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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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living.*

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bondage. It is to move out of our cozy homogeneous units and to identify with those issues which promise freedom. It seems to me that this is the only way the Church can validate its claim that Jesus frees and unites. The Church must be set free; the Church must be united; the Church must be born again for others.

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## The Breakthrough Counselling Centre

Philemon Yuen-Wan Choi

*Reprinted from Asia Theological Association's Asian Perspective Series,  
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*Interest in counselling is relatively new in the Chinese church. According to Dr. Choi, up to six or seven years ago, Bible colleges and seminaries offered no courses in pastoral counselling. Literature on the subject, apart from translations from English, has been in short supply. A 1978 survey of pastors in Hong Kong revealed that the majority spend 50–70 per cent of their time in administrative duties, while spending only 10–20 per cent of their time in counselling. While this is in part due to a disproportionately heavy work load, 70 per cent of the pastors surveyed felt they did not have sufficient training for a counselling ministry. But there are signs that the picture is changing. In Taiwan, Christians have established telephone counselling, family counselling and youth counselling services for the community. In 1976, C. Y. Kau, a seminary professor of practical theology, wrote An Introduction to Pastoral Counselling (Taiwan: China Evangelical Seminary, 1976) in Chinese. In Hong Kong, which Dr. Choi says still lags behind Taiwan in the area of counselling, the Fellowship of Evangelical Students established the Breakthrough Counselling Centre in 1975 as a form of outreach. The following is a description of the Centre by Dr. Choi, its current director and director of Breakthrough Magazine. It is the second half of his booklet, Counselling—A New Frontier in Asia, available as No. 24 of the Asian Perspective Series from Asia Theological Association, P.O. Box 73–119 Shihlin, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC 111.*

(Editor)

Most Christians are aware of counselling as a ministry within the Church, but few have considered the possibility of using counselling as a means of outreach. Recently, this idea has become acceptable to the Christians in North America. In a survey, a substantial majority of evangelical Christians, both pastors (90 per cent) and laymen (80 per cent), believe that providing (or supporting) professional counselling would be a visible ministry of their church.<sup>1</sup> In Asia, this concept is still in the experimental stage. The Breakthrough Counselling

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<sup>1</sup> King, R. R. Jr. "Evangelical Christians and Professional Counselling: A Conflict of Values?", *Journal of Psychology*, Fall 1978, 6(4), p.279.

Centre in Hong Kong is an example of one attempt by the Church to reach out to the surrounding society through counselling.

## BRIEF HISTORY

The “Breakthrough Ministries” was started in 1974 under the umbrella of the Fellowship of Evangelical Students (Hong Kong). It began as an evangelistic magazine (*Breakthrough Magazine*), aimed at the youth in Hong Kong. Now the scope of Breakthrough Ministries includes the publication of two magazines (*Breakthrough*, circulation 35,000; *Breakthrough Junior*, circulation 16,000); the operation of two counselling centres; the production of a 1–1 1/2 hour programme five evenings per week on a local commercial radio station; and the production of evangelistic slide and film shows.

The Breakthrough counselling ministry started off as a means of following up the magazine readers. The counselling service was advertized through the magazine, through the radio programme, and subsequently by means of a “hot line service” and personal interviews. Over the past five years, counsellee clientele has expanded to include not only the magazine readers and the radio programme audience, but also the referrals from churches, Christian organizations and other social agencies. Now the two counselling centres, with ten full-time staff and over forty regular volunteer counsellors are touching people from all walks of life.

## BASIC PHILOSOPHIES AND THEIR APPLICATION

*1. Wholistic care.* We believe that the Lord has called us to care for people: for their physical, intellectual, and emotional, as well as spiritual needs.

While most secular counsellors make no attempt to explore, not to mention fulfil, man’s spiritual needs, we make no apologies for integrating evangelism and counselling. Due to the evangelistic impact of the magazine and radio programme, a good proportion of the counsellees (approx. 15 per cent) who seek our help take the initiative to reveal their spiritual needs. We apply scriptural principles and utilize spiritual resources to help our counsellees face their spiritual problems.

However, we do not preach to everyone who comes our way. There are those who seek help for emotional disturbances, and we start where they are, working with their felt needs. Eventually, we may bring some of them to an awareness of their spiritual needs, but we do not turn the counselling service into a purely evangelistic service.

*2. Multi-faceted service.* We attempt to cover the following dimensions of counselling in our service: remedial, preventive, and developmental.

*Remedial* counselling is offered by means of correspondence, radio programmes, telephone service, and personal interviews. At present, we handle approximately 300 counselling cases per month: roughly 65 per cent by interview, 25 per cent by telephone, 10 per cent by correspondence. The counsellees approach us with a wide variety of problems, covering areas such as friendship, love affairs, family relationships, study problems, career and religious issues. There are those who present serious psychiatric problems, requiring referral to psychiatrists. We also enlist the help of other social work agencies to offer help in solving social problems (e.g. housing, finances).

The majority of our counsellees fall into the age group of 18–22 since these young people belong to the target audience of our magazine and radio programme. Gradually, over

the years, we have begun to help more counselees over 22 years of age as we receive more referral cases from pastors, Christian workers, social workers and teachers.

Approximately half of our counselees are Christians and the other half non-Christians. Therefore, we are in a good position to get in touch with non-Christians in their times of crisis. It also indicates clearly that Christians are not exempt from psychological disturbances. We are encouraged by the fact that more Christians have gathered enough courage to seek counselling help, particularly in a culture which cares so much about “losing face”.

As we recruit more full-time counsellors, we continue to put more effort into launching *preventive* counselling programmes. The common format of a preventive programme includes lectures and workshops conducted in schools and churches. Occasionally we conduct large scale public seminars. In 1978, a seminar on “Spiritual and Emotional Balance” was attended by over 800 people. In 1979, a seminar on “Crisis Intervention” drew over 600 participants; and another workshop on “Interpersonal Relationships” attracted an audience of over 800.

Several times a year, the magazine publishes special issues related to preventive counselling: such as “emotional crises,” “understanding yourself,” “dating and courtship,” “sex education,” “interpersonal communication”. In the magazine, there is a regular column devoted to answering personal problems raised by the readers. These columns and issues related to counselling have been enthusiastically received by the public.

The radio programme also allocates a regular slot for answering the audience’s personal problems on the air. In addition there are occasional special programmes which deal with issues related to counselling.

The counselling staff are co-operating with their co-workers in the publication department and audiovisual department in the production of books, pamphlets and slide shows dealing with relevant issues that the young people are facing today. The first in a series will be a set of material on the theme of “interpersonal relationships”.

In offering *development* counselling we want to educate the public to know that counselling is not designed exclusively for the psychologically disturbed. Everybody in their developmental process will encounter crises which they have to learn to cope with and overcome. To promote the concept of growth, we have organized “growth groups” for “normal” people—e.g. encounter groups for our volunteer counsellors; growth groups for married couples or engaged couples; groups for developing social skills.

In order to facilitate personal growth, our volunteer counsellor trainees are required to receive a minimum of four sessions of personal counselling. The staff counsellors also meet regularly to help one another in personal growth, and they act as counsellors for one another.

**3. Multi-media approach.** We acknowledge the power of the mass media; yet, to be effective in bringing behavioural change, mass communication should be coupled with interpersonal communication.

The Breakthrough Ministries utilizes the multi-media approach in its attempt to reach young people. Mass media is used as a means of “pre-evangelism,” preparing the soil for the seed of the Gospel. We do not rely on the mass media for personal conversion. We try to encourage Christians to do personal follow-up, at the same time we organize Gospel camps and evangelistic Bible study groups for our readers as means of direct evangelism.

The counselling ministry also serves the purpose of being a means of follow-up for the magazine and radio ministries. At the same time, these media are used as tools for launching

preventive counselling programmes. The audiovisual department is laying ground work for the utilization of other media such as films, television, and video-cassettes.

*4. Multi-level mobilization.* We believe that the effectiveness of a ministry would become very hampered if it were monopolized by only a few experts. Therefore, we also endeavour to mobilize and train lay people at various levels.

We do not undermine the importance of specialists, but we do not confine the task of counselling to a few experts. Among our eight fulltime professional counsellors, two hold doctoral degrees in counselling, one has a doctorate in medicine, two have special training in social work, the others have obtained a master's-level training in counselling. In addition to their counselling service the full-time staff are responsible for training volunteer, para-professional counsellors. After an intensive training programme, the volunteers begin their service under the supervision of the full-time counsellors. These training courses are conducted every six months, producing approximately 40 para-professional counsellors each term.

We also attempt to mobilize the peer groups of our counselees in order to offer them fuller support and "peer-counselling". They also participate in our growth groups.

Recently, we have set up special training programmes for teachers, pastors and seminary students, since these people are in excellent positions to offer counselling help to a large population both inside and outside of the Church. A special eight-week training course for teachers was attended by 40 teachers, and a workshop for teachers had 120 participants. The seminars and workshops for pastors and seminary students were also very well accepted.

The Lord has also opened the way for us to enter Bible colleges and seminaries. Several of our staff were invited to conduct either regular courses or TEE courses on counselling. This is a sign that the counselling ministry is gaining more acceptance from theological educators.

To build up an effective and extensive Christian counselling network in and out of the Church, we need to train and mobilize people at all levels: professional, para-professional, and even nonprofessional (peer counselling).

*5. Christian social concern.* We are convinced that the proclamation of the Gospel should be accompanied by Christian action. By God's grace, we strive to function as the Church's arm, extended into the society.

Christian influence should not be confined within the four walls of the Church; rather, the impact should be felt in every stratum of society.

By virtue of their profession, counsellors inevitably exert a direct influence on their counselees, and indirectly make their impact felt on the society through their lectures and writings. Sigmund Freud, one of the founding fathers of modern psychiatry, is still considered an influential figure in relation to the life pattern of the modern man. The worldview and value system of the counsellor is reflected in the effect he has on others. Unfortunately, several key figures in the counselling field were rather unsympathetic towards religion, and some of them even attacked Christianity openly.<sup>2</sup> Christians should be more involved in the field of counselling, not merely in hopes of helping the counselees, but also in trying to inject a Christian influence into the profession.

By virtue of the remedial service and preventive programmes we offer, the Breakthrough Counselling Centre is gradually making its influence felt in society. Even within social work

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<sup>2</sup> Freud, S., *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1961); Skinner, B. F., *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

and counselling circles, we are recognized as a group of professional counsellors who hold firmly to our Christian standards. We make no attempt to hide our Christian values in front of our counselees. We make no apologies for our Christian viewpoint during encounters with other professionals. By our involvement in the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the Hong Kong Psychological Society, and the Association of Psychological and Educational Counsellors of Asia, we wish to have an input in the shaping of the trends, ethical standards and the professional quality of counselling in Hong Kong.

Counselling serves as an excellent contact point between the Church and the society. We desire to be used by the Lord at this strategic point: serving the Church on one hand and at the same time exerting an influence on the society.

## SEVERAL BURNING ISSUES

The Breakthrough Counselling Centre faces tremendous challenges from all directions. Reassured by the Lord's presence, we are grappling with several burning issues.

*1. Integration of psychology and theology.* Since most secular psychologists have built their theories on a naturalistic presupposition, it is absolutely essential to rebuild psychology on a new foundation.<sup>3</sup> The most basic premise is the recognition that God exists and that He communicates with man by various means—natural revelation, revelation through the prophets and His own Son Jesus Christ; and special revelation through the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and the behavioural sciences should be put under the authority of Scripture. This implies that when the teaching of Scripture conflicts with any other idea, the teaching of Scripture will be accepted as truth.

This is not to say that outside of Scripture there are no resources for building a counselling theory. I believe that other disciplines also contribute to the understanding of human behaviour and its modification. One should not ignore other disciplines such as theology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, the arts and even the physical sciences. However, information gathered from these sources should be tested against the truths revealed to us through the Scriptures.

The integration of psychology and theology is still at the infancy stage. As more progress is made in this area, it will shed more light on approaches to counselling.

*2. Blending of counselling and culture.* Christianity is rejected by some Asians because of its "western package". Counselling may receive the same treatment unless it is adapted and presented in a form which is meaningful and relevant to each particular culture.

Although counselling is much better developed in the West, the burden to cross the culture gap should not lie on the Christians in the western world alone. Efforts should come from both sides of the cultural gap. The Christian in a non-western culture has to make an effort to meet the challenge, and this would require crossing the culture to draw from the resources available in the West, and then adapting what he has learned to his own culture. Winter pointed out that E<sup>1</sup> evangelism is more effective than E<sup>2</sup> and E<sup>3</sup> evangelism.<sup>4</sup> Other

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<sup>3</sup> Collins, G. R., *The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1977), pp.137–152. The author proposes a new foundation for the rebuilding of psychology.

<sup>4</sup> Winter, R. D., "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism". In G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky (eds.), *Mission Trend No. 2: Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

researchers also agree that counsellors from a different culture are usually less effective as a direct deliverer of service.

While a major part of the effort should come ideally from the people in the non-western culture, the counsellors in the western culture also have a significant role to play. In an attempt to tackle the question “can we export western psychotherapy to non-western cultures?”, Wohl has the following suggestion:

This means that the occasional westerner engaging in intercultural therapy is at best doing therapy to learn the culture so that he can better do research or perform training and consultive functions for the direct delivery of service.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the complexity of each individual culture, it would be most practical for a counsellor from a different culture to work in an area of research, training or consultation rather than direct service.

With efforts from both sides, the task of crossing the cultural gap would be made much easier. This would help to promote the development of counselling in Asian cultures, and at the same time stimulate growth in the field of cross-cultural counselling.

The present author has adapted a peer counsellor training programme to the Chinese, making cultural modifications in the adapted version.<sup>6</sup> The quarterly *Counselling Bulletin* published by the Breakthrough Counselling Centre also attempts to bring counselling and the local culture closer together. More efforts will be made along this line in the future.

*3. Establishment of link with the local church.* In order to serve the church more effectively, there needs to be good communication, mutual understanding, and close co-operation. Right from the beginning, we work side by side with the local church. The first counselling centre was founded in one of the low-cost housing estates in Hong Kong (Oi Man Estate), by means of joint effort with a Christian and Missionary Alliance church. A second counselling centre was started in co-operation with a Baptist church, which had a vision of reaching out into their local community (Shum Shui Po District, Kowloon). We thank the Lord for this close working relationship with the local church. We are making an effort to build a model by which a local church can effectively penetrate its neighbouring community by means of a counselling service. This model is still in the experimental stage.

For other local churches which are not so closely linked to us, we function as a referral centre and a training centre. In return, we depend on their prayers and financial support.

*4. Co-operation with seminaries.* During the Asian Leadership Conference on Evangelism, Dr. Philip Teng commented: “Asian Christians are not known for their co-operative spirit that has gradually been built up over the past few years among the churches in Hong Kong. The theological educators are working hard to improve their co-operation; the Asia Theological Association and the Association for Promotion of Chinese Theological Education have made significant contributions in this area. We are praying for a major breakthrough in the area of counselling training. The Breakthrough Counselling Centre and the local Bible colleges and seminaries are joining hands in the planning of a joint counselling training programme. The

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<sup>5</sup> Wohl, J., “Intercultural Psychotherapy: Issues, Questions, and Reflections”. In P. Pedersen, W. J. Lonner, and J. G. Draguns (eds.), *Counselling Across Cultures* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), pp.184–207.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, G. R., *How to be a People Helper and People Helper Growth Book and People Helper Training Cassettes* (Santa Ana, California: Vision House, 1976). The Chinese version is published by Christian Witness Press, Hong Kong, 1978.

Lord willing, there may emerge a comprehensive training programme offering a master's degree in Christian counselling. There is a long way to go, and we welcome input from Christian counsellors and theological educators in other Asian countries.

## CONCLUSION

The Asian scene is rapidly changing. China with the greatest population is concentrating her effort on "modernization"; similar trends are obvious in other developing countries. As a by-product of modernization, the increase in demand for counselling is predictable. Counselling is rapidly becoming a new frontier for the Asian Church. Christians who are concerned about theological education, church growth, pastoral care, evangelism and social concern should attempt to contribute to the advancement of the field of Christian counselling. In response to the challenge, some initial efforts are being made in certain Asian countries. To enable greater strides forward, there needs to be more awareness of the demands; more willingness to devote time, money, energy and talents; more openness to cooperate at a local as well as pan-Asian level.

"Lord, give us mountains,  
and the courage to climb!"

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# The New Gospel of Community

Derek Tidball

*Reprinted from Third Way, April 1980, with permission*

The idea that Christians ought to live in communities is currently receiving much attention. For some Christians, community living seems to have become the new gospel which they are zealously preaching as the answer to man's personal problems. Other Christians are almost as zealously opposed to the idea and propagate scare stories about the supposed harmful effects of community living. In spite of the topicality and importance of the subject, little real awareness of issues seems evident among Christians.

The current emphasis on communities amongst evangelical Christians stems from three recent movements. The briefest such movement was the Jesus movement of the 1960s and early 1970s whose communes reflected the secular communes of their generation. They were designed to insulate the Jesus converts from the contaminated world around them and to provide a controlled lifestyle for them which relied on strong leadership. Some of these communes were transitory and others developed in a disturbing way. Ronald Enroth has recorded the sad story in *Youth Brainwashing and the Extremist Cults* (Paternoster, 1977). It is the fear of the repetition of these experiences that causes some Christians to react negatively towards the idea of community living.