Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 32 · Number 3 · July 2008

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by

Paternoster:
thinking faith

WEA
World Evangelical Alliance
Theological Commission

for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

ERT (2008) 32:3, 196-209

Use and Abuse of the Bible in Pastoral Practice: An Evangelical Perspective

Derek J. Tidball

KEYWORDS: *Evangelical, Bible, pastoral care, hermeneutics, exegesis, psychology, wholeness*

In 1988 Stephen Pattison commented on the curious absence of discussion about the way to use the Bible among pastoral theologians. There was, he suggested, no doubt about the Bible's importance, or even its authoritative status, since it was consulted and appealed to frequently but, he lamented, 'The fact is that pastoral theologians seem to have almost completely avoided considering the Bible….There is an almost absolute and embarrassing silence about the Bible in pastoral care theory.'[1]

Recent years, however, have seen a revival of interest in the role of the pastoral use of the Bible, not least because of initiatives that Stephen Pattison has taken with his colleagues at Cardiff University, in conjunction with the (British) Bible Society. Research projects have been undertaken and conferences held which have led to the publication of several significant volumes.[2] These encouraging initiatives have sought to be genuinely inclusive and brought evangelicals into real engagement with those who would have a very different understanding of the Bible from them.

1 Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM, 1988), p. 106.

2 Paul Ballard and Stephen Holmes (eds.), *The Bible in Pastoral Practice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005); Gordon Oliver, *Holy Bible, Human Bible* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006); and, Stephen Pattison, Margaret Cooling and Trevor Cooling, *Using the Bible in Christian Ministry: A Workbook* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007).

Rev. Dr. Derek J. Tidball *(PhD Keele) is a Baptist pastor who has served as the Head of the Mission Department of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and most recently for twelve years as Principal of London School of Theology. He is chair of the Council of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK. He has written numerous books including* Skilful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology, The Message of the Cross *and* The Message of Leviticus *in IVP's 'Bible Speaks Today' series. This is a revised and updated version of a paper originally given to an MA Seminar for the Cambridge Theological Federation in 2004. (Email: derekjtidball@googlemail.com)*

This paper does not set out to review the Cardiff/Bible Society project but to reflect independently on the use and abuse of the Bible in pastoral practice from an evangelical perspective.[3]

I Definitions

I begin with definitions. 'Pastoral practice' I interpret as an inclusive term to include not just the one-to-one dimension of pastoral care or counselling, or that pastoral practice which might involve a pastor with a family or small group, but the total range of pastoral activity which includes the activity of preaching and the leading of worship and the shaping of the liturgy as well. This broad definition consciously embraces 'the whole gamut of Christian ministry related to the comprehensive needs of other human beings'[4] so as to broaden our understanding of care away from a narrow focus on individual counselling. Much pastoral care takes place in the context of preaching and worship in formal services, while other pastoral care takes place in personal, often casual, conversation.

By 'a pastor' I do not intend to imply someone who is necessarily 'ordained' since Evangelicalism has always recognized leaders who have emerged outside the formal structures of the church and, indeed, some of its branches, such as the Christian Brethren, reject the clergy/laity distinction altogether. Certainly in many local churches pastoral care is exercised by lay folk and, sometimes less happily, often by untrained lay folk. That makes an examination of how they might use the Bible even more crucial.

'Evangelical' might be more difficult to define. I use it not in the European sense of the evangelical church which emerged in contrast to Catholicism following the Reformation, but in the sense of that stream within the church which became a self-conscious movement following the Evangelical Revivals in the 1700s. It has gone through many forms and today is a diverse movement. The label is frequently used as if synonymous with Fundamentalism but such an equation is indefensible.[5] Evangelicalism embraces a spectrum of positions which at one end finds more fundamentalist expressions but at the other appears to have a fuzzy boundary with classic liberal theology. What then holds it together?

3 This paper is a revised and updated paper, originally given to an MA Seminar for the Cambridge Theological Federation in 2004. Those who issued the invitation had not expected me to comment as an evangelical on how others used the Bible but to confine myself to an exploration of how evangelicals used it. The title given, however, seemed to invite wider reflection, even if the major part of the paper was devoted to exploring evangelical practice.

4 This is part of the definition used in Pattison, Cooling and Cooling, *Using the Bible in Christian Ministry*, p. 10. Pattison's own definition was, 'pastoral care is that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God' (*Critique*, p. 13).

5 See, Derek Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), pp. 17-18.

For all the criticism there has been of it, David Bebbington's[6] suggestion that Evangelicalism is that section of the church marked by a combination of four characteristics, namely, conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism, remains an excellent framework to distinguish it from others in the church. To these perhaps the willingness to act interdenominationally should be added.

It is the third of these characteristics which particularly concerns us in this paper. Taking their cue from the Reformers and Wesley, who desired to be a 'man of one book',[7] Evangelicals show a supreme interest in the Bible and a devotion to it. Their doctrinal statements will usually refer in a shorthand way to 'the authority' of the Bible[8] as 'supreme' or 'sole' and their critics, somewhat understandably, might refer to them as having a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Bible—at least until recently when the advent of the closely related charismatic movement somewhat changed the emphasis. When challenged, evangelicals, of course, believe the supreme authority belongs to God, to Christ, the living Word, and to the Spirit, the one who transmits the word today. But they see no reason to downgrade the importance of the Bible in their theological framework and they will not accept any disjunction between the living word and the written word. The Bible is central in shaping their view of God—it is a revelation of God and his ways—and their interpretation of the Christian faith.

We could develop the theme of an evangelical view of the Bible, paying particular attention to the way evangelicals have formulated their views over the centuries, being at first very much affected by the Enlightenment, then by the Romantic movement and recently by postmodernism. This, of course, has an impact on the way the Bible is used pastorally, as we shall see, but this is not the primary subject of this paper. Suffice it to say that the Bible is central.

Its centrality stems from its inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and this gives rise, in turn, to its sufficiency and its dynamic nature. Paul tells Timothy that the God-breathed scripture 'is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, *so that God's servant may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*'. There is nothing we should need that we do not find within it: it is sufficient; but that does not mean every question will receive a direct and immediate answer or that it is right to come to the Bible as if it is some form of supreme reference book where we can find obvious solutions to all the problems we face in life. This was the mistake of some during the initial stages of Enlightenment enthusiasm and is still reflected in the way some evangelicals use the Bible.

6 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 5-17. Criticisms may be found in D. A, Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), pp. 449-451 and Kenneth Stewart, 'Did evangelicalism predate the eighteenth century?', *EQ*, 77.2 (2005), 135-153.

7 Wesley used the phrase more than once but it can be found in the Preface to his *Sermons*, vol 1.

8 For a review see, J. I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 39-57.

The evangelical position also gives rise to the view that the Bible has a dynamic power which generates change in people's lives. It is not regarded as magic: take a text a day, as you may take an aspirin, and the cure will automatically follow. The reading and study of the Bible needs to be combined with faith, as Hebrews 4:2 argues. Nonetheless, James 1:21, which uses the dynamic image of 'the implanted word, which can save you' and 1 Peter 2:2 which uses the image of craving for 'pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation' suggest a basis for the evangelical view of the Bible as a spiritual growth hormone.[9] It is as Justin Martyr said:

> I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the saviour. For they possess a terrible power in themselves and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; while the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them.[10]

Exactly how that translates into the practical handling of the Bible in Evangelicalism varies and leads some, at the fundamentalist end of the spectrum, to a proof-text, sound-bite type of approach and to others at the more open end to a more reflective imaginative approach.

II The Greatest Abuse...

Before, however, turning in more detail to how evangelicals use the Bible in pastoral care, let me mention three general abuses which evangelicals discern in the way the wider church uses the Bible in pastoral care.

1. Neglect

One form of abuse is neglect. Child carers do not have to physically assault a child to be guilty of abuse—they just have to ignore the child. Evangelicals, of all shades, would want to argue that the greatest abuse of the Bible is its neglect. The failure to use it is one of the greatest scandals of the church in recent times. As Herbert Anderson notes, while evangelicals have asserted more and more strongly the authority of the Bible, others have found it less and less relevant or seen it merely as one resource among many others but not especially normative.[11]

Thomas Oden, in a number of places,[12] has championed the cause (and it is a cause) that pastoral care should not be held in psychological captivity. He has researched the textbooks used in the training of clergy in pastoral care and found that the discipline which informs clergy training is

9 See further, Derek Tidball, 'The Bible in evangelical spirituality' in Ballard and Holmes (eds.) *The Bible in Pastoral Practice*, pp. 258-274.

10 *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch.8.

11 Herbert Anderson, 'The Bible and Pastoral Care', in Ballard and Holmes (eds.) *The Bible in Pastoral Practice*, p. 196.

12 *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); 'Recovering Pastoral Care's Lost Identity' in *The Church and Pastoral Care* Leroy Aden and J. Harold Ellens, eds., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 17-40 and *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

psychology, with its amoral commitments, rather than theology. Whilst there are many references to contemporary psychological theories and scholars, there is almost the total absence of reference to the Bible or even to the great tradition of pastoral care to be found in the Apostolic Fathers.

The situation has changed in some respects since Oden began his campaign on this issue. There has been a greater recognition that pastoral care cannot be detached from a moral framework and it has broken out somewhat from a psychological captivity to embrace wider sociological and psychological perspectives. But still too often pastoral caregivers in the church neglect the Bible altogether.

2. Demotion

So, although from their viewpoint there are gains, evangelicals remain uneasy with an approach to pastoral practice which uses the Bible but merely as one of a number of resources to which one might turn without giving it any sense of priority. The approach, common, according to Donald Capps of Princeton,[13] in the middle of the last century in Europe, recognizes the Bible has a place, but it is only one voice around the table and has no privileged status. Its use is *ad hoc* and it only indirectly informs the discussion. It neither establishes the goals to be reached in the pastoral process, nor is it allowed to critique the other voices that contribute to the conversation.

Michael Taylor, is a later English representative of this position. In his book *Learning to Care*, he dismisses the possibility of absolutes guiding our pastoral practice and pleads for it to be based on living doctrine, informed by contemporary knowledge. He concludes,

> On occasions older literature including the Bible will deal with the same issues that we are dealing with and will be worth consulting, though we shall need to remember that changes in culture and circumstances often make the similarities more apparent than real.[14]

For an evangelical this is to marginalise Scripture in an unwarranted fashion and an abuse of the Bible in pastoral practice. The Bible is not only to be used, but to have a sense of priority, not only an ancient document but a contemporary and living word.

3. Revisionism

This raises huge issues of hermeneutics and here is not the place to address them. But evangelicals become very unhappy when what they regard as the plain teaching of the Bible on an issue is reinterpreted in such a way that the Bible is made to sound as if it is saying the exact opposite of what it appears to be saying. A particular current example is that of homosexual practice. Complex as it is, many evangelicals are handling the issue with great personal and pastoral sensitivity, and they are grappling with the theological, moral and exegetical complexities of it but

13 'The Bible's Role in Pastoral Care and Counselling' in Aden and Ellens (eds.) *The Church and Pastoral Care*, pp. 43f.

14 Michael Taylor, *Learning to Care* (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 101f.

most still cannot agree that homosexual practice is one which can be commended for disciples of Jesus. A good illustration of how they are handling it pastorally and theologically might be found in Ray Anderson's recent book, *The Shape of Pastoral Theology: Empowering Ministry with theological Praxis*, chapter 16.[15]

III The Evangelical Use and Abuse of the Bible

How then do evangelicals use the Bible? Evangelicalism is essentially a popular movement and a protest movement. Its scholars, however, have increasingly adopted the tools of modern scholarship in their approach to the Bible, wishing to defend the Bible against its critics on their own terms. Hence, many have engaged in historical criticism and there is a wealth of Bible commentaries to demonstrate the point. They have been less involved until recently in systematic reflection.

Many rejoice in the more recent developments in hermeneutics and have grappled with the philosophical and epistemological foundations involved, even if some remain very cautious about the more subjective and postmodern underpinning of the enterprise. Canonical approaches have been welcomed with some enthusiasm. But the more the scholars have engaged with the academy, the more suspicious many evangelicals at pew level have become of them and there can be a fairly wide gulf between scholarly writing and popular practice.

To evangelicals, the Bible is the book of the people, not the book of the scholars, or even of the pastors.[16] It is a book for all, not just the intelligentsia. To them, as Gregory the Great put it, 'The Bible is water where lambs may safely walk (as well as) great elephants swim.' Many evangelicals, therefore, have been brought up to love it, read it, learn it and imbibe it. They believe Psalm 119:105 at face value: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'. They also take seriously the active role of the Holy Spirit as its interpreter today.

This has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths are that it provides a particular reader-response type approach to Scripture, albeit one which predates recent postmodern theories and albeit one where readers are not usually aware of their own presuppositions. That is lauded in some circles as a rediscovery of what the Bible originally was: the book of the community of ordinary people. It gives the Bible back to the people.

An example was presented in the Cardiff Conference as a positive example by one speaker. The reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan in one household in Sheffield led to the children demanding they should share their food with their poor neighbours. In this case the outcome was positive

15 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001). Among a vast literature see also, Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An evangelical response to homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

16 This differs from Wesley Carr, *Handbook of Pastoral Studies* (London, SPCK, 1997), p. 27, who says, 'Scripture chiefly addresses the pastor and not the client'. Nonetheless, he refers to scripture as a vital resource.

but no one asked the question as to what would have happened if they had read some parts of the Deuteronomic Law and decided as a result to stone their neighbours who were having affairs? Undisciplined reader-response, whether by evangelicals or others, can prove disastrous. Good hermeneutical principles cannot be avoided.

Here we turn to particular evangelical approaches in the use of the Bible in pastoral care.

1. A 'promise box'—snippets of insight.

My grandmother had a box containing little scrolls of paper on each of which was a verse, or even part of a verse, of scripture. It was her practice to extract one at random each day using a pair of tweezers and read what it said, taking it as the motto for the day. The choice of texts often reflected an evangelical canon within the canon. The text was, of course, completely out of context and made to apply to one's life regardless of its particular relevance. It was assumed that whatever problem we faced—and here we see the Enlightenment legacy—there will be an answer, usually a very clear and direct answer, to it in the Bible. Whether this exact custom is practised or not it is symbolic of the way many evangelicals use their Bibles in relation to themselves and pastorally in relation to others.

A popular but more refined example of this is seen in the approach of the Gideons Bible. It is not as hit-and-miss as the promise box, since the reader is directed to an appropriate text by consulting a menu of problems or circumstances. Nonetheless, Chris Wigglesworth has provided us with a robust critique of it in the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*.[17]

> The hotel bedroom, 'Gideons' Bible contains a list of verses deemed suitable for various problems in life. Whatever emergency value this may have, it is a poor model for pastoral use…. The pastoral problems created by this approach should also be listed: absence of relationship, blocked expression of feelings, coerced responses, failure to listen, hasty diagnosis, premature advice, selective emphasis, superficial solutions, etc. More serious still is the attraction this approach has for the insecure pastor whose authority is shored up by the symbolic significance the Bible has for many people. Linked to this is the dependence (q.v.) encouraged by the pastor who is expected to know the 'correct' verse for each succeeding need. It is hardly surprising that such abuse has led many counsellors into leaving out use of the Bible from their work.

His objections may be expressed like this:

- It ignores hermeneutical issues, whilst practising poor hermeneutics. 'The Bible says it, we believe it, that settles it.' Anyone can justify all sorts of behaviour and belief without decent hermeneutics. A creation, fall, redemption and consummation framework is needed.
- It can be insensitive, saying the

17 (London, SPCK, 1987), p. 25.

right thing at the wrong moment or in the wrong way. Job's comforters often come to mind.

- It can degenerate into the use of proof texts. Learn the words and quote them as if it is a magic chant or as if that automatically deals with the problem.
- It shows no awareness of how people respond to the Bible. Is it seen by readers as a constructive authority or an authoritarian task master which may, indeed, be part of their problem?
- It can deal with superficial symptoms while failing to deal with deeper issues.
- It can be very hit and miss in its use of scripture.
- It can be wooden, literalistic and legalistic in its use of the Bible.
- It can provide the pastor with a false, even dangerous, authority.

Although evangelicals must plead guilty to some of Wigglesworth's strictures, both in relation to something like the Gideons Bible and even more widely in relation to their use of the Bible in preaching, many of the above criticisms fall because they fail to take into account the presence of the Holy Spirit in the transaction between the person reading the Bible and the Bible itself. God's normal method may well be to use people to interpret and apply Scripture to needy individuals, as illustrated by Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Official in Acts 8:26-40, but he is not restricted thereby. The Holy Spirit is the chief interpreter (Jn. 14:26-31; 16:12-15) who is present and at work even when others are absent. He is the indispensable partner in any pastoral transaction, however gifted the counsellor or skilled in hermeneutics he or she might be, if the conversation is to bear good fruit.

Furthermore, who is to say that while radical surgery may be necessary, first aid may not prove the first step on the road to healing before surgery is possible? And in some situations it may be sufficient on its own. Deeper solutions may well be required than the Gideons Bible provides but it may well provide (and in countless cases it has provided) a crucial preliminary step towards a more mature faith.

It would be wrong for evangelicals to derive false encouragement from this and think themselves exempt from the need for good hermeneutics and the serious work involved in handling scripture aright. But the God who is capable of speaking through Balaam's ass, and who provides a multitude of illustrations in the Bible of speaking through imperfect messengers, is capable of owning the less than perfect efforts of such an approach.

2. A textbook—detailed prescriptions

This is illustrated most clearly by the writings of Jay Adams who has had a major influence on a segment of the Evangelical church. He rejects the value of contemporary disciplines such as psychology or psychiatry and regards the church's adoption of them as a betrayal of our message. He argues that the Bible alone is all we need. He advocates using the Bible as a textbook both in diagnosing problems and prescribing answers, both when handling general and when handling specific problems.

He does not consider this a debatable option.[18] 'The Bible's position is that all counsel that is not revelational or based upon God's revelation, is Satanic.'[19] He asserts his belief that the Bible is able to answer every problem comprehensively.[20] Hand in hand with this conviction goes a particular method. The Bible is to be used confrontationally as a tool of rebuke, in order to correct wrong behaviour, not as encouragement or *paraklesis*. Basing his approach on Colossians 1:28-29 where Paul writes of 'warning' or 'admonishing' (*nouthetountes*) everyone, so that he may 'present everyone fully mature in Christ' (TNIV), Adams calls his approach 'nouthetic counselling'.

There are attractions to this position. Busy pastors have no time, let alone expertise, to negotiate their way through contemporary counselling theories. So to be told that their expertise which lies in their knowledge of the Bible, is not only all they need but all that it is legitimate for them to use, boosts their confidence. It is not difficult to see the connection between this counselling approach and the Evangelical doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture.

In spite of this, the approach has been severely criticised by other evangelicals for a number of reasons.[21] The *noutheteo* word group is small in comparison with other words that relate to pastoral care in Scripture, such as *parakaleo*, and Adams over-emphasizes it.[22] He lacks a deep understanding of creation and personhood. People are essentially actors and what people do is what they are. He does not take into account the deeper structures of personhood or that they may, for example, be complex unities who are shaped and moulded by their genes or their upbringings. So, never mind what the problem is, change their doing and the rest will follow.[23] Emotions have a secondary and contingent place at best.

The same lack of depth is evident in handling of sin. He has little place for the fallenness of creation. Although he does not believe that the difficulties we experience are in direct proportion to the sin we commit, he very quickly builds a connection between the symptoms of our suffering and our individual sin as the cause of them, or a major contributor to them. Sin is about the actions we do rather than a result of being the people we are.

Confrontation about our behaviour, therefore, is the answer without indulging in the the complexities of a solution. And, as with Wigglesworth's

18 Jay Adams, *The Use of the Scriptures in Counselling* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), p. 5.

19 Jay Adams, *More Than Redemption* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), p. 4.

20 Among his many other writings see, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) and *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

21 See, *inter alia*, William Challis, *The Word of Life: Using the Bible in Pastoral Care* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), pp. 126-145 and Derek Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: Explorations in Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1986, 2007), pp. 236-241.

22 Challis, *The Word of Life*, p. 139f.

23 This applies to Christians only. Adams regards regeneration as an essential prerequisite to helping people.

criticism of the approach of the Gideons Bible, the practitioners of this approach can use the Bible very atomistically (hence, Adams' love of Proverbs) and credit pastors with a dangerous authority that leads them to give superficial answers to any and every problem when sometimes more in depth treatment is required.

There are other, more nuanced, less clumsy and more sympathetic examples of this position, which is often associated with Reformed Evangelicals although not exclusively so. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, for example, a medical physician who became one of London's best known preachers, often argued that the need was to believe the right doctrine and to understand correctly with one's mind and then the right actions and emotions would follow. A classic statement of it can be found in his book, *Spiritual Depression: Its causes and cure*.[24] He succinctly sums up his approach in the opening chapter.

> The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself…And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and defy the whole world…[25]

Although one can see the value of such an approach for some who have been seduced by over-self-indulgent western cultures, or who face trivial depressions that are more due to selfishness than to reality, it requires a fairly strong 'self' or 'ego' to benefit from such advice when depressed and it would be a despairing and damaging approach for those who were clinically depressed. The nouthetic approach is not a responsible pastoral approach if it is used exclusively or even if it is the default position which is adopted. A much broader and more sensitive range of tools is essential for effective pastoral care as the Bible itself recommends.[26]

3. A framework—significant perspective

The Bible is seen by other evangelicals not, on the one hand, as a detailed reference book but certainly, on the other hand, as much more than a vague resource. Examples may be found in Selwyn Hughes or Larry Crabb.[27] Selwyn Hughes recently wrote that we need a clear grasp of our problems 'and we must understand them from a *biblical* point of view'.[28] But he does not mean the same by this as Jay Adams does. He is not anti-psychiatry and gives serious attention to the emotional dimension of our lives and to the power of imagination within them.

24 M. Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (London & Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1965).

25 Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 21.

26 See, for example, 1 Thess. 5:14.

27 Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counselling: How to become a Capable Counsellor* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) and *Understanding People: Reaching Deeper through Biblical Counselling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

28 Selwyn Hughes, *Christ Empowered Living* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), p. 91.

Even so, he insists, 'I simply believe that Scripture can give us more complete and reliable answers to human problems than the best secular textbooks on the subject of the human psyche.'[29]

It does this by addressing the framework through which we view life and our worldviews rather than dealing on a surface level just with the presenting problem itself. Consequently, much has to do with unearthing the deep longings and thirsts which drive our lives and how they express themselves in the goals we choose (many of which may be inappropriate) and of the escape strategies (which may well be neurotic) that we devise to retreat from frustration when our goals are not met. These factors have an effect on our sense of security, self-worth and significance.

It is a long way from the Bible as a quick tonic. It is a more open explorative approach, as well as a deeper one. It demonstrates a much greater understanding of human personhood, of the need for intimacy and community and of the varied impact of the fall on people' lives. Yet it stays within the reach of popular counsellors, thousands of whom have been trained through CWR seminars and courses around the world.[30]

4. The Bible informs a system: shaping a psychological approach

Roger Hurding is our representative here. A professional psychotherapist, Hurding believes strongly that pastoral care should be community-based and exercised both within the fellowship and outside in the local community. He argues that there are four main psychological perspectives and each one uses the Bible in a different way. No one system is superior to another, although one might be more appropriate than another, and each relates to a particular style of scripture.[31]

- Cognitive-behavioural approaches are *prophetic* in style and prescriptive in their use of the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 epitomises the approach.
- Analytic approaches look for healing (inner healing) and emphasize the *wisdom* approach and reflection. Psalm 139 and meditation would epitomize this approach.
- Relationship counselling emphasizes issues of formation and is *pastoral* in style. It tends to *paraklesis*, with John 14:16-18 and passages like 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, epitomizing the approach.
- Inner journey, which Hurding calls Christian transpersonalism. It is *priestly* in style and uses the Bible imaginatively. The counsellor is a fellow traveller on pilgrimage with the person seeking help.

Hurding himself adopts an eclectic

29 Hughes, *Christ Empowered Living*, p. 91.

30 CWR is the Crusade for World Revival, the organisation founded by Selwyn Hughes as an umbrella for his ministries.

31 Roger Hurding, *The Bible and Counselling* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), pp. 147-178. His fuller position is to be found in *Roots and Shoots: A Guide to Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986).

approach but within some very clear boundaries.[32] He writes of the way in which 'much counselling is blighted on the one hand by a hard-edged emphasis on the written word that tends towards aridity and judgmentalism and, on the other hand, by a type of experience-centred stress on the Holy Spirit that leads to emotional instability and doctrinal looseness'.[33] He believes we need to negotiate between the twin perils of Biblicism and subjectivism by a right and careful balance between the word and the Spirit.

5. Living communication and understanding genre

This approach has much in common with what Stephen Pattison terms the 'informative approach'.[34] He illustrates it chiefly in reference to Donald Capps' book, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counselling*.[35] It works with the genre of scripture and uses scripture to give intentional shape to our experiences. Capps has done much in terms of the use of lament in the grief process. He relates it to Kubler-Ross's work on grief and shows how by expressing complaints, trust, petition, finding assurance and renewing vows, our values are addressed and comfort is found.

But he has also written of the place of proverbs and parables. The former is particularly relevant in premarital counselling and represents a treasury of human experience which 'has the claim of divine sanction'. It provides 'arrows' into life and understanding. Parables often relate to broken relationship with resolutions coming when people gain new perceptions about themselves, others and their world.

Eugene Peterson is an example that Evangelical pastors would be familiar with, especially his book, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Care*.[36] Peterson takes the Wisdom books as models of the pastoral work of prayer-directing (Song of Songs); story-making (Ruth); pain-sharing (Lamentations); nay-saying (Ecclesiastes) and community building (Esther). He provides us with rich insights—for example, that the Song of Songs was read at the Passover so that the meal did not degenerate into a mere ritual and empty formula and in order to rekindle warmth in the heart for God. Ecclesiastes, which he takes as a book of true piety, refuses to let pastors come up with the easy answer or promise miracles that never happen.

Each generation of pastors, he argues, needs to build its own superstructure and, for that 'there is not much pastoral work in scripture that can be taken over, as it is, into a pastor's routines'.[37] But the Bible does provide us with a foundation on which we must build and it is on this, not our own, we must build. To do so we have to dig down deep into scripture, like

32 For a critique of Hurding see Challis, *The Word of Life*, pp. 156-161.

33 Hurding, *The Bible and Counselling*, p. 158.

34 Stephen Pattison, *Critique*, pp. 123-126.

35 Donald Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counselling* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1981).

36 Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

37 Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Care*, p. 11.

archaeologists, to unearth the stones we need to use.

6. A workbook—helping us to learn to solve problems

Brian McLaren, one of the leaders of the Emerging Church, has recently put forward the view of the Bible as a pastoral workbook. He points out that the Bible in 2 Timothy 3:16 does not claim to be *authoritative* but *useful*. He compares it to a maths book where you work through exercises, using the textbook to give you practice and teach you methods and formulae which will help you solve the problems for yourself.[38] This he says is what much of Scripture is doing, especially in the narrative and proverbial sections, which are extensive.

It is an approach which resonates much more with a postmodern evangelical generation and engages with the ambiguities of ethics and paradoxes of life more than traditional approaches. It makes more sense of the narrative parts of the Bible which are often open-ended or ambiguous in terms of the right or wrong handling of situations. Our mistake, he would argue, is to see narratives as prescriptive rather than illustrative, as enshrining propositional truth, instead of inviting us to enter a story and mesh it with our own. To such people, the use of narrative and tentativeness in pastoral care is likely to grow.

Many evangelicals, however, would want to point out that at the end of the maths book there are answers which are either right or wrong and that no teachers worthy of their profession would be satisfied with pupils endlessly working through the exercises unless they were learning to come to the correct answers, by the correct methods, as a result. To some evangelicals this approach seems to give away too much

IV Conclusion

Evangelicals, then, do not adopt a single but rather a variety of approaches when using the Bible in pastoral care. Some of the approaches are better at avoiding the pitfalls of wooden interpretations or of texts out of context than others. Though each has strengths and weakness, none is exempted from the need to engage in careful exegesis, take note of questions of genre and interact seriously with hermeneutical issues. The more imaginative approaches as much as the more proof text approaches are all in need of solid foundations lest they prove to be nothing more than flights of unsanctified fancy. But evangelicals, by definition, should have no fear of serious biblical study and of a mature handling of scripture for pastoral purposes.

The goal of using the Bible in pastoral practice must be to bring people to experience eternal life through Jesus and then to lead them to maturity in him.[39] Used rightly, it is a wonderful channel of life, and life in all its full-

38 Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p. 53.

39 This differs from the objective many in the mainstream would adopt which speaks more of physchological than spiritual wholeness, or even of freedom defined as human autonomy.

ness. If our use of the Bible does not accomplish this, then we should re-examine whether we are using it aright.

As evangelicals, because we love the Bible so much, we need to remind ourselves frequently of the words of Jesus to the Jewish leaders of his day: 'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life' (John 5:39-40). I do not believe there are any tensions between the written word of God and the living word of God, yet, we do well to remind ourselves that our objective must be to assist people in their growth in Christ and not primarily to be able to quote chapter and verse of the Bible. The Bible is a wonderful means that God has given, but the end is Christ himself.