
Counselling: Pastoral Care or Psychotherapy?

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Use the word 'counselling' in the presence of Christian ministers and it is guaranteed to produce a whole variety of responses. Some will readily and warmly receive the word because they have taken a counselling course, read some counselling books or practised some counselling skills; others will want a more precise definition to clarify just what is meant, and yet others will react in horror as the word immediately conjures up thoughts of secular rivals to the pastoral office.

What is counselling? Is it the same thing as pastoral care? What is the difference between counselling, pastoral counselling, Christian counselling and biblical counselling? Is counselling the same as psychotherapy? Is it the same as the 'care of souls'? Does a Christian functioning in counselling automatically make his work 'Christian counselling'?

Counselling

Counselling has to do with the relationship between one human being and another in which help is given towards solving problems of living. There are personal problems like anxiety, grief, guilt, resentment, uncontrolled desires and appetites, selfishness, feelings of insecurity or worthlessness, indiscipline and destructive patterns of behaviour. There are relationship problems between husband and wife, parents and children, brother and sister, employer and employee, neighbours, friends and work associates. There are 'spiritual' problems such as loss of identity, bitterness against God, resentment over sufferings, a feeling of desertion, lack of assurance, spiritual doubts, fear of death or judgment, and a host of doctrinal difficulties.

In counselling one human being offers himself in a helping relationship to another human being in need. He uses his expertise, knowledge, insights, skills and experience. **The goal of effective counselling is to help the counsellee to help himself by focusing on problems and their resolution.** As the psychotherapist Nelson-Jones expresses it: 'The counsellor's repertoire of psychological skills includes both those of forming and understanding relationships with clients and also focuses on helping them to change specific aspects of their feeling, thinking and behaviour'.¹ A whole range of professions are taught counselling skills for their work, such as social workers, probation officers and nurses. A new category which has emerged in recent years is the professional 'Counsellor' from whom time and attention can be purchased. Counselling in Britain and America is a growth industry. A whole variety of people with a host of different approaches are practising counselling.

Pastoral Care

By contrast, pastoral care is the sole prerogative of the pastor. The care of souls is not a side interest in the pastor's life and work. **It is his life's work.** It is exercised through preaching, teaching, the supervision of public worship, the leadership of the church and through private pastoral counselling. Hence the apostle Paul urged the Ephesians pastors to exercise their God-given office: 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (or pastor) the church of God which he purchased with his own blood' (Acts 20:28).

Much pastoral care is carried out through applicatory preaching. When a minister follows the direction of Scripture to 'take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you' (1 Timothy 4:16), and, 'Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching' (2 Timothy 4:2) his preaching will contain biblical counselling. Sermons will contain four distinct emphases suited to the occasion; doctrinal, pastoral, moral or evangelistic. Over the year a careful balance will be sought to declare 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). God-honouring preaching consists substantially in the exposition, interpretation, clarification and application of the written Word containing 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3), and addressed to the here-and-now community of saints and others who would hear it.

But preaching is not the only means ordained by God for the exercise of pastoral care. Referring to the minister of the gospel William G T Shedd writes,

He is not only a preacher, whose function it is to impart public instruction before an audience, but he is also a *pastor*, whose office it is to give private and personal advice from house to house, and to make his influence felt in the social and domestic life of his congregation . . . and hence requires the special discipline that qualifies him to watch over the personal religious interests of his flock . . . The pastor . . . has the care of souls . . . The pastor . . . is a watcher for souls.²

Definitions

As counselling is a feature common to the Christian Church (exercised in the context of pastoral care) and to a secular society (as practised by a host of differing professions) definitions are necessary for clarity. *Pastoral care* will be used to designate the whole activity of the Christian pastor. *Pastoral counselling* will be used of private conversations in which the pastor gives help, comfort, support, challenge or advice. *Psychotherapy* will be used to describe the activity of secular counselling. Whilst originating from the stable of *psychology*, psychotherapy is quite a different animal. **Psychology is a science** in which tests are carried out, observations recorded, reactions measured, statistics compiled and evaluated. It is a strict science dealing with animals, birds, fish and humans. Procedures are tested for reliability and validity. Psychology is a discipline devoted to the understanding of how animate creatures think, feel and behave. It is no more sinister than biology or chemistry.

In marked contrast psychotherapy (secular counselling) is not a science. It is a belief system in which assumptions are made about the nature of human existence, the quality of human life, and the necessary conditions for personality change. The Bobgans declare, 'Psychotherapy is not a coherent science in principle or in theory, diagnosis or treatment'.³ There are over 250 distinguishable variants in psychotherapy. Among the ranks of psychotherapy there is no shortage of critics who admit there is no proof whatever that their procedures are successful in achieving what they purport to achieve. Adams⁴ and M & D Bobgan⁵ detail numerous internal critics of psychotherapeutic procedures.

The issue faced in this paper is, 'What is the relationship between pastoral care and psychotherapy?' In seeking to address the question it will be necessary to begin by tracing the historical developments of pastoral care and identifying its courtship with psychotherapy.

The History of Christian Pastoral Care and Psychotherapy

Until the middle of the last century pastoral care exercised by ministers of the gospel was practised with great seriousness and general recognition in the community. Peter Lewis substantiates the point that 'among the puritans of sixteenth and seventeenth century England, pastoral work was not the light and uncertain thing which it has largely become in our own day'.⁶ Ministers were seen as effective counsellors for the whole community. People facing problems of living for which they needed help, support or advice, turned to the clergy. The wisdom of pastorally oriented classic Protestant theology was known and practised by caring pastors.

The nineteenth century produced its own outstanding men in pastoral care - William G T Shedd in America, Patrick Fairbairn in Scotland and Charles Bridges in England. These men championed the application of Scripture to the pastoral needs of the people with the same devotion, skill and commitment seen in the earlier fine pastoral theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Baxter Wesley, and Edwards.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Protestant liberalism blossomed. Biblical infallibility and authority were abandoned and consequently biblically informed and directed pastoral care was also abandoned. One of the key ideas in Protestant liberalism is the notion of the innate goodness of the human self. There was a consequent neglect in responding pastorally to human self-assertiveness and pride. Another assumption of liberal Protestantism was the progressive evolutionary delusion that things are getting better so that eventually, even if we do have some difficult human problems now, they will doubtless work themselves out either naturally, rationally or technologically.

In the early twentieth century the content of pastoral care was to change drastically. There was a dramatic shift away from a basically evangelical approach to the Scriptures and also a shift away from an appreciation of the accumulated wisdom, insight and experience of classic pastoral theologians. The arrival of the new theories and practices of psychiatry and psychotherapy diverted the attention of theologians and pastors away from their classic roots to the new therapies. Pastoral care took on a whole new meaning.

Theologians became frantically engaged in building bridges to the modern psychotherapies. Bridges were certainly built between theology and psychotherapy but the traffic on them was all one way! **Theologians imbibed the new psychotherapies without critical analysis from the vantage point of Scripture and the classic pastoral tradition.** The 'emergent psychologies,' as Thomas Oden points out, were 'becoming accommodated, often cheaply, into pastoral care'.

The pastoral wisdom of the godly forefathers was thrust aside. New mentors had arisen to lead pastors and people into the new promised land of solved problems, healed minds, stable emotions and controlled behaviour. Freud, Jung, Rogers, Ellis, Berne, Skinner - these were the men. That they were God-haters, antichristian and largely amoral, was of no concern to the beguiled theologians and ministers, who blindly followed and became their ardent supporters.

Under the misguided assumption that they could only function effectively in their pastoral work by the practice of the new therapies and skills, ministers began taking courses in a whole variety of therapies: psychodynamic therapy (Freud, Klein or Jung), personal constructs therapy (Kelly), person-centred therapy (Rogers), rational-emotive therapy (Ellis), reality therapy (Glasser), cognitive therapy (Beck), cognitive-behaviour modification (Meichenbaum), behavioural therapy (Pavlov, Watson, Skinner, Wolpe, Eysenck and Bandura), existential therapy (Rollo May), transactional analysis (Berne), gestalt therapy (Perls), logotherapy (Frankl) and a whole host of eclectic amalgams which have produced a mish-mash of therapies with strands crossing, inextricably interweaving or sitting uncomfortably in contradiction. Pastoral theology in recent years has become 'largely a thoughtless mimic of the most current psychological trends'.¹⁰

By stark contrast there are those in the ranks of psychotherapy who openly recognise its religious dimension. An example of this is found in an article by psychotherapist Brian Thorne who admits the encroachment of secular counselling into the realm of 'the spiritual' and concedes that we might now be 'witnessing a massive take-over by therapists of the traditional role of the clergy as spiritual guides or companions'.¹¹ Of course what Thorne means by 'spiritual' and what the Bible defines as spiritual are two entirely different things!

Evangelicals and Psychotherapy

Evangelical pastors have not escaped the influence of modern psychotherapy upon their God-given office. For many this has resulted in confusion (as illustrated by Ian Williams' article in the Anglican evangelical journal ANVIL).¹² Some will have imbibed ideas through previous professional training and consequently import some secular techniques, methods and principles. A few may react, like clinical psychologist turned clergyman Richard Krebs and discount all psychotherapy and all pastoral counselling from pastoral care. Krebs asserts that 'pastors should not be counsellors. They should evaluate, provide support, and refer'.¹³ Others will have been influenced by evangelical theorists whose books flow in profusion from the presses. Jay E Adams, Lawrence J Crabb and Gary R Collins are three key figures representing the spectrum of evangelical thought on psychotherapy that is, respectively - *rejection, accommodation and integration.*

Lawrence J Crabb

Crabb offers four alternatives for dealing with the relationship between Christianity and psychotherapy (unfortunately he uses the term 'psychology' which is misleading. In this context he is using 'psychology' in the sense of 'psychotherapy'). The alternatives he presents are designated (i) separate but equals, (ii) tossed salad, (iii) nothing buttery, and (iv) spoiling the Egyptians.¹⁴ In Crabb's opinion 'separate but equals' fails to recognise the relevance of the Scripture to psychological problems. 'Tossed salad' adds scriptural concepts to psychotherapeutic thinking rather than beginning with Scripture and cautiously scrutinizing psychotherapeutic concepts in the light of biblical presuppositions. 'Nothing buttery' neatly handles the problem of integration by disregarding psychotherapy altogether. The basic tenet is *Nothing But Grace, Nothing But Christ, Nothing But Faith, Nothing But The Word*. In identifying his own approach as 'spoiling the Egyptians' he contends 'we can profit from secular psychology if we carefully screen our concepts to determine their compatibility with Christian presuppositions'.¹⁵

How then did Anna Freud's writings on the ego-defence mechanism squeeze through the sieve? (Anna was the daughter of Sigmund.) Crabb, unhesitatingly and without qualification,¹⁶ recommends her writings as 'appropriate and helpful reading for a Christian'.¹⁶ The heavy emphasis on these defence mechanisms of unconscious denial and repression continue throughout all of Crabb's work. It is essential to 'Understanding People'¹⁷ and for changing from the 'Inside Out'.¹⁸ Freudian theory has met with growing criticism both in and out of the field of psychotherapy. Furthermore Anna Freud's teaching conflicts with the biblical view of conscious choice and responsibility.

Erich Fromm also receives commendation. Crabb says, Fromm 'offers a useful discussion of love . . . Some of his insights are useful',²⁰ in spite of the fact that Fromm denies that God is love or that he is the source of love. Fromm says, 'love is not a higher power which descends upon man or a duty which is imposed upon him; it is his own power by which he relates himself to the world and makes it truly his'.²¹

Crabb has wholeheartedly recommended Christians to read the works of Anna Freud, Erich Fromm and Carl Rogers. Furthermore his psychotherapy betrays a strong affinity with the work of Abraham Maslow (hierarchy of needs) and Albert Ellis (rational emotive therapy). Maslow's work is shot through with godless insinuations. In the late 1950s he wrote against the human tendency to look for supernatural help in life's struggles, criticising the 'good many' who 'have thrown up their hands altogether and talked about original sin or intrinsic evil and concluded that men could be saved by extrahuman forces'.²² Ellis also attacked Christian teaching. He says, 'one of the central theses of rational-emotive psychotherapy is that there is no place whatever for the concept of sin in psychotherapy and that to introduce this concept in any manner, shape or form is highly pernicious and antitherapeutic'.²³

The Israelites 'spoiled the Egyptians' by requesting and obtaining 'articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing' for 'the LORD had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians' (Ex 12:35-36). God did not direct the Israelites to

emulate the theories, ideas or practices of the Egyptians. The expression 'spoiling the Egyptians' as used by Crabb is distinctly unfortunate and may indicate the limitations of his theological expertise. The Bobgans expose the inadequacies behind Crabb's thinking and demonstrate how he is more influenced by his training in psychotherapy than his study of Scripture.²⁴

That there are strong similarities at times between some of the insights of psychotherapy and the teachings of Scripture is readily admitted. The issue facing the Christian pastor is whether he can learn pastoral care from, or have his pastoral care enhanced by, the proponents of secular psychotherapy. The Bobgans suggest that,

Crabb's rationale for integrating psychology with the Bible is based on his observation of superficial, ineffective Christians, his confidence in psychology, and his contention that the Bible does not give direct answers to people with problems of living. Crabb touches the common sense of the church when he points out the fact that there are Christians who are struggling with difficult problems of living. And, he touches the nerve of the church when he admonishes Christians for being materialistic and superficial . . . We also believe that Christians should be in the process of learning to walk in full dependence upon the Lord who saved us and who is conforming each one of us into the image of Jesus Christ. But, the inner man is not transformed into the likeness of Christ through psychological systems or techniques devised by men. The spiritual transformation of the inner man is outside of the domain of secularly based systems.²⁵

It is also to be noted that Crabb designates his own psychotherapy as 'biblical counselling',²⁶ which is grossly misleading for the average Christian reader. His 'biblical counselling' (or 'Christian counselling') is a mish-mash of secular philosophy, secular techniques and secular methods garnished with numerous biblical references served as though it came direct from Mount Sinai.

Jay E Adams

In his definitive book, *COMPETENT TO COUNSEL*, Adams claims to strike a new note: 'Rather than defer and refer to psychiatrists steeped in their humanistic dogma, ministers of the gospel and other Christian workers who have been called to help his people out of their distress, will be encouraged to reassume their privileges and responsibilities'.²⁷

In spite of his undoubted desire to recall pastors back to the exercise of their God-given responsibilities as guided and instructed by the Word of God, and to shun modern psychotherapies, Adams nevertheless shows a remarkable affinity with the procedures of those he disclaims. He has developed systems, methods and techniques which when coupled with a lavish use of Bible texts seem to win the day with evangelical pastors, especially of the 'reformed' persuasion.²⁸

What is an even greater concern about the counselling approach of Adams is that he majors on one aspect of counselling in pastoral care to the detriment of others. Adams chooses to major on 'nouthetic' teaching and disregards the 'para-kletic' element in biblical pastoral care. 'Nouthetic' derives from the Greek words *noutheteo* which occurs eight times and *nouthesia* which occurs three times in the New Testament. *Nouthesia* is translated as admonish, warn or confront. Whereas

'parakletic' derives from the words *parakaleo* and *paraklesis* which are used a total of 138 times. *Parakaleo* means literally 'to call alongside' and is translated as comfort, console, exhort, or entreat. One of the outstanding usages is in reference to the Holy Spirit as another Parakletos (Jn 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7) and by implication designates also our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 14:16).

Adams' 'nouthetic counselling' rightly addresses the omission of secular psychotherapy in calling sinners to repentance and faith. Confrontational counselling has its place in Christian pastoral care. The admonitory function has been generally neglected. Ministers have struggled to appear non-judgmental and have succumbed to the pressure of the age. The corrective task was a vital aspect of pastoral care in the past. It recurrently appears as an essential dimension of virtually all classical descriptions of the care of souls. Most agree that it is necessary to ministry and that the task 'must be approached with great care, concern, sensitivity and delicacy - and that it is fraught with hidden dangers'.²⁹

But Adams highlights admonition to the detriment of comfort and compassion.

Adams argues that the triple requirements of change, confrontation and care within the counselling process are best met by the possession of 'extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, divine wisdom, and good will towards others'.³⁰

However 'nouthetic' counselling is not the whole approach of pastoral care in individual counselling as represented in the Scriptures. Indeed, in comparison with the number of references to the 'parakletic' element, the infrequent occurrence of the 'nouthetic' element would lead to the conclusion that it is only a small part of pastoral care. Noting this imbalance in Adams' approach, Hurdling concludes that 'Adams seems to favour the more distinctive and admonishing stance . . . to the more encouraging and consoling style'.³¹

'Parakletic' counselling receives greater attention in the Scriptures than 'nouthetic' counselling. A typical example is found in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God,' from which it is clearly seen that, (i) God is the source of all comfort, (ii) we ourselves have been comforted by God, (iii) we are called and equipped to share this comfort with the afflicted.

Summary

Christian pastoral care has come under the corrupting influence of psychotherapy. Protestant liberalism absorbed, virtually wholesale, the secular theories, principles and practices of psychotherapy. **Evangelicals have been more cautious but they have gradually yielded ground as influential leaders came 'under the spell' of the secular practitioners.** Identifying similarities at certain points between biblical teaching and the theories and practices of psychotherapy, evangelical theorists have assumed psychotherapy had something to offer that could not be obtained through the Scriptures. Even where a stance of opposition to psychotherapy has been adopted the plain marks of influence can be clearly seen. A formal methodology, work sheets, interview techniques, manuals and pocket guides for the busy counsellor have largely replaced the spiritual and theological preparation of the man of God. Pastors need to walk with God, to be immersed

in God's Word, to love people and to learn from godly forefathers. Our heritage is not from Freud, Rogers, Ellis or Skinner but from the words and example of the Lord Jesus Christ and from godly men of the past who were mighty in the Scriptures and had large pastoral hearts - Paul, Peter, John, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Baxter and Edwards . These fine men have more to teach the Christian pastor than all the psychotherapists put together.

Competence in Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is the sole prerogative of the pastor. It is his life and work (Moody, in an article in the journal THEOLOGY, helpfully delineates the distinctive roles of a Christian pastor and a secular counsellor.)³² But competence in pastoral care, and in particular that aspect of pastoral care related to the application of Scripture to the personal needs and conditions of the individual in private counsel, does not come automatically with the office. Hard work (1 Tim 5:17), careful study of the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15), real self-sacrificing love for the people (Acts 20:19-20,31; Phil 1:8), reliance on the Holy Spirit for illumination and insight and, preferably, years of experience, make the competent pastor. Oden states it succinctly when he writes, 'The fabric of effective pastoral work involves the constant interweaving of spiritual wisdom, historic awareness, constructive theological reasoning, situational discernment, and personal empathy. It is best studied by examining case materials of concrete problems of pastoral counsel, viewed in the light of Scripture and tradition'.³³

One of the arguments which is used against the minister functioning in pastoral counselling with those who are disturbed is *the perennial issue of mental illness*. What if the counsellor is mentally ill? What if it is something which cannot be cured by 'talk therapy'? Won't the pastor make the situation a whole lot worse? The question of mental illness is largely a red herring. It is used to undermine the confidence of the Christian pastor when faced with people presenting with serious problems. In the first place 'mental illness' is a term widely used and rarely defined accurately. It is often used by 'professionals' and 'experts' as a blanket term to describe any condition where a person is not coping with life's problems. By contrast Jay Adams asserts, 'Apart from organically generated difficulties, the "mentally ill" are really *people with unsolved personal problems*'.³⁴

Consultant psychiatrist, neurologist and neurophysiologist Dr Raju Abraham fully endorses the assessment of Dr Adams. With all the weight of his medical expertise, he distinguishes *non-organic* and *organic* problems as problems originating in *the mind* and problems originating in *the brain*. Dr Abraham writes, 'One of the reasons there is so much confusion is because of the failure to distinguish between mind and brain. We often think that mind problems are somehow brain problems and therefore the purview of the medical profession. Little do people realise that actual organic problems cause only a tiny proportion of counselling problems'.³⁵

One of the reasons why pastors are so often intimidated by psychiatrists and psychotherapists is because of their own inability to distinguish between 'organic' and 'non-organic' mental disorder. Only 'organic' disorders should be termed 'mental illness'. Adams is often wrongfully criticized for having no category of mental illness. This is blatantly untrue. In *COMPETENT TO COUNSEL* he states

clearly, 'Organic malfunctions affecting the brain that are caused by brain damage, tumours, gene inheritance, glandular or chemical disorders, validly may be termed mental illness'.³⁶

Consequently Adams recommends the completion of a Personal Data Inventory³⁷ by every counsellee which, among other things, will elicit the general state of health, the use or abuse of drugs, patterns of sleep, hallucinations, perceptual distortions of colour and shape, phobias, etc. He also insists that 'The pastor . . . works back to back with the physician. The latter will help him immensely in sorting out cases in which thyroid deficiency, myxoedema (*a disease resulting from underactivity of the thyroid gland characterised by puffy eyes, face, and hands and mental sluggishness*), or some other condition is at the root of a disorder. There is, of course, a grey area between, where it is uncertain to both whether a problem stems basically from organic or non-organic sources'.³⁸ (italics mine)

Adams further acknowledges that there is a possibility that some of the bizarre behaviour which one meets in so-called schizophrenic persons, stems from organic roots. Adams raises the question, 'What about people, for instance, who suspect that others are after them? Can a Christian counsellor help them? What if they freeze up in a catatonic state? Other persons also may talk about visions, claim to hear voices inaudible to others, etc. What can the Christian counsellor do for them?' Adams answers his question,

To begin with, a good medical checkup is the place to start. Counsellees with problems of this sort may have an organic problem; perhaps a tumour on the brain or, as may be more likely, a perceptual disorder resulting from chemical malfunction of the body. Chemical malfunction also may result from toxic chemical buildup in the body caused by acute sleep loss. Christian counsellors who are aware of the effects of sleep loss (often as the result of sinful abuse of the body) have been able to get to the root of the problem when physicians could find no cause.³⁹

The pastor is at no greater disadvantage than the psychotherapist in his work for he too must carefully watch for any tell-tale signs which may indicate that the presenting problem is organically based.

So where does the pastor begin? **What are the guidelines for the pastoral care of the seriously disturbed?** He requires confidence in a number of specific areas:

- a) In his God-given task and God-provided resources. Many of the so-called 'mentally-ill' are people who can be helped by the ministry of God's word provided the Scriptures are well known, accurately understood, graciously applied and mediated in reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and with much prayer.
- b) That there are only two origins of disorder; organic and non-organic, and that only the smallest proportion of presenting problems will have an organic origin. When uncertain, especially where there are other tell-tale signs, the pastor will immediately refer the counsellee to his/her GP with a covering letter.
- c) In knowing that his secular counterpart, the professional psychotherapist, has no greater perception, skill or expertise in determining when problems are organic or non-organic.
- d) That in fulfilling his work of pastoral counsel he will be assisting in the

prevention and cure of stress-related illness, such as arthritis, vascular disease and gastrointestinal disease.⁴⁰

Singleness of Mind

In order for pastors to achieve their God-given responsibilities in pastoral care (preaching, teaching, supervision of public worship and the private application of the Scriptures to individual needs) God gives them colleagues, gifted brethren and sisters in the church to fulfil other tasks. Deacons were appointed to release those in pastoral care who would otherwise be distracted from their duties of 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4).

Ministerial megalomania, the obsession with power and control, hampers not only the full functioning of the body of Christ to which pastors should be committed (Eph 4:11-12), but it also renders the pastor ineffective in pastoral care through the neglect of prayer and spiritual reflection. It is pride which causes the pastor to want to do everything in the church. The Jethro principle (Ex 18:14ff) enables more people to share the leadership load, so that God's grace works through many and spares anyone excessive demands (Calvin's Institutes 4.11.8).

A 'golden rule' for pastors is 'Never do the work of general ministry that can be done by others.'

Pastoral leadership consists principally in learning how to empower, enable and enrich the leadership of others. It often seems more trouble-free for the pastor to do the job himself. 'If you want a job doing well, do it yourself' may not be presumptuous arrogance but it comes perilously close to it. Pastors are to train, nurture, educate, equip men and women of God for the tasks of the church (1 Tim 3:2-13; 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5-9; 2:3-5; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Cor 12:7). The phenomenal rise in men leaving the pastoral office, particularly young men in their first church, may be accounted for, at least in part, by confusion as to what ministry entails. When the minister leads the flock and educates the flock so that 'every part does its share' (Eph 4:16) he has time to give to the study of systematic, biblical and pastoral theology. When he is diverted to other work: bricklaying, cleaning, church letter writing, caretaking, accounting, delivering, administrating or by organising teas, evangelistic campaigns or open-air speaking; attending meetings, committees and functions, then his work of 'pastoring' of necessity suffers. Are pastors so entrenched in these activities that they abdicate their pastoral responsibilities by referring people with problems to 'professional' counsellors? Pastors *are* the professionals; professionals at pastoral care. The pastor who does not pastor is like salt that has lost its savour, 'good for nothing but to be thrown out' (Matt 5:13; cf. Ezek 34:1-16).

Personal Qualities Needed For Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is the heaviest responsibility in the world. As a teacher the minister is warned that he will 'receive a stricter judgment' (James 3:1). As one who watches for souls the minister is reminded he must one day 'give account' (Hebrews 13:17). Great care must therefore be exercised in the choice and training of men for the pastoral office.

A man suited to pastoral office will have:

An ability to maintain absolute confidentiality - recognized by the church

A thorough working knowledge of Scripture

A deep insight and extensive self-knowledge

A genuine care for ordinary people

An ability to accurately empathize with a variety of human conditions

A gentle spirit

Practical wisdom

Ability to communicate in public and private

A willingness to learn

Trustworthiness and a trusting disposition

Genuineness, internal congruence (feeling your own feelings accurately)

Gospel hope, Christian optimism

Courage, humour and the willingness to face limitations and admit mistakes.

Where better to start in the study of pastoral care than with the Great Pastor, the living God. Substitute the word 'pastor' for 'shepherd' throughout the Bible and the magnitude of the task begins to dawn. 'Jehovah is my Pastor' (Ps 23:1). The good Pastor leads his sheep beside still waters and restores their soul (Ps 23:2-3). The good Pastor is self-sacrificing. He 'gives his life for the sheep' (Jn 10:11). A fellow-pastor, the apostle Peter, says, 'Pastor the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Pastor appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away' (1 Pet 5:2-4).

The Lord Jesus is the Wonderful Counsellor (Is 9:6). He teaches pastoral counselling by example. He talks with needy people; Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, little children, an immoral woman, the blind, deaf and lame, the demon possessed and mentally deranged. The Bible is a mine of teaching, of examples and of illustrations in the art of pastoral care.

The pastor who has reliable knowledge of himself is best prepared to offer good counsel. This is emphasised in the works of Augustine, Calvin, Wesley and especially Baxter and yet is curiously absent from much modern day pastoral training. The care of souls requires accurate understanding of one's own driving passions, distorted motives, neurotic tendencies, latent doubts, and emerging struggles.

The art of pastoral care is hard won. Pastoral counselling is not to be handed over to 'Christian professionals' as Crabb recommends⁴¹. It is the long-working, hard-thinking, God-knowing, Christ-centred, Bible-based, people-loving pastor who alone is competent to counsel towards a permanent and effective outcome.

Pastoral Care and Theological Reflection

For too long ministers have been and still are being trained as theologians, teachers or preachers but not as pastors. Pastoral theology deserves a position by the side of, and equal in importance to, systematic theology and biblical theology. To quote Oden once more,

Since pastoral theology is theology, it proceeds by the same method as any well-formed theology, utilising a well-known quadrilateral of sources for

understanding God's self disclosure in history: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience . . . The texts of Scripture . . . are the Word of God, addressed to us for our healing, instruction and benefit. Tradition at bottom is the history of exegesis. It implies an ongoing process of trying to understand the address of Scripture in various historical settings . . . The application of reason as a criterion for pastoral self-reflection implies an effort to think constructively, rigorously, and consistently; to argue cogently; and to reflect systematically on the cohesive ordering of pastoral wisdom . . . Personal and social experience forms the fourth branch of the quadrilateral of the theological method for pastoral theology. This includes factoring into our conception of ministry not only our own existential experience and personal story, but also the experience of others we know who have been engaged in ministry. The best pastoral insight is derived from lived experience of ministry.⁴²

Conclusion

It has been shown that the demise of pastoral care has been precipitated by the undermining of biblical authority and the influence of secular psychotherapy. Christian pastors need not be intimidated by psychotherapy. At best secular counselling only does a patching-up job. Pastors mediate Christ by the Spirit through the Word. It is the Lord Jesus who effectively and eternally cares for souls. 'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . But his delight is in the law of the LORD (Psalm 1:1-2).

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