not the one who lords it over God's flock. Feeding, leading, guarding and healing summarize a shepherd's task.

*Feeding* (discussed under 'discipleship and nurture')

### *Leading*

Adequate pastoral care must provide counselling for people in order to navigate through the complex problems, heartaches and decisions of everyday life. The flock must be regularly visited by the leadership — we must know where people are, spiritually, week by week if we are to shepherd them. Counselling 'surgeries' can be organized on week nights and staffed by those spiritually gifted to counsel. We must be careful in such ministry not to depend solely on secular counselling techniques, but must rely on spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14) and inspired application of the scriptures to adequately meet people's needs.

### *Guarding*

'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians' (Acts 20:28). Paul was keenly aware that 'fierce wolves' would seek to destroy the flock at Ephesus. In our care for the church we must be aware of the pressure on people from the enemy: the occult, false doctrine, false prophets, cults and sects, moral and sexual temptations. As shepherds, we must be close enough to the flock to see if individuals are feeding in dangerous pastures. We must be loving, yet firm and unafraid to exercise church discipline if necessary (Matthew

18:15-17). In our own work from time to time, in order to protect the flock and maintain the Lord's testimony we have had to publicly warn and even put out from our midst certain individuals involved in sexual misconduct. We must not side-step such confrontation if we are to faithfully guard the flock.

### *Healing*

Ezekiel's indictment against the shepherds of Israel was that they did not strengthen the weak, or heal the sick or bind up the injured. James tells us that the task of shepherds ('elders' James 5:14-15) is to pray for the sick, anoint with oil and offer the prayer of faith. We must not turn aside from our responsibility to minister to people's psychological and physical needs as well as their spiritual.

In our own work, as we have sought to obey the injunction in James, we have been encouraged to see God healing the sick. At times a joint consultation with Christian doctors/psychiatrists is helpful in diagnosing the roots of a person's problem and in providing care and ministry.

### **Housegroups**

The use of homes in the New Testament church has been referred to above in the context of the cell structure. Housegroups are an ideal way of organizing a higher level of pastoral care. In our own work we have twenty such groups that meet on two Wednesday evenings and one Sunday morning in the month. The following points indicate how our groups function.

1. They are the basic units of pastoral care. Normally each group has three or four leaders and therefore over 80 people in our own fellowship (not including the eldership) are involved in pastoral care.
2. The groups are flexible, meeting whenever and wherever they want to. Many groups meet informally on other occasions in addition to those mentioned above.
3. The groups are small enough to be personal, intimate, caring and supportive, 12-24 being the average size.
4. The groups are developmental. Leadership and spiritual gifts can emerge and be exercised.
5. They grow by simple cell division. As the groups become too large another group is formed.
6. They have great evangelistic potential. The evangelistic effectiveness of the Methodist movement lay in its 'class' (small group)

structure. Each housegroup is encouraged to reach out in evangelism and to invite non-Christians to their gatherings.

7. Clear job descriptions must be given to housegroup leaders (visitation, prayer, hospitality, etc.).
8. Continuous leadership training must be provided. We meet once a month with all our leaders and have weekend or day conferences once or twice a year.
9. Women are particularly effective in housegroup leadership, and they often have more time in the day for pastoral work than the men.
10. We rely heavily on group discussion and interaction based on the scriptures, rather than a lecture format.
11. We encourage all the housegroups to relate socially and many of them are very active in this area.

### **Contextualization**

One of the buzz-words in theological circles today is contextualization — the discipline of relating the *message* to the cultural context of those we are proclaiming it to. However, in our efforts to contextualize the message of the gospel we have neglected to contextualize the *care and compassion* of the gospel. Many of our efforts to care for those in the church or in our neighbourhoods are hopelessly out of context and belong back in the Victorian era. Accelerated cultural change is a feature of most societies today and we must adjust our care accordingly.

We must provide the context in which the single parent, the unemployed, the homosexual and those with psychiatric problems can be counselled and cared for. Counselling and instruction on marriage and family life must regularly be given. Over the last eight years in Ichthus we have organized a 'Jesus Action' scheme of social action in the community. As practical needs are discovered we seek to minister to them. Each housegroup has a Jesus Action representative who is responsible for mobilizing his group in this kind of neighbourhood care. Tasks vary from mending an OAP's plumbing on Christmas Day to decorating flats for handicapped persons! Mother Theresa has often said that the suffering caused by loneliness and alienation in the West is as great as that by disease and malnutrition in the East. Into such a context we must creatively care.

### **Conclusion**

Organizing an effectively caring church in today's society is a

monumental task, but one in which we are co-labourers together with God and recipients of his supernatural enabling.

## **RUNNING A CHRISTIAN ADVICE CENTRE<sup>1</sup>**

**Fran Beckett**

*Fran's essay describes the advice centre which her church runs in north London. As well as describing the way the centre was conceived and set up she shows how its role is part of the ongoing work of her church's life and the lessons which can be learned from such an activity.*

Woodcroft Evangelical Church is strategically situated on a crossroads on the corner of a large pre-war council housing estate. The local shops, library, park and underground station are all within a few hundred yards of the church, with people from the estate having to pass the church in order to reach them. Beyond the shops, across a main road, are mainly owner-occupied family homes for those with a middle range income.

Through carrying out a community survey it was discovered that many newcomers to the area weren't too sure what sort of a church we are or if indeed we are one at all! Residents of longer standing knew that we were a church but little more than that. However, many from both groupings felt that the church should have a higher profile in a caring capacity in the community if our faith was to have credibility. This formed a backcloth to subsequent discussions with a majority of the area's professional and voluntary helping agencies e.g. Social Services Department, Citizens Advice Bureau, local welfare rights groups, the Housing Department.

As a result of these discussions and through contact with individual local residents many needs were highlighted. Our thinking and praying began to crystallize into a consideration of the establishment of a Christian Advice Centre. This would be a place, on church premises, where people could come for advice and information on a wide range of issues — such as welfare benefits, housing, consumer affairs, resources for the elderly and handicapped, and other areas of concern. Many people are frightened or put off by large, seemingly bureaucratic, organizations and don't understand the 'system' that encompasses so much of life in the 1980s. They need someone to take the time to help them fill in forms, to negotiate on their behalf with large government departments, to explain in an uncomplicated way their legal rights in certain situations, and who above all will be prepared to listen and to care in a way that will restore a sense of dignity and worth.

Fourteen months ago we opened an Advice Centre that offers information, care and a limited amount of counselling help to members of the local community. It functions from a Christian basis, incorporating Christian principles sensitively applied, but is open to all no matter what their personal convictions. Whilst maintaining a Christian stance, we work in co-operation with secular agencies and where possible try to complement what they are offering rather than compete.

Careful consideration was given to how this could be a bridge-building exercise to enable those who would normally never go near a church begin to grasp something of the reality of God's love and concern for them. This affected the type of publicity used, the appointment of receptionists in the Advice Centre who have the ability to put people at their ease, and the provision, where appropriate, of follow-up befriending of clients by church members. It was also important to ensure that there were resources within the overall life and activities of the church which could be utilized as a next step in contact and relationship building. These included a weekly evangelistic coffee morning, an informal evangelistic discussion group and Sunday services that were relevant to visitors to the church.

Several factors emerge when coming to assess the life and effectiveness of the work of the Advice Centre fourteen months after it has opened.

Firstly it has been increasingly used by the public with over two hundred clients on our books during that period, and probably three times as many actual visits to the Centre by those clients.

Secondly, the work of the Advice Centre has created greater and more positive community awareness of the church as a whole, and has significantly increased the quantity and quality of our contacts with non-Christians.

A third factor is the type of problem and need that people have presented. They cover an enormous range of areas from seeking advice about a neighbour's troublesome cats to needing someone to talk to about complex marital difficulties. A large number of the enquiries are concerning welfare benefits, and many others are of a largely practical nature rather than involving emotional problems. However, an apparent underlying motive for a majority in using the Advice Centre is a sense of loneliness and a very real need to have someone caring to talk to. It is this that brings us to the fourth factor in our assessment.

The initial contact with the Advice Centre has led naturally beyond that into attendance at some of the activities listed earlier in this article, and has significantly increased the size of the fringe of the church, with some having subsequently become Christians. Follow-up befriending and the existence of an evangelistic coffee morning, discussion group,



guest services, and Sunday lunches have therefore proved vital.

The final area of consideration in this article is to consider some of the lessons that have been learnt over the past fourteen months of the life of the Advice Centre. This is not an exhaustive list — we anticipate learning much more — and we would stress that what has been learnt and achieved is due to the grace and enabling of God rather than human accomplishment. Many of the points listed below could be developed as subjects in themselves, but space does not permit this.

### **1. What is offered to the community must be relevant to their felt needs**

This point can be illustrated in several ways. Firstly, judging by the response, the Advice Centre is meeting a felt need in our particular community. Secondly, we have contact with another Christian group who have attempted in some measure to duplicate the Advice Centre but have had very little response because that model is not appropriate to their particular local community. Thirdly, a recent Advice Centre Open Evening including a buffet meal and a talk by a doctor on 'Coping with Stress in the 1980s' packed the church with visitors because stress is a human experience that we are all subject to — a very obvious felt need.

### **2. True commitment needed**

To get involved with individual and community needs requires a considerable time commitment, and we should be aware of the implications of this.

### **3. Compromise**

We have found out there is a temptation to compromise our distinctiveness as a Christian agency, and that we need to be constantly alert to this.

### **4. Snowball effect**

There are always more needs than an individual church can meet, and we have therefore found it important to ensure that the work of the Advice Centre keeps pace with the life of the church, and does not out-

strip it. Equally, it would be easy to build a separate 'empire' but we have found it vital to keep in mind that the Advice Centre is a servant organization of the church.

### **5. Follow up**

It is of great value to be able to provide individual follow-up and other means of ongoing contact in order to build relationships which will facilitate natural personal evangelism.

### **6. Prayer and the power of God**

Increasingly, we are discovering the necessity of prayer as a priority to undergird all that is done, and the answers to prayer so far have been a great source of encouragement. We are now more aware of the need to see a greater degree of direct intervention by God, breaking into the lives of those who come to us.

### **7. Importance of building a team ministry**

To be a 'listener' can be tiring and stressful and so we have found it valuable to belong to a team where we can pray for and support one another, as well as learn together. It is also important that the focus of the Advice Centre is not centred on one particular personality, and a team approach has minimized this possibility.

### **8. Bridging the gap**

One of the main aims of the Advice Centre has been to bridge the gap between the church and the surrounding community and in so doing, to demonstrate the vital relevance of the Christian message. We have found that this type of service to the community has in many instances bridged that gap, and has brought us into meaningful contact with people who would not normally 'darken the doors of a church'.

## NOTES

1. This article originally appeared in *Harvester* April 1984 as the second of two articles explaining the need for the local church to be active in its serving role to

the community in which it is situated. It is used here by permission of the author, Fran Beckett, and the editor of *Harvester*, Jonathan Lamb, to both of whom we express our grateful thanks. *Harvester* is published monthly and can be obtained from Paternoster Press, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter, EX2 4JW. The annual subscription is £8.40.

## CONDUCTING A COUNSELLING INTERVIEW

**Campbell Bell**

*Helping others often involves a one-to-one interview. Campbell's essay deals specifically with this. His approach highlights the type of skills and attitudes which we need to develop in order to increase our awareness and sensitivity in helping individuals. He deals with both the verbal and non-verbal sides of interviewing, and takes us through the various stages of an interview. His essay draws attention to ways in which, unwittingly, we may be making our attempts to help less helpful than they might otherwise be.*

To say that there is a need in our churches and church-based organizations for individuals skilled and practised in the art of counselling is an understatement. Over the years we have emphasized the need for evangelism and mission and the importance of presenting the claims of Christ to a sinful world. This is right and proper, but in our eagerness to heal the spiritual needs of man we have tended to neglect the physical and psychological aspects of everyday life which cause both Christians and non-Christians such despair, depression, helplessness and grief. Terms such as 'social gospel' have been used by many to denigrate what, in my opinion, is a vital part of the church's function in the community, namely, addressing ourselves to the more practical aspects of being a service to our local communities. Spiritual, psychological and social factors are inextricably linked, as these are factors which make up the whole person that Christ gave his life for. The role of the church as a loving, caring entity in the world needs to, and indeed should, address itself to every area of life where Christ can be presented as a positive and only alternative.

Generally, when a term like 'psychology' is mentioned in Christian circles several reactions are observed. It may be dismissed as merely the 'airy-fairy' ideas and the ramblings of mid-European eccentrics. It is also argued (rather more strongly) that many psychological and counselling theories are not Christian in their conception or their practice.

I would to some extent agree with both of these claims, but must insist that the insights given by psychology can be an ally rather than an enemy to the Christian. These insights can inform us in all areas, from the temperamental adolescent to the couple who are having difficulties

in their marriage, to the retired man or woman who, after a lifetime of work, feel that they have been thrown on the scrapheap. Professor Malcolm Jeeves, a Christian who lectures in psychology at St. Andrews University, points out that 'Christians have no need to be defensive about these matters'. He argues that the findings of psychologists help us to answer some of the problems we face when dealing with human behaviour and feelings. I believe that many of these insights are God-given, and we are therefore failing those who come to us for help if we do not use them in a constructive manner.

That there is a need for counsellors in our churches is undeniable. There is an increasing number of problems related to marriage break-ups, single parent families, solvent abuse, drugs, pre- and extra-marital sex, alcoholism, family discord, lack of parental control, high levels of unemployment, and so on. These are problems which are acute both outside *and* inside the church family, and we, as Christians, should be addressing ourselves to them in both spheres. Coupled with this is a point already made — the church needs to rediscover its caring role within society. Many people can be won for Christ if they are shown compassion and helped in life-crises (cf. John 8; Matthew 17; Luke 5; John 4 etc.). This may mean a radical change in attitudes and in the way in which we administer church resources, but I believe that it is essential that we become more involved in the community around us and address ourselves to the personal needs and problems within the geographical areas in which we serve God.

This article is not designed to outline a particular kind of counselling, nor is it intended to turn the individuals who read it into expert counsellors overnight. What it does aim to do is to give some basic, practical guidelines for an interview/counselling session: how to make people feel at ease, give and receive relevant information, pick up verbal and non-verbal cues, clarify and define problems and how the counsellor's behaviour can have both positive and negative aspects. Realizing how an interview is structured and the various stages that it involves is important in giving purpose and direction to a process which can so easily lose its way and move very little from where it started.

Hopefully, reading this will encourage those already interested in this subject to read and practise in a constructive way so as to improve their skills as counsellors. It must be stressed at this point that to be a good counsellor involves not only natural skills but also years of practice and reflection, including acquainting oneself with the relevant literature. The guidelines that follow are therefore by way of introduction, but may be of some help to those who are faced with a counselling situation and are finding it difficult to know what to do next. Their ultimate aim is that through helping individuals through the problems that a fallen

world produces we can bring them into a deeper understanding of and personal relationship with God.

## Introduction

Any encounter between two people is a complex event involving several processes. Each perceives the other, and also perceives the other perceiving him. Each person behaves in such a way as to attempt to influence the other's perceptions and, at the same time, to adjust and change his reactions and behaviour according to the feedback he receives. Therefore a meeting between two people produces an interaction which is an evolving process in which each person perceives the other's verbal and non-verbal actions, and learns to react to these actions, changing and adapting their own behaviour either appropriately or inappropriately. This can be explained as follows:

Person A perceives person B  
 Person B perceives person A  
 Person A perceives person B perceiving person A  
 Person B perceives person A perceiving person B  
 Person A behaves (e.g. by greeting person B)  
 Person B perceives person A's behaviour and responds according to the way he has understood what he has seen and responds behaviourally.

So we see that a meeting between two people can very quickly become a complex affair in which each person in the dyad can have a very false impression of the other, and in consequence their aims and objectives.

The behaviour which takes place can be differentiated into two types — verbal and non-verbal. Verbal behaviour or language tends to be concerned with opinions, problems, facts and objects, whereas non-verbal behaviour generally communicates emotions and attitudes. Language is usually carefully managed, whereas non-verbal signals are more spontaneous and less easy to control consciously. Both are interdependent, and one can impinge on the other (e.g. how and where we sit can convey a particular attitude, and what we say may reinforce or contradict the attitude we have portrayed non-verbally: the converse is also true).

Therefore it is helpful to be aware that your verbal and non-verbal behaviour is having an effect on the interview (and vice-versa) and that you are both perceiving each other's behaviour. In practice these processes form a rapid stream of feedback loops, each one affecting the next.

Non-verbal messages come via touch, dress, jewellery, **body movements**, voice (tone, pitch, speed), vocabulary, **facial expressions**, **eye**

contact (gaze or avoidance), closed sitting, hunched-up positions, slouching, hopeless droopiness, gestures of hands, feet or legs. All these convey aspects of the person to us. It is important to remember that our non-verbal messages are also being perceived by the interviewee. Through training ourselves and being trained we can respond to and be aware of these sometimes fleeting signs. Their context, persistence and repetitiveness can give us information regarding the person we are interviewing.

Language and vocabulary should be attuned to the person you are interviewing or counselling. Age and intelligence, cultural and educational background as well as their present emotional state, should be taken into account. A rule of thumb is: the simpler the language the better. You should always ask if you have made yourself clear. As has already been pointed out, what we *think* we say or do is not always what is perceived by the interviewee.

Of course, much of your contact depends on how well you know the individual and how much you know about them. If it is a young person who has grown up in your church or a married couple whom you have known for many years, the interview *may* be more relaxed and easy to conduct. On the other hand, the nature or difficulty of the problem may cause uneasiness, confusion or embarrassment between the best of friends. To be aware of verbal and non-verbal cues is particularly important in such cases. It is equally important if you are counselling someone who is new to your church or whom you have never met before.

## **Preliminaries**

The stages which precede an interview need to be carefully managed since they can be important factors which determine the outcome of the interview.

It must be realized that before an interview each participant is influenced by his store of expectations built up from previous experiences. Also, factors such as role, status and the purpose of the contact influence how both parties respond and react to the interview. These reactions/responses and the behaviour they elicit tend to fit the expectations of the other person.

In a church setting the first contact may be made through a letter, telephone call, face-to-face contact (planned or otherwise) or a long-term relationship. It is valuable if each stage is observed, since it can lay the basis for a beneficial working relationship. For example, a formal letter to a social worker or doctor may be appropriate, or a friendly letter to

someone who is reluctant to talk, or an appropriate phone call. (We have noted that our behaviour — e.g. gaze, voice tone and gestures — can have an effect on people. In the same way we must remember that attitudes and behaviour can also be communicated by the tone of a letter or telephone conversation.) Sometimes it is necessary to reassure a person of your status, competence or the purpose of the interview, and some of the above examples are ways of facilitating this. The way in which these overtures are handled will have an important influence on the processes of the interview.

All interviews require preparatory work regarding their purpose — there will, of course, be the spontaneous, impromptu counselling session for which you cannot plan. Venue can be significant. It may be formal or informal, at the church, office or in a home. It can be on one participant's own territory or on neutral ground. All this can have an effect on the helping process. We can communicate by the way we arrange the furniture. For example, desks between persons act as barriers. But some protection can help. A small table in between, or sitting at the side of a desk, can lessen the isolation or confrontation situation without threatening too much intimacy. Seating arrangements are also important. Two people sitting opposite each other may suggest confrontation.

### **Interview stages**

The stages in an interview can take the following structure:

1. The social stage
2. Clarifying the purpose/problem stage
3. Discussion stage
4. Goal setting stage
5. Ending stage

#### *The social stage*

This is a very important stage in the interview. During the greetings and first few minutes of meeting, each has collected and interpreted a great deal of data about the other. This data is used to confirm or change preconceived notions regarding each other. It is therefore an ideal opportunity to set the tone of the interview. Both parties are likely to be anxious, and because of this the tendency is to feel uncomfortable and rush this stage. It is helpful, therefore, to follow some socially accepted rituals concerned with greetings and introductions. This will help both



parties to relax and to prepare themselves for the interview. Shaking hands, arranging the seating, commenting on the weather, introduction of names and the offer of refreshments — all this can be carried out in a warm and attentive way which helps to personalize the situation and make the basis for meaningful contact between the participants. This is also the stage where role and status can be clarified and communicated. It is important that the counsellor recognize the counsellee's status for four reasons. 1. To note points of similarity which will aid the process of identification with each other. 2. To use this for the introduction of new ideas later. 3. To enable the counsellee to feel valid as a person. 4. To give both parties more time to become relaxed and to prepare to start the interview.

It is most important not to rush or omit introductions and formalities. Often, because of anxiety and the fear of the unknown, this stage is omitted or rushed, and the interview suffers in consequence.

#### *Clarifying the purpose/problem stage*

Moving from the social stage should be the responsibility of the interviewer. The next stage is concerned with clarifying and agreeing the purpose of the meeting. The change should be made clear, and a conscious effort should be made to change the atmosphere to one of 'work'. It is necessary for the interviewer to identify his role and status and the reasons for the interview. Introductory remarks can do a number of things. 1. They identify the name, role and purpose of the interviewer. 2. They set specific time limits. 3. They state the aim of the interview. 4. They seek the agreement of the interviewee. (This is of the utmost importance. We do not want individuals to be involved against their will, and there is a much greater chance of success if you have the individual's consent.) 5. They give the interview a point from which to begin.

The scene has been set for both parties to begin to clarify the purpose of the interview by making clear the abilities and purposes of the interviewer and the expectations of the interviewee. There should then follow a period of negotiation and exploration which allows the purpose and the problem for solution to be fully clarified. It may help, for instance, to have an informal written contract which can be referred to and amended if the need arises. To facilitate this you could ask the interviewee to write down his expectations of the interview, and his felt needs. Writing down these points can not only help to clarify ideas but can serve as a point of reference if an area becomes muddled or fudged.

During this stage, the interviewer should be using his focusing, listening and attending skills. He must encourage the interviewee to be concrete in his descriptions and must help him to select issues to focus on

first. Although the interviewer should *listen* throughout the interview, it is especially important that he should do so at this stage. Listening well is vitally important, and we should resist the temptation to reach preconceived conclusions on a little information. It is necessary, however, to use our own experiences and knowledge as we listen, in order to build up a picture and framework of the presenting problem. This will enable us to help the person if they fall silent or find it difficult to express themselves.

This leads us to an important but difficult area — silence. Silence tends to generate anxiety, but it can be productive. Understanding a silence may lie in what was discussed prior to the silence. We must be careful to balance respect for the individual's right and need to withdraw or fall quiet with the sensible use of his and your time. Silence can be the springboard to another area or the point at which you can probe deeper into what has been said previously. But it must be stressed that silence should be respected. If it is it can be constructive and supportive. Above all, do not be afraid of silence.

### *Discussion stage*

This stage is concerned with testing out the ideas which the interviewer has formulated regarding the nature of the problem. He may do this by summarizing what he *thinks* has been said, challenging the same, offering information, probing to ascertain whether more information is forthcoming or whether more information is needed. The interviewer should be involved in engaging the interviewee in a problem-solving activity which will lead to some agreement about goals.

### *Goal setting stage*

Participants should now attempt to reach some agreement about further action. This may be simple or complex. It could mean a series of counselling sessions or a simple problem-solving approach (e.g. financial) which redresses the equilibrium in the interviewee's life and enables them to cope.

### *Ending stage*

This stage, like the first, is often rushed or omitted. The end of the interview should be signalled in good time, so that any further important points the interviewee wanted to say can be said. Sufficient time should be allowed to enable the interviewee to leave unhurriedly and without feeling under pressure to leave. Social rituals can be helpful

once more. These allow the person to feel like an individual, and to leave feeling that the interview has terminated on a positive note. The interviewer should take responsibility to end the interview at the time agreed at the beginning. It is not usually helpful to allow the interview to drift on. This entails the interview ending either vaguely or abruptly, both of which are undesirable. It also leaves the interview without structure, which can be counterproductive, especially if you are trying to help someone who needs structure and boundaries.

### **Practical points**

Let us now look at a few practical aspects of interviewing and counselling which are related to what we have already discussed.

A useful mnemonic for aiding people to develop attending and listening skills is S.O.L.E.R.

**S.** means that we should face the other person *squarely*. This is the basic posture of involvement. It says, 'I am available to you.' Turning at an angle from another person lessens your involvement.

**O.** calls on us to adopt an *open* posture. Arms and legs crossed are often signs of lessened involvement. If you have an open posture you are not on the defensive but are signifying that you are open to what the other person has to say to you and you to them. (Incidentally, this is a reminder of the need to be non-judgemental. We may not agree with what a person is doing or saying, and it will be appropriate at some stage to instruct on what God says regarding an issue. But a judgemental attitude on our part cannot fail to be counterproductive.)

**L.** indicates that we should *lean* towards the other. This again shows involvement and availability. People who are seriously involved in a conversation will automatically lean towards each other as a natural sign of their involvement.

**E.** reminds us to maintain good *eye* contact. You should spend much of the time looking directly at the person you are interviewing. This should not be a 'staring-out contest' but an indication of deep involvement. When people are involved in conversation their eye contact is almost uninterrupted. They are not self-conscious but involved.

**R.** invites us to be at home and relatively *relaxed*. If you are able to convey the message that you are relaxed, this will help the interviewee to feel more at home with you. Of course you should not be so relaxed that you are not listening or attending properly, but your demeanour should allow for the situation to be less threatening and anxious.

Having looked at how we should present ourselves, here are some points which may help in a positive way. You could call this 'counselling First-Aid'.

1. If there is a crisis, first help defuse the crisis.
2. Begin with a manageable problem, i.e. one which shows some promise of being successfully handled.
3. When possible, move from less severe to more severe problems.

It is usually far better policy to enable a person to overcome a problem themselves rather than do everything for them. Solving smaller manageable problems first is an excellent way of gaining the interviewee's confidence which encourages them to go on to tackle larger problems. Allied to this, you may find that by solving one or two minor problems the individual is able to cope on his own with other problems. We all have a threshold beyond which our powers to cope are disabled. The alleviating of one or two problems may be enough to redress the balance.

## Summary

1. There are many needy people in our communities for whom we have a legitimate concern.
2. We must educate ourselves to the problems around us and how we can help people to deal with them.
3. Our actions and reactions, verbal and non-verbal cues, are important in any encounter with people. We should be aware of them and of their consequences.
4. Preparation for an interview is important. Venue, initial contact etc. should be carefully planned.
5. Be aware of the stages of an interview. Do not allow them to structure you but use them to give you insights which will make you aware of the processes and in turn help you to help others.
6. Don't rush the social and ending stages.
7. Clarify the purpose, limitations and time-limit of your interviews.
8. Listen carefully, and make sure that you have understood and that you are understood.
9. Use silence constructively, and don't be afraid of it.
10. Make the interviewee feel important, an individual and at ease. Use language he will understand.
11. Scrupulously respect confidentiality.
12. Be non-judgemental.
13. Remember S.O.L.E.R. and First Aid.

14. All your work should be done in an attitude of prayer.
15. Use God's word and prayer in your sessions when appropriate.

The last two points are obviously of great importance, and without them our help will never be as effective as it could be. In my opinion there is no need to develop a Christian counselling model. If we are living a life in God's will then our Christian love and witness should be apparent in all we do and should pervade our counselling sessions. The degree of confidence, security and purpose which our Christian faith in a risen saviour gives to us has no equivalent in the secular world. At his best the Christian counsellor should be less prone to disillusionment and frustration in the face of difficulties or failure than his secular counterpart. This may not make him a 'better' counsellor than a non-Christian but it certainly should make him better equipped to cope with difficulties.

The reference in the letter of James to the power of the tongue takes us to two final points. Firstly, confidentiality. I cannot stress too heavily the necessity that whatever passes between you and a counsellee must be held in the strictest confidence. You may be dealing with highly emotional and sensitive subjects, and it is the right of the individual to demand complete confidence. A counsellee is entrusting you with very private matters, and it is not open to you to talk of these outside the interview room. If you break a confidence you will lose respect and your work will be nullified. Only if the counsellee gives specific consent may you make the problem a subject of shared prayer with the church. Secondly, James tells us how our tongue can be used for good as well as evil. Trained correctly, we can use our natural abilities to help people in crisis situations in a positive way which will help them to a deeper understanding of God.

'If . . . words are to enter men's hearts and bear fruit, they must be the right words shaped cunningly to pass men's defences and explode silently and effectually within their minds.' (J. B. Phillips)

# COVENANT AND COUNSELLING: SOME COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS OF A COVENANT THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

David Atkinson

*David's essay, which addresses itself to the biblical basis for counselling, seeks to describe the counselling process by using the biblical idea of a covenant relationship as a model for ours. He traces the view of God with which the Old and New Testaments present us — examining God's character and the way he deals with us — and demonstrates persuasively how the same concerns and qualities should form the foundation for our efforts to help others.*

## Introduction

My aim in this article is to offer a possible Christian theological approach to counselling. By 'theology' I mean our human attempt to think in an ordered and consistent way about God and about ourselves in God's world, in response to God's self-disclosure in history, in Christ, in the scriptures and in Christian experience. By 'counselling' I have in mind the sort of activity defined by the BAC Ethics and Standards Committee in these terms:

People are engaged in counselling when a person, occupying regularly or temporarily the role of 'counsellor' offers or agrees explicitly to give time, attention and respect, to another person temporarily in the role of 'client'. The task of counselling is to give the 'client' an opportunity to explore, define and discover ways of living more satisfyingly and resourcefully within the social grouping with which he identifies.<sup>2</sup>

In a Christian context, therefore, 'counselling' is about helping to remove obstacles which may hinder us fulfilling our calling to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves. Obviously many different people with different religious or theological convictions, or with none, may be engaged in counselling so defined.

Some Christians are engaged in 'secular' counselling. Some Christian 'professional' pastors 'counsel' as part of their pastoring. Some are primarily spiritual directors, perhaps wondering how the counselling task meshes with the responsibility of giving 'direction'.

Every counselling system of whatever colour makes certain assumptions. It assumes a certain view of the nature of human being; it assumes a certain value system, such that it is meaningful to talk in terms of change from a less good to a better way of living; it assumes a process theory of how personal and behavioural change comes about. Specifically, therefore, our task is to think theologically about what it means to be human, about values, and about personal and behavioural change.

## Theology and psychology

There is a great deal of literature seeking to apply the insights of counselling psychology to the practice of Christian caring. At the other end of the spectrum, there is literature warning Christian pastors against allowing their counselling practice to be based on unChristian humanistic psychological presuppositions. One important question, therefore, is the relationship between theological and psychological disciplines.

John Carter and Bruce Narramore offer four models by which the relationship between the disciplines may be understood.<sup>3</sup>

1. Firstly, the *'Against' model*. Theology and psychology are frequently set against each other, either by secular therapists,<sup>4</sup> or by some Christian counsellors<sup>5</sup> who believe that psychotherapy is an illegitimate discipline because all that is needed for personal and relational development is revealed in the scriptures.
2. Secondly, the *'Of' model*. This resolves either into the attempt to find 'good' psychology in religion<sup>6</sup> by holding on to the useful 'human' elements of a religious faith as constructive in promoting psychological health, while denying the supernatural dimension, or it resolves into the psychology of religion which seeks to interpret religious phenomena through a psychological grid — important though that is within its own limited terms.
3. Thirdly, the *'Parallels' model*. The concepts of theology and psychology parallel each other, but rarely meet. Either they are viewed as complementary disciplines seeking to account for the same phenomena, in different language systems and conceptual frameworks,<sup>7</sup> or, there is thought to be some mystical disjunction between emotional life and 'spiritual' life such that psychology can be concerned with one part and theology with another.
4. The fourth model which Carter and Narramore themselves support is what they call the *'Integrates' model: theology integrates psychology*. This model is rooted in the conviction that God is the author of all

truth; that there will be a congruence between the true insights of psychology and God's revelation; that scientific psychology has its own restricted methodological assumptions and interpretative techniques which are important and valid at their own level, but that these need to be placed within a larger conceptual framework in which all of life at all levels is viewed from a centre in God's self-disclosure.

Carter and Narramore's own conclusions seem to me to be rather simplistic and too tidy; almost as though they were seeking a new third discipline to be created out of the two. But I wish to affirm their fundamental conviction that we need first and foremost a theology of human life and relationships which integrates within it the important and proper place for the human sciences; that insofar as psychology is dealing with scientific 'truth' rather than meta-scientific theory, there can be no conflict with 'true' theology; that psychology can be used critically as part of that other human task of creating a consistent theology.

In working towards a theology of counselling, therefore, our task will not be that of taking our agenda from counselling psychology and trying to see how this fits with Christian belief. It will rather be that of taking our agenda from Christian theology — in particular our understanding of human being and relation — informed as that must be by psychological insights, and seeking to reflect on the counselling task from that perspective.

### **Counselling implications of covenant theology**

I propose to take the concept of 'covenant' as one overarching category of biblical theology. From this I wish to sketch — and it can be no more than a sketch — some counselling implications of a covenant-based theological perspective, under the following headings:

- Covenant relationship
- Christ, the covenant mediator
- The life of the Spirit as a covenant resource
- Covenant promise and fulfilment.

#### *Covenant relationship*

My thesis here is that the counselling task is the establishment of a covenant relationship between counsellor and client which derives its meaning from and should be patterned on God's covenant relationship with his people.<sup>8</sup>



'I will be your God; you will be my people'. This is the refrain by which God established his purpose for his people from the beginnings of the Old Testament age, and through to Revelation at the end of the New.

'Covenant' refers to the relationship God has established with the world and with people — with people in general, not just believers. In it he discloses his nature and his will, both by acts and by the interpretation he gives of those acts; he invites his people to discover their true being by consciously responding to his self-disclosure, and he sets the conditions by which this covenant relationship is to be established and enjoyed. To be human is to be called by the word into covenant with God. In a derivative sense, 'covenant' refers to the interpersonal roles and relationships which by nature, choice or need we make with our fellow human beings. In biblical theology, our human covenants of life with life are intended to be patterned on, and so reflect, something of the divine covenant of God the life-giver with all people and with his people.

Calvin comments on the mutuality of our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves at the very beginning of his *Institutes*:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.<sup>9</sup>

There is a correspondence between our relationship with and knowledge of God and our relationship with and knowledge of ourselves and of others. The key words of the divine covenant relationship are grace, love, promise, faithfulness, sacrifice, and obedience. These are intended, *mutatis mutandis*, to find meaning in our human covenant relations. Of course human covenants are very different in many ways from God's sovereign covenant. There is much about God's nature we do not share! But what the older theologies call his 'communicable attributes', we are called on to share and to express. The question for the counselling task is therefore: what is the meaning in the counselling relationship of covenant grace, love, promise, faithfulness, sacrifice and obedience?

### Noah and grace

The opening word in this biblical story is that of grace. 'Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord' (Gen. 6:8). In the context of human misery, disorder and wrong described in the prologue to the flood narrative, God establishes a relationship for rescue and restoration. The possibility is created for human being to be preserved even in the midst

of conditions of estrangement. It does not depend on Noah's worthiness: it is an approach of unconditioned sovereign freedom. The basic theological conviction here is that God makes things new. On the basis of his gracious intervention, God then established after the flood a covenant with all living beings: human creatureliness and humanness are held in being by God's word, and the conditions for human living in a fallen world are spelled out.

Grace says 'God is for us'. Here is the essential theological base for the affirmation of the self. We are not 'alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe', asserts Monod: God turns to us in grace. *We matter!* The word 'favour' (*chen*) here denotes the 'stronger coming to help the weaker, who stands in need of help by reason of his circumstances or natural weakness'.<sup>10</sup> It is the action of the sovereign God described later in these terms:

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand  
(Deut. 32:39).

God's initiative is wholly unconditioned. The *counselling covenant* will express something of this 'unconditional' regard, although it will leave us with decisions to take about the conditions which do have to be set in terms of accepting and refusing certain clients. Is there a difference at this point between 'pastoring' and 'counselling'?

### Abraham and Moses: personal communion

As we move in the development of covenant history to Abraham, again we find a word of gracious initiative, and again we find the establishment of a certain pattern of appropriate living. But centrally here we find a personal relationship. God calls Abraham by name. God's covenant with him is concerned with the establishment and welfare of his family.

At the beginning of the exodus narrative, the personal relationship is deepened further: God tells Moses *his* name! Human personhood is determined by relation with another. The 'image of God' is about personal communion. We share creatureliness with others of 'the sixth day', but we are invited also to be creatures of the *seventh* day: in whom personal relationship is the meaning of their being. The basic theological conviction here is that God speaks, and invites a personal response. The way God makes his relationships is by speech, to which the response is faithful obedience. Commenting on the covenant with Abraham in Romans 4:16-17, St Paul writes:

Abraham . . . is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father

of many nations' — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

God's promise, spoken through his word, creates life. The *counselling covenant* will be a personal relationship in which communication is central.

### Torah and sacrifice

There are certain moral boundaries for human being and human welfare, both individual and social. Alongside the gift of torah, there is also established a sacrificial system which was to keep alive in the experience of the covenant people the nature of their covenant God who came to them in their misery and acted for them at the exodus, who spoke to them and called them back to life and gave them a way to live. It was also to provide a means through forgiveness of keeping the relationship healthy.

God, in other words, sustains his people's life and holds them in their need. Later, in the prophetic consciousness, more of the character of God's sustaining, forgiving, restoring covenant love comes to clarity. In the eighth century, Hosea wrote of *hesed* (covenant love-faithfulness = *agape* love) in terms of God's persistent care for a wayward and adulterous people. *Hesed* is the central word of covenant love. It is used of God's loyal and faithful commitment to his people; it becomes the foundation for the people's life and their interpersonal relationships. It is a combination of *chen* and *hesed* together that we need to hold on to when we use the word 'grace'. As H. R. Mackintosh put it: 'Grace is love in its princely and sovereign form, love to the indifferent and the disloyal, whose one claim is their need.'<sup>11</sup>

It is *hesed* love which is the basis for the torah: that body of fatherly instruction which set moral boundaries to the people's behaviour which were appropriate to their well being, and which gave them guidance in loving. The motivation of the law is the welfare of the people: 'You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land which you shall possess' (Deut. 5:33); 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us' (Deut. 6:24f). The *counselling covenant* will require a moral framework within which human well-being can be sustained.

### Individual responsibility

As the covenant family grew, the corporate solidarity of belonging to one another developed to the point where corporate personality seemed to override individual responsibility. Against this, some of the prophets of the exile were to proclaim again the strong strand of individual personal responsibility within the context of corporate social determinants. The *counsellor* will be alert to social and environmental conditioning without letting go of personal responsibility.

### Wisdom is helping people to cope

Forged in the pain as well as the joy of being a covenant community, the wisdom traditions provided literature with the very practical aim of helping people to cope. It was the 'wise man' who helped people with their personal life-choices. Jeremiah tells us of three well established vocations within Israel, 'the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet' (Jer. 18:18). When, later, prophecy declined and the priesthood became impaired by political pressure, the major force in Israel's religion was the wise man who counselled. In the Old Testament, as in the New, ethics and religion are inseparable. The tasks of counselling and of spiritual direction were one task. The wise men give instruction — much of which is left to us in the book of Proverbs. Primarily they are teachers, but they are, in particular, teachers who discern that there is more to life than meets the eye. As another great book from the wisdom tradition — the book of Job — makes clear, humanistic wisdom can provide no resting place for personal life. 'If a man rigorously pursues that openness to facts which is the characteristic boast of humanism, he will find either that his confidence disintegrates, and he is thrown into despairing scepticism, such as we find in Ecclesiastes, or that he is brought to a faith in which his discernment of order in human existence is discovered to have its explanation in the being of a personal God.'<sup>12</sup>

The counselling task of the wise man within the covenant community was to enable a man who was trying to cope to discover a divine order to his life and circumstances which did provide a resting place for his personal quest. It was about the shape of his assumptive world and a person's significance within it. The *counselling covenant* today has to be set in the context of this divinely disclosed order.

### Psalms: covenant responses

The covenant God, we are beginning to see, redefines human life around a centre in himself. Human persons in covenant relationship with God are set in a new context which is framed by God's faithful

love. It is God who initiates, provides, forgives, supports, confronts, gives the resources by which his people may learn to find him and in so doing find themselves. This is the world in which counselling — all counselling — takes place. Counselling intervenes at many different points in the processes of a person's life to help move the blocks in finding a way to love God and neighbour.

It is in the security of this covenant context that certain human responses become appropriate expressions of faithful obedience to God's self-disclosure. Among these Brueggemann refers to the appropriateness of rage and protest as an expression of trust in the covenant-making God. He points also to the appropriateness of expressions both of grief and of praise. The way the psalms become vehicles for personal response to God in the worship of the covenant people points us to these expressions of personal feeling as being appropriate expressions of covenant faith at different times. Examples would be the *protest* of Psalm 88:

But I, O Lord, cry to thee; in the morning my prayer comes before thee.  
O Lord, why dost thou cast me off? Why dost thou hide thy face from me?  
Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer thy terrors; I am helpless

and the *grief* of Psalm 137; the *guilt* of Psalm 51; the *misery* of Psalm 73; the *longing* of Psalm 42; the *joy* of Psalm 18; the *assurance* of Psalm 23; and the *praise* of Psalm 103, etc.

### Summary

In the context of counselling we need to think out the relevance for our theory and practice of these dimensions of the divine covenant, for this is the God-given way for human relationships. What are the counselling implications of his initiative of grace, of coming into the point of pain and need, of the establishment of a personal relationship, of giving the boundaries within which such a relationship can be creative, of providing the resources of forgiveness, ritual and wisdom to keep the relationship going, and the opportunity for a safe expression of deepest feelings?

Is it not precisely because so much good counselling (whether overtly 'Christian' or not) actually mirrors to some degree something of 'God's way of relating', that it is effective in helping people discover more of themselves, and how to live more appropriately? Thomas Oden writes:

An adequate theory of therapy must not only understand therapeutic growth as a product of human self-disclosure, but authentic human self-disclosure as a response to the self-disclosure of God in being itself.<sup>13</sup>

However, we perhaps need to stress again that whereas the divine

covenant is between the sovereign Lord and needy people, the counselling covenant is between two people who both have needs. In the context of mutual needs what we have said about unconditional regard, personal relationship, a moral framework and social conditioning still has meaning. But our counselling is not a one way process. The counsellor — alongside the goal of helping to enhance the personhood of the other — has his or her own needs which are also part of the counselling process. The counsellor, too, is in search of completion.

### *Christ, the covenant mediator*

In the Old Testament, much of the covenant material points beyond itself to a future deeper fulfilment. What in the Old Testament is often primarily promise, in the New Testament takes on the colour of fulfilment. Embodied in one person we find not only the fullness of God's promise that he is 'for us' and that he 'makes things new', that we hear his word, that we see his character, that we are offered his forgiveness, that we apprehend the divine wisdom; we *also* see *embodied* the full human response of faithful loving obedience. Christ in his own person is the embodiment of what the Old Testament covenant promise and community were but pointers towards. *He* makes things new.

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 7:22).

My thesis in this section is that the counselling task is one part of the work of God to make new people within a new community of which Christ is the head. There are five headings:

Incarnation: God for us and with us

The grace of God which initiates the Old Testament covenants becomes event within our history in the person of Jesus Christ. In him we see true God and true man. He fully bears the divine image, and in his self-disclosure of God he fully makes the word of God known.

The incarnation vividly declares that God is *for us*. In Christ, God enters in person into our broken and painful human condition and makes it his own. As Oden puts it, *God 'assumes our frame of reference'*.<sup>14</sup> In the counselling context, 'empathy' is the word used to describe the process of placing oneself in the frame of reference of another, sharing their world with them. The counselling implications of the incarnation centre on the 'divine empathy': God for us. Just as the incarnate God became 'vulnerable' for us in Christ, so the counsellor is made vulnerable to others.

### Divine and human: empathy without loss of identity

Jesus is not only true God he is also true man. Oden makes a link between the congruence of the two natures of Christ, and the importance of the counsellor not ceasing to be himself even in the midst of sharing another's pain.<sup>15</sup> 'Even as God participates in our estrangement without being estranged from himself, likewise the therapist participates in the estrangement of the client without losing his self-identity.'<sup>16</sup>

### Cross: healing of the self

The mediatorial work of Christ is perhaps focused best in the word 'forgiveness'. Forgiveness does not minimize wrong, but rather *accepts* the person who is in the wrong, and refuses, through costly self-giving, to allow the wrong to destroy the relationship. 'Acceptance' has become a word with too many connotations to be helpful. Rogerian theory speaks of 'acceptance' in the sense of non-judgemental empathy and affirmation. Some Christian writers argue against this, saying that to 'accept' in this way is the equivalent to condoning wrong and sin. We should not 'accept', they say, we should rather 'exhort' and sometimes 'confront'. However the acceptance associated with forgiveness can sometimes imply confrontation. God 'accepts' us unconditionally and without requiring prior qualification for his interest in us, yet he does so without affirming all that we are or do. Indeed the parables makes clear that his invitation to the feast will require a change of clothes: we cannot stay as we are with the rags of the hedgerows. So we can use the word 'acceptance' of the counsellor's approach to the client to speak of no pre-conditions, of empathy, warmth and respect as the opening basis for the relationship, and also of the acknowledgment that some things will need to be changed as the counselling covenant develops. It is God's acceptance of us through Christ's forgiveness which serves as the model for our acceptance of ourselves and of others. It is not a blanket affirmation; there is a moral discrimination and the hope of change.

### Christ the whole person

Christ the true man is not only the means by which God's gracious acceptance and welcome comes to us, he also displays what true humanity is. Christ is the head of a new humanity, and through his covenanted relationship with us God is building a new community 'in Christ'. It is at this point that the appropriateness of the approaches of Frank Lake and Jack Dominionian, for example, is clear. Lake chooses the 'Christ model', albeit based rather narrowly on a Johannine Christology, as the goal of the therapeutic encounter. The counsellor is to facilitate 'Christ-realization' within the client. Dominionian portrays Jesus as the whole

man, emotionally and psychologically as well as 'spiritually', who serves as a model of true humanness.<sup>17</sup>

One point of particular interest for our purposes is the emotional life of Jesus. Warfield opens his classic study 'On the Emotional Life of Our Lord' with the statement: 'It belongs to the truth of our Lord's humanity that he was subject to all sinless human emotions.'<sup>18</sup> He then goes on to survey all the gospel references to Jesus' emotions, beginning with 'compassion' and 'love', moving on to the 'moral sense' which reacts to evil in terms of 'indignation' and 'anger', then the 'afflictions' of the 'Man of Sorrows' leading to the 'joy' that was set before him. His soul is 'troubled'; there is a repugnance to all that death meant; he is 'distressed and despondent' (Matt. 26:37), or as Mark has it 'appalled and despondent' (Mark 14:33); 'sorrowful unto death'. There is the 'agony' of Gethsemane; the anguish of the dereliction of the cross. Sometimes he experiences 'wonder' (Matt. 8:10, Luke 7:9); once 'desire' is attributed to him (Luke 22:15) — he had 'set his heart on' eating with his disciples and once he speaks of himself as conceivably the subject of 'shame' (Mark 8:38). Our Lord's emotions 'fulfilled themselves, as ours do' comments Warfield, 'in physical reactions'.<sup>19</sup>

He who hungered (Matt. 4:2), thirsted (John 19:20), was weary (John 4:6), who knew both physical pain and pleasure, expressed also in bodily affections the emotions that stirred his soul. . . . Not only do we read that he wept (John 11:35) and wailed (Luke 19:41), sighed (Mark 7:34) and groaned (Mark 8:12), but we read also of his angry glare (Mark 3:5), his annoyed speech (Mark 10:14), his chiding words (e.g. Mark 3:12), the outbursting ebullition of his rage (e.g. John 11:33, 38); of the agitation of his bearing when under strong feeling (John 11:35), the open exultation of his joy (Luke 10:21), the unrest of his movements in the face of anticipated evils (Matt. 26:37), the loud cry which was wrung from him in his moment of desolation (Matt. 27:46). Nothing is lacking to make the impression strong that we have before us in Jesus a human being like ourselves.<sup>20</sup>

It is noteworthy that these are strong emotions, there is a full range of emotions, and yet throughout the expression of them Jesus is always in control: our Lord is always 'Master of himself'.

The value of this knowledge for us is not only to tell us that it is possible within a human life to find a way of expressing emotions appropriately and responsibly, and in a way that is pleasing to God, but also to encourage us that it is safe for us to try to learn the appropriate release of our emotions, because he has been there too. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it he is not untouched with 'the feeling of our infirmities' (Heb. 4:15).



### The 'wonderful counsellor': guiding, consoling, delivering

Jesus, true God and true man, is mediator of the covenant between God and his people. He is the one to whom the prophet Isaiah pointed forward — the one who as well as being mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace — is the wonderful counsellor. Indeed his role as counsellor is to make available to the people knowledge of God as 'mighty', as 'father' and to bring 'peace'. As the picture of the coming one develops throughout the various writings of the book of Isaiah, we find him described first as the king on whom rests the 'Spirit of counsel and might' whose ministry of word and spirit is to guide and discipline. In later chapters the coming one is described as the suffering servant whose ministry of word and spirit is of consolation and comfort. In the closing chapters, he becomes the conqueror with a ministry of word and spirit of deliverance from evil. The total restoring work of the coming messiah, the wonderful counsellor, is guidance, consolation and deliverance. It is this which Jesus perfectly fulfils.

### *The life of the Spirit as a covenant resource*

My thesis here is that it is the work of the Spirit which makes available to those in need the counselling work of Christ, and that the counselling task is to be understood in the context of the work of the Spirit.

#### Common grace

It is by the Holy Spirit that the response of covenant faithfulness to the divine initiative is made possible. It is a manifestation of the work of the Spirit whenever human faithful responses in personal relationships mirror God's covenant. What God requires, that in Christ — through the Spirit — he also gives.

Part of the Spirit's work is to restrain evil and disorder, and to promote a context in which humanness can be restored. This has often been referred to as God's 'common grace'; it is not restricted to the Christian community. Out there, apart from me, apart from church: God is at work — and God is *for* us! It is the secret work of the Spirit, healing wounds, establishing rationality, making peace, and furthering human harmony. The healing work of the doctor, the therapist, the counsellor can be seen as part of the workings of God's 'common grace'.

#### Paraklesis

There is a special work of the Spirit, however, which provides a close model for the task of counselling. In the Johannine writings the Spirit is described as *parakletos*, one who is sent to bring active help. He is an

intercessor and a facilitator.<sup>21</sup> But he does more: he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement (John 16:8). He will 'teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance' all that Jesus has said (14:26). Although the world will not know him the disciples 'know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you' (14:17). He will 'bear witness' to Jesus (15:26). In other words, 'his role is to continue the revealing work of Jesus'.<sup>22</sup> The Spirit is given to continue the work of the historical Jesus. Jesus and the Spirit are both called *parakletos* (John 14:16; 1 John 2:1).

What is involved in *paraklesis* — this counselling work of the Spirit? The verb *parakaleo* is used 109 times in the New Testament, and covers a range of meanings: summon, invite, ask, implore, exhort, beseech, comfort, encourage. The most frequent words are 'beseech' (43x), 'comfort' (23x), and 'exhort' (19x). We have here, therefore, a range of pastoral responses by which the revealing and convincing work of the Spirit is expressed. They seem closely to parallel the work of the wonderful counsellor: guidance, consolation and deliverance.

#### Mutual ministry in the worshipping community

The New Testament picture of ministry stresses its mutuality: encouraging 'one another'. The work of one Spirit is expressed in a variety of gifts within the community of worship and service. The worshipping community is the healing community. Rituals of worship are part of the 'means of grace' of the Spirit. The underlying conviction is that it is the work of the Spirit in the new community to enable us to make good relationships with others, within the boundaries of the truth of Christ which he reveals, using his gifts — including our own temperament and personality — by making available the fruits of the Spirit. In the mutuality of the counselling covenant, especially in the worshipping community, God through his Spirit can work to 'make things new'.

#### *Covenant promise and fulfilment*

The eschatological dimension to covenant theology is vividly focused in the closing chapters of the Bible:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be

mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.' And he who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new' (Rev. 21:1-5a).

There are three counselling implications from this picture. *Firstly*, that the task of 'making new' is a process with a goal. We are not trapped in a changeless determinism; we are not held by our past. Re-creation is possible, is beginning, and will come to fulfilment. *Secondly*, fulfilment will be then rather than now. In the whole salvation drama, there is a 'now' and there is a 'not yet'. What God promises now, and can in some measure be experienced now, will not be experienced in its fullness until then. For now, we still live with the ambiguity and brokenness of tears and crying and mourning and death, even while being made new. This will caution us against a false optimism and proud perfectionism this side of heaven. T. F. Torrance refers to that pause between the two words spoken by Jesus to the paralytic (Mark 2:5f.) as 'eschatological reserve'.<sup>23</sup> There is an interval between the declaration of the word of forgiveness and the word of physical restoration. Before the word of wholeness is spoken, the paralytic is held fast by the word of forgiveness. This helps us to place present disorder in the context of an ultimate new order. Counselling takes place aware of this 'eschatological reserve'. But *thirdly*, the acting of re-creation is God's action and he is doing it and will bring it to completion. And that is a word of *hope* — which should characterize all our human relating and particularly our counselling. 'We do not know what we shall be, but we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).

If God's gracious calling is the theological basis for affirmation of the self; if his covenant is the basis for the relatedness of the self, if the salvation through Jesus Christ is the basis for the healing of the self, then eschatology is the basis for the self's ultimate significance.

### **Towards a theological anthropology**

Within the context of covenant relationship, counselling is about discovering and developing personhood. We will conclude first by going back to the Christian understanding of *creation* as the framework for covenant, and then go on to outline our understanding of *personhood* as the creator's gift and as our personal goal.

#### *Creation as the framework for covenant*

It was Karl Barth who expounded 'covenant fidelity' as the inner

meaning and purpose of our creation as human beings in the divine image, and the whole of the created order as the external framework for, and condition of the possibility of keeping covenant.<sup>24</sup> From the Christian understanding of creation, I wish to draw four implications:

#### Creation implies dependence

The whole created order depends on God for 'life and breath and all things'. True fulfilment of creatureliness is thus to be found in an appropriate expression of response to the fact that we are creatures. This means that we are not autonomous; that life is a loan; that we depend on God for the resources for living (whether we acknowledge that or not). We need, however, to distinguish an immature and childish dependence which tries to escape from personal responsibility, from a 'mature dependence'<sup>25</sup> characterized not by getting but by giving. In counselling terms, we need to avoid basing our practice on the view that we are autonomous and have sufficient resources in ourselves for living truly; we also need to avoid creating irresponsible infantile dependence. In terms of the human relationship of counsellor to client, the goal must be to create 'mature dependence', or perhaps 'mature interdependence', which mirrors our dependent yet responsible creaturely relationship with God. For surely the counsellor as wounded healer has to receive from the client as well as vice-versa.

#### Creation implies contingency

Humanness is not a necessary development from creatureliness. We are creatures alongside the rest of the animal world, creatures of the sixth day, but we are distinct within the creaturely realm as being also creatures of the seventh day. The distinction is not determined by our creatureliness, but by being called to be human by God. Our human calling cannot therefore be discovered or defined with reference only to our creatureliness (our biology, our psychology, our social and environmental determinants). It can be known only through the divine self-disclosure and the will of God for man as he reveals it. This is why a *theological* anthropology is the basis for the integration of all the other human sciences.

#### Humanness involves response to word

That which distinguished the human animal from other animals is the capacity to respond to the divine word. There is a human rationality which corresponds to the divine rationality, such that when the word of God comes to a man, he is addressed personally and invited to make a personal response. This sets man apart from other creatures. What makes human relationships essentially human is the capacity for verbal

communication. Therapeutic attempts to enhance humanness, therefore, will include attempts to facilitate verbal communication and rational understanding. This is also why we can understand distortion and pain and disease and death within the *creaturely* world without labelling them sinful — and yet affirm our accountability to the word of God which constitutes our personal and human being.

Creation implies responsible freedom

The calling of God to us to be human, and to express our humanness in covenant relationship with him and with our fellow men, involves the capacity to make an individual and personal responsible decision to do so. God's address is in terms of invitation. Within the constraints of our creatureliness (which limits our action, while at the same time creating opportunity for action) and within the determinants of our psychological and social environments (which also limit and enable us), we are invited to be free persons. Therapy will address those areas of personal and social need which inhibit the exercise of a responsible freedom which block our loving God or loving our neighbours as ourselves. It will seek to enhance responsible action, and the enjoyment of personal freedom, within God-given boundaries. For personal freedom is not irrational arbitrariness. It is a contingent freedom given and so bounded by the divine freedom, and the constraint of God's own nature.

*Personhood as gift and as goal*

The task of counselling we defined as helping a 'client' to discover ways of living 'more satisfyingly and resourcefully' with the implication of some dissatisfaction and incapacity. There is an assumption that counselling is about personal interaction between persons, and yet with a view to personal change. There is an assumption that in one sense the client is fully a person, and in another sense not yet fully a person. That ambiguity is present also in the way we use the word 'human'. As Macquarrie notes, we might describe a certain man as human — in contrast to merely animal — but yet 'inhuman' in the way he behaves.<sup>26</sup> That ambiguity is the truth of the human condition in all of us. In one sense we are fully human, in another sense anything but. It is to point up this ambiguity that I refer to human personhood as both gift and as goal.

Personhood as gift

To affirm that human beings are made 'in the image of God' — despite the fact that this side of the fall this is expressed — as Thielicke puts it — 'in the negative mode', gives a reference point for personal worth and for the obligation that we treat one another as persons, as neighbours,

irrespective of our own capacities and achievements. The client is my neighbour because his personhood is derived; his is an 'alien dignity' (Barth) bestowed by God; he does not become my neighbour only when certain relational abilities are present. His personhood is a gift, or as Barth puts it a 'loan', to be affirmed and respected.

In counselling terms this will caution against any technique which fails to treat the other as person, but rather as the object of mere manipulation. It will also challenge the notion, at the root of much personal misery, that self-worth is somehow dependent on achievement.

### Personhood as goal

To affirm personhood as a gift, however, is not to say that all is well with the world. On the contrary, the image of God is seen in fullness only in Christ. For the rest of us, the 'image' is a pale shadow of what is meant to be a shining reflection. Personhood is given its meaning in relation to another, and the human predicament is that all our relationships at all levels are disordered. The theological concept of sin as failure to keep covenant with God underlies the therapeutic language of 'estrangement', 'alienation', 'anxiety' and 'disorder'. Whether we speak of 'ego' as being 'split'<sup>27</sup> or as only 'weak'<sup>28</sup> there is an acknowledgment that full personhood is found in the growth of interpersonal relating, and that there is much that is disordered which hinders that growth.

The human story was meant to be one of development. Adam was to grow in knowledge of God on the basis of obedience. That development was stunted and distorted in the attempt to grow in knowledge on the basis of rebellion. The covenant of grace is the offer of God to make things new. Growth back to full personhood, the true image of God, is by way of faithful response to the covenant promise. Maturing, both psychological and spiritual, is thus a process of change and development. The phases of growth in personal identity are not irrelevant to the process of moving towards the goal of full personhood, and developmental psychology has valuable insights in terms of personal, moral and religious development.

But it is within the human covenants of life with life, of which the counsellor-client relationship is but one, that opportunities are made available for personal development, to understand and deal with some of the personal disorders which hinder growth, and facilitate the work of the Spirit in bringing us nearer to the divine image, and so nearer to our true humanity. Our confidence rests in the fact that while we struggle for ourselves and with others to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, God is at work in us to will and to work for his good pleasure. All our hopes and joys and failures are to be set in the context that this is his world, and *he* is the one who has no need of counselling help:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

(Rom. 11:33-36 NIV)

## Conclusion

We must try to develop our understanding of personhood within a theological anthropology. We must try to set our goals on the pattern of truly free and fulfilled humanity we see in Christ. We must try to understand the mechanisms of personal and behavioural change in the light of the work of the Spirit. These are the Christian assumptions about man, about values, about change which will undergird our theology of counselling. And we will try to understand our task as part of our covenant response to God's gracious initiative to us, and as seeking to be faithful (in the covenant sense) in our covenanted relationships with others. It is in this sort of framework that we shall try to integrate the insights of psychology and the human sciences to sharpen our understanding of personal relationship, and by which our theological formulations will be tested and modified.

## NOTES

1. This paper was originally read at the Care and Counsel conference 'Towards a Theology of Counselling', September 1983 and subsequently published in the evangelical Anglican journal *Anvil* 1/2 (1984), which can be obtained from *Anvil* Subscription Secretary, c/o St John's College, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3DS at £8.40 (\$14.80) per annum. We gratefully acknowledge the permission of Peter Williams, the editor, and David Atkinson, the author, to use this article.
2. British Association of Counselling.
3. John Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology*, (Rosemead, 1982).
4. Cf. Albert Ellis, 'The Psychotherapist's Case against Religion.' A paper read at the New York Humanist Society, New York 1965.
5. Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, (Philadelphia, 1970).
6. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, (New Haven, 1950).
7. M. Jeeves, *Christianity and Psychology: The View Both Ways*, (Leicester, 1976).
8. In much of this section I am indebted to Walter Brueggemann, 'Covenanting as Human Vocation', *Interpretation* 33 (1979), pp.115-129.
9. *Institutes*, 1.1.1.
10. C. Brown, (ed.), *International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., (Exeter, 1975-78), 2, p.115 (article on 'Grace').

11. Quoted in T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, (Edinburgh, 1984), p.12.
12. E. W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms*, (Oxford, 1968), p.184.
13. T. Oden, *Kerygma and Counselling*, (New York, 1978).
14. *Ibid.*, p.50.
15. *Ibid.*, pp.56ff.
16. *Ibid.*, p.57.
17. J. Dominian, *Cycles of Affirmation*, (London, 1975).
18. B. B. Warfield, 'On the Emotional Life of Our Lord', in *The Person and Work of Christ*, (Philadelphia, 1956).
19. *Ibid.*, p.138.
20. *Ibid.*, pp.138f.
21. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Cambridge, 1957).
22. Brown, *op. cit.*, 1, p.89 (article on 'Advocate').
23. Quoted in Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*, (Grand Rapids, 1982), p.129.
24. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (ET Edinburgh, 1958), 3.1.
25. W. R. D. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, (London, 1952).
26. John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, (London, 1982), pp.1ff.
27. M. Klein, 'Our Adult World and Its Roots in Infancy', in *Envy and Gratitude*, (London, 1975).
28. H. Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena: Object Relations and the Self*, (London, 1977).



## Book Reviews

Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Word Books, 1980) 477pp, \$10.95 paperback

Dr Collins is Professor of Psychology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois; he has written several books in the fields of psychology and counselling.

His stated aim in this volume is to provide 'a resource tool for pastors and other Christian counselors and a study guide for lay helpers and a text book for use in seminaries and colleges'. In my opinion he succeeds in all of these aims; I know of no better comparable work.

The book is divided into six sections. The first serves as an introduction and contains four chapters giving an overview of counselling. The second covers personal issues in five chapters: anxiety, loneliness, depression, anger, and guilt. Section three has five chapters dealing with issues of singleness and marriage. The fourth section is devoted to problems arising within family life from cradle to grave. The fifth section deals with sexual and interpersonal issues. The final section attempts to cover all remaining matters, like financial problems, drugs and alcohol, sickness, grief, spiritual problems, and life's traumas.

Chapters and topics can be consulted in isolation from the rest of the book. In each chapter Collins covers relevant biblical material, information about the matter under consideration, practical help in counselling, and other relevant factors. He generally includes a section on prevention, and adds useful suggestions for further reading.

While the book is well permeated with insights from contemporary psychology, Collins freely acknowledges that it is God who gives the capacity and desire to counsel. He has written the book with the hope that the Holy Spirit will use its contents to equip Christian counsellors to be more aware and sensitive towards those they seek to counsel.

*Gwen Hicks*

H. Taylor, *Tend my Sheep* (SPCK, 1983) 305pp, £6.50 paperback

This Theological Education Fund study guide is the fruit of 16 years of pastoral care, administration and theological teaching in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Since 1977, the author has taught missiology at the Bible College of Victoria in Australia. A brief survey of the contents of his book will give some idea of its potential usefulness.

A short introduction sets the scene by looking at the subject from the

point of view of a shepherd looking after his sheep. Part 1, 'The Ministry of Pastoral Care', develops this metaphor in the first chapter by means of an examination of the 'Good Shepherd' theme in the Bible, with special reference to the way in which Jesus cared for the needs of people during his earthly ministry. The second chapter looks at the way in which pastoral care has been exercised in the church down the centuries. Careful note is taken of patterns to avoid as well as examples to be imitated. Chapter 3 is designed to develop an understanding of how people tick and how a pastorally inclined person can help others to function better as people. This is followed by a chapter written in order to help such a person to understand himself better.

Part 2 expounds 'The Ministry of Counselling', starting with the need for counselling, the sort of counselling required, the best person to provide counselling, and continuing with the approach to counselling and the practice of counselling, and concluding with an important study of the spiritual resources available to the counsellor.

Part 3 looks at some common counselling situations, including marriage and family relationships, sickness and healing, death and bereavement. A whole chapter is devoted to the problem of coping with change.

The epilogue is devoted to the need for evaluating our ministry of pastoral care.

Useful features of this book are the 65 detailed examples and case studies drawn from real life, the questions and suggestions for review, research and discussion that appear at the end of each chapter — after all, it is a study guide! — and the many scripture references that appear throughout the book and are also collected at the end of the book under subject headings.

The style is direct, straightforward and crystal clear, and the tone biblical, devotional and warm.

The intending reader should be notified that this book was specially written for use in the so-called Third World. This means that its subjects, case studies and study questions are selected with that in mind, and the topics it singles out for special attention are those which are particularly relevant to those parts of the world. But this is not a book merely for those who work in those areas (though it is that). It deals with basic, universal needs, problems and solutions which should concern us all, and it does so with an objectivity that enables the attentive reader to learn 'at a distance'.

The following passage gives something of the flavour of the book:

*Jesus accepted people as they were.* To 'accept' a person is to recognize that person's worth *as a person*, whether or not one agrees with their ideas or approves of their behaviour. Jesus did not approve of wrong behaviour, but

He did not let His condemnation of people's wrong behaviour get in the way of His loving relationship with them, or prevent Him from helping them.

*Harold H. Rowdon*

Duncan Buchanan, *The Counselling of Jesus*  
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1985) 174pp. £4.95 paperback

This book, recently published in the 'Jesus Library' series, edited by Michael Green, is particularly suitable for any who are suspicious of the idea of counselling people who have an emotional or personal need that cannot be put into spiritual terms. For it shows that helping people in need is a way of following the example of Jesus. The book breathes a desire that people should become whole in him.

The author does not disdain the help which can be gained from the insights of others, but points out what he sees to be their limitations and inadequacies on the one hand, and maintains that Jesus acted in accordance with their genuine insights on the other. There is a particularly helpful discussion of the usefulness and limitations of both directive and non-directive methods of counselling.

Most of the chapters of this helpful book, which is written by the principal of a South African theological college who has had many years' experience of helping others, take the form of a brief discussion of a subject, followed by a section dealing with the way Jesus handled it, and another showing how it can be handled today.

The first chapter, entitled 'Abba', discusses the way in which his relationship with the father enabled Jesus to handle feelings of guilt (in others), temptation, fear, shame, antagonism, loneliness and anger. There follow chapters on listening, fear, anxiety, anger (with which depression is linked), self-acceptance, repentance and forgiveness, giving and receiving — i.e. dependencies — (in which the need for empathy and compassion is stressed), the love of God in counselling, models (in which the way that Jesus dealt with various individuals is discussed), directive and non-directive counselling, and man and sin.

The editor is right in commenting on the unique character of this book, but it is doubtful whether the expectations raised by the editor's preface or the publisher's blurb are fully matched. But there can be no doubt that it contains much helpful material which could go a long way towards overcoming prejudices against the study and practice of counselling. The thoughtful reader will also gain many insights into the way in which people tick and ways in which they can be helped, as they are reminded of the way in which the master went about that task. He should perhaps be warned that the author is evidently writing from a

somewhat high church, charismatic perspective, but this in no way detracts from the value of his book: in some ways it enhances it. Here then is a useful introduction to the subject which can hardly fail to whet the appetite for more.

*Harold H. Rowdon*

Evelyn Peterson, *Who Cares? A Handbook of Christian Counselling* (Paternoster Press, 1980) 181pp. £3.95 paperback

So much material is available on the subject of Christian counselling that any book must have a distinctive contribution to make if a review of this nature is to be justified. *Who Cares?* does this at just those points where non-professionals, deeply moved by the emotional needs of their fellow-men and having committed themselves to prepare for a caring ministry, meet the dilemma of divided professional opinion. One issue is that of the relationship subsisting between the Bible and modern psychological insights. Another is the normally highly polarized debate over the respective validity of directive and non-directive methods of counselling. For the bewildered layman Evelyn Peterson provides a constructive approach to this dilemma and shows that it is possible — better, necessary — to employ understanding and techniques drawn from both sides. ‘Since Christ is the source of all truth (John 14:6) any proven psychological insight must agree with scriptural truth.’ (p.16).

The book comprises four major parts dealing respectively with the definition of Christian counselling, the development of suitable perspectives, a description of various types of counselling and, finally, discernment of specific kinds of problems the counsellor may have to handle. The first of these parts is very straightforward, requiring no comment. Something needs to be said about part two, however, in connection with the author’s discussion of the Christian view of personality. She is committed to a tripartite view, based largely on 1 Thesalonians 5:23, which is a well-known and widely accepted model, especially among conservative evangelicals. The extreme lengths to which this model is pushed analytically, though, results in explanations and conclusions of varying quality and validity. For example, on the ‘three accepted sub-divisions’ of the mind (will, intellect and emotion) it would have been helpful to clarify the relationship between emotions and feelings; they seem to be used interchangeably in this book. On page 47 the unsupported statement is made that the emotions are ‘symbolised

in scripture as the heart of man' (Mark 7:21). Reference to this text might suggest that the will is a more likely candidate for this distinction. With regard to man's spirit nature 'its three suggested parts' (conscience, Holy Spirit and gifts) seems to be an arbitrary classification leading to the conclusion that spiritual gifts are part of our natural endowments, the difference between the Christian and non-Christian lying in the extent to which development of these 'talents' takes place. (See p.47). The rest of this section, on Age-behaviour Relationships and Defence Mechanisms, is much clearer and coherent, suggesting that Dr. Peterson is more at home with clinical psychology than with biblical exegesis.

The chapters on types of counselling are perceptive and instructive, setting out both policy and procedures to be used in crisis intervention and supportive counselling. This latter, which is the kind of commitment demanded of a caring church, is expounded at some length and is very practical. Chapter 9, on specific therapeutic techniques, needs to be read discerningly, for some of the methods set out call for considerable expertise. Wrongly used they could cause damage rather than produce healing, for they consciously seek to manipulate the client's feeling, thinking or choosing. The author advises that 'some of these are best left for a professional psychologist to use' but does not indicate which of the nine fall under this head or whether she is referring to techniques other than those described here.

Part four seeks to inculcate awareness of the underlying pathological processes that lead to distortion of the 'emotions', intellect and will. This is an important set of chapters for it equips the counsellor to recognise the category of problem he is dealing with and thereby to predict, even anticipate, the pattern of behaviour associated with it. Forewarned is forearmed! A short appendix on the major psychological disorders, a bibliography and an index round off the book.

Alliteration is regularly used in titles and subtitles and all the charts and diagrams display a remarkable balance, even symmetry. These methods are essentially the stuff of the lecture room — verbal-visual communication rather than literary — and tended with this reviewer to create suspicion (too good to be true?) and distraction (will she keep it up?) instead of admiration and delight. This style may well have contributed to some of the analytical difficulties mentioned earlier. With all this, however, *Who Cares?* is well worth buying, reading, studying and keeping for reference, especially for its contribution towards helping ordinary Christian counsellors understand and incorporate into their ministry the results of modern psychological investigation in the light of an unchanging gospel.

*Jim Harris*

Myra Chave-Jones, *The Gift of Helping*, (IVP, 1982) £1.75 paperback

This concise book, first published in 1982, is written by Myra Chave-Jones, former Director of Care and Counsel, who has herself a wealth of experience as a 'professional helper'. It was primarily addressed 'to people in the student world who want to respond helpfully to the cries of others, people who want to be encouragers and comforters to those who are worried or in distress' but has already been of help to a much wider group of people than students.

The book is clearly written and commences by stressing the need for anyone who seeks to help others to understand themselves first. Helpful suggestions as to how to do this are made, including the use of the Bible and Christian friends, and important distinctions are made between spiritual and emotional problems. Ways of approaching problems are then covered clearly, emphasising the importance of trust and communication in any helping relationship but also the need for objectivity. Throughout the book helping situations are brought alive by illustrations from real life which most people will be able to identify with. Specific problems such as depression, loneliness, bereavement and sexual relationships are covered briefly with good suggestions for further reading.

Perhaps the most crucial chapter in this book is the one on listening, which not only emphasises the importance of listening but gives practical hints on ways of cultivating this skill, which is of value to every Christian of any age and in any fellowship.

John Stott, in his foreword to this book, states that the author 'recognises that there are many situations of need in which ordinary Christians can learn how to love and serve people with sensitivity'. I would recommend this book to any 'ordinary Christian' who wants to be more able to help others in need.

*Rosemary Jennings*

# PARTNERSHIP

## WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP?

**Partnership** is an association of individuals committed to the service of Brethren and other churches wishing to avail themselves of the facilities it offers.

**Partnership** works in fellowship with local churches and para-church bodies to serve the cause of Christ in the world today. It aims to strengthen the churches by disseminating information, stimulating growth and development of spiritual gifts, providing critical analysis of current trends and movements, and encouraging the application of biblical principles to the solution of contemporary problems facing the churches.

**Partnership** has strong links with Brethren churches, and therefore has a particular interest in research into Brethren history, in providing a reference point for communication with other churches, and in establishing links with Brethren churches around the world.

**Partnership** is an initiative of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship which was founded in 1963, has conducted many conferences and seminars, publishes a journal, now known as *The Christian Brethren Review* and has a variety of other publications to its credit.

**Partnership** is responsible to a body of trustees, operates through a growing number of project groups under the general guidance of an executive committee, and is led by an executive director.

## WHAT DOES PARTNERSHIP OFFER?

### A Growing Range of Publications

These include:

*The Christian Brethren Review*. Published once or twice a year, the review contains papers given at seminars and specially commissioned articles of current and historical interest.

*Occasional Papers*. These are special publications dealing with single topics.

*Newsletters*. Published several times a year, these keep subscribers in touch with the current scene.

*Booklets.* A series of booklets is planned to provide brief treatments of topical issues for general readers.

### **Seminars in London and Elsewhere**

**London seminars** are held twice a year. Recent topics include worship (1985), pastoral care (1984) and world mission (1983). A seminar programme normally includes addresses, discussion of case studies in small groups, an open forum and an epilogue.

**Regional seminars** have been held in Bournemouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Bangor, Birmingham and Northampton. Seminars are planned for other locations. Enquiries are invited from anyone interested in the possibility of arranging a local seminar.

**Tape recordings** are available of most of the addresses given at seminars.

### **Surveys**

A survey of church growth was undertaken in 1978. An analysis of the results was published by Paternoster Press under the title *'The Brethren' Today — A Factual Survey* (ed. G. Brown and B. Mills).

A survey of resident full-time workers in local churches was conducted in 1984 in preparation for a consultation to be held in 1985 and subsequent publication.

### **Projects**

Among the projects already in operation or in preparation are the following:

**Student ministry** Conferences for students have been held annually since 1978, and churches in areas where students are numerous have been encouraged to do all in their power to meet the needs of Christian students.

**World mission study/action group** A group has been set up to investigate the situation in regard to education in world mission, and to stimulate assistance to missionary candidates, missionaries on leave and on retiral.

**Inter-church contacts** Enquiries are received from churches, the media and research workers, and contacts are actively followed up.

**International contacts** Personal links have been formed with Brethren in other countries, both in Europe and further afield. A conference of European Brethren (1985) has been one result of these contacts.



**Information and resource services** Steps are being taken to survey the resources available to our churches, and to make this information available.

**Training courses** These are being developed in consultation with church leaders in various parts of the country.

### **HOW CAN I BECOME INVOLVED IN PARTNERSHIP?**

We invite your participation by:

- your prayers
- subscription to our publications
- donation to our working funds
- involvement in our activities

### **MY RESPONSE**

Please fill in the response slips below, and send them to the appropriate addresses.

#### **Subscription to Partnership Publications**

To:

The Paternoster Press, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter, EX2 4JW.

I should like to subscribe to Partnership Publications, and enclose my annual subscription of £7.50. (There are advantages in multiple subscriptions — see Paternoster Magazine Order Form.)

Signature .....

Name (block capitals) .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Date .....