
Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Counselling: Pastoral Care or Psychotherapy

May I say how much I enjoyed the article by Gareth Crossley (Autumn 1992) with the above title. For many years I have been concerned by the encroachment of the professional psychiatrist who is a Christian into the area of pastoral care where it is the province of the minister.

His analysis of the true situation is excellent, made even more so and with greater authority by the fact that he has passed through the upper reaches of secular psychology. Despite all that training, he has been bold enough to state that it should not be used in counselling amongst Christians.

May I, however, make two small comments regarding his criticism of Jay Adams? Firstly, he says that Adams has majored on *nouthetic* ie confrontational counselling to the detriment of *paracletos* ie comfort and compassion counselling. Dare I suggest that Gareth Crossley has missed the whole point of why Adams wrote his many books. Most competent pastors will be able to handle the many traumatic problems that can afflict their flock, such as bereavement, illness, loss of job or living accommodation etc. These are problems that can come upon anyone at any time. They will produce temporary depression, fear, stress and anxiety when they first face a situation that is not of their doing. This is where "comfort" counselling is required, and to infer that Adams would enter the situation with hob-nailed boots demanding a change of attitude immediately is unwarranted. Adams assumes that any pastor would handle the situation with care.

Where there is a crying need for clear advice is when a pastor is confronted by a church member who is acting in a strange fashion, is in deep depression or highly stressed for a long period, ie they are not behaving as one might expect a reasonable sensible or mature person should behave. Here is where they will tend to feel "out of their depth" and be tempted to refer them to a professional psychiatrist - Christian or not. It is *this* gap in knowledge that Adams filled so effectively with his emphasis on "rebuking" those who fail to behave maturely. To put it simply, we are responsible for how we react to situations. One person behaves correctly and in a Christian way. Another reacts incorrectly, and thereby sins against himself and God. I do not feel that "comforting" that person will actually solve the problem in the long term - it will reappear perhaps years later in another guise. Surely he needs to be confronted with his wrong reaction and encouraged to train himself so that he reacts rightly next time the same situation arises.

I can emphasise this difference between problems coming from outside and those from inside by using the very verse that Gareth quotes to support his view that Adams is wrong, 2 Cor 1: 3-4.

The word twice used here for "tribulation" and "troubles" is *thlipsis*. Examination of this word in Vines shows that it is predominantly used for

external problems that come upon us, being the main word used for the Great Tribulation of end time. As I have said, this is precisely where “comforting” of the flock is needed, for they are not responsible for what is happening to them. If their reaction to the problems is wrong, however, then “admonition” is called for - in the gentlest of ways of course, but still aiming to change their behaviour. In this very brief consideration, I would hope that I have been able to overcome his one criticism of Adams. If I have succeeded, then what prevents pastors from following his guidelines as far as they reasonably can?

Secondly, if Crabbe and Adams are criticised, where then should a minister turn to when he is confronted with a member behaving in a strange way? Gareth gives a list of the desirable qualities possessed by a counsellor, but these are hardly adequate to deal with a particularly difficult set of behaviour patterns - guidance is badly needed, and this is what Adams provided.

May I particularly recommend his book MORE THAN REDEMPTION which gives the theological background to his counselling methods and is a feast of subjects for sermons.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Bowden

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Reply to Malcolm Bowden

I am pleased to have this opportunity to reply to Malcolm Bowden’s letter and hope that I shall address his comments with the same generosity of spirit with which he clearly writes.

Malcolm raises three issues in relation to Jay E Adams. Firstly he claims that I have misrepresented Adams when I say that he ‘highlights admonition to the detriment of comfort and compassion’ (FOUNDATIONS, 1992, 29, p 18). In my reading of nine of Adams’ books I have seen no indication that Adams assumes that any pastor will be able to handle the more common pastoral problems effectively and that he is therefore concentrating on the neglected area of “rebuking” those who fail to behave maturely. I hope Malcolm is right but I fear it is Malcolm’s assumption rather than Adams’. In my opinion Adams fails to point out that *nouthetic* counselling, although essential, is only one part of Christian pastoral counselling.

Having said this, Adams is undoubtedly worthy of our attention. We owe him a debt of gratitude for championing, in our day, the cause of the true pastoral ministry based on the application of biblical principles and truths. My warning was only against his over emphasis on nouthetic counselling. Even in the book which Malcolm recommends, Adams speaks of nouthetic counselling as ‘the principal and the fullest biblical word for counselling’ (p ix).

Secondly, I did not suggest that ‘confronting’ should be replaced by ‘comforting’. Adams has done a great service in calling pastors back to this neglected feature of God-honouring counsel; that we should challenge sinful selfish behaviour. Much of what Adams writes is extremely helpful and instructive in relating the Scriptures to problems of living. I have no hesitation in recommending his writings provided that his emphasis upon nouthetic

counselling is recognised as an over-emphasis. That words related to 'comfort' occur in the New Testament twelve times more frequently than words related to 'confront' might give ground to consider that a disproportionate emphasis on confronting and rebuking is inappropriate. Let each presenting problem be met by a fitting response.

The last point which Malcolm raises is the most important issue facing pastors today. 'Where should a minister turn?' In agreement with Adams I would answer, not to Freud, Rogers, Ellis, or Skinner, nor indeed to Crabb, but to the Scripture, and men like Calvin, Luther, Baxter, Owen, Edwards, Fairbairn and Bridges. The Puritans were not only great preachers they were great pastors too. They knew how to apply the Word of God to the multifarious problems of life. They preached about practical issues. They constantly applied the Word of God to the daily experiences of believers. They wrote extensively about spiritual depression (all depression is basically 'spiritual'. See W Bridge, *A LIFTING UP FOR THE DOWNCAST*, Banner of Truth), about marriage and family life (see Baxter's *PRACTICAL WORKS* Vol 1, Soli Deo Gloria Publications). There are helpful books about pastoral theology (W G T Shedd, *HOMILETICS AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY*, Banner of Truth, pp 279-355), pastoral work in general (Bridges, *THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY*, Banner of Truth, pp 344-383) and visiting and pastoral counselling (Baxter's *THE REFORMED PASTOR*, Banner of Truth).

A good book to begin with is Peter Lewis', *THE GENIUS OF PURITANISM* (Carey Publications) and the section on *The Puritans as Pastors* (pp 63-136). Peter's references will lead to numerous sources of sound counselling on a multitude of pastoral issues.

Even with a good grasp of pastoral care and counselling from the classic theologians of the past, one vital ingredient remains to be added to the development of the minister's skills in pastoral counselling; he needs to talk over practical pastoral counselling issues with fellow ministers. Though godly able ministers in the UK are relatively few, nevertheless they have between them a wealth of pastoral experience and expertise. The inexperienced minister should 'tap into' this source of learning by finding an able minister and treating him as a mentor (How many ministers were helped in understanding and unravelling difficult pastoral problems by the wise counselling of the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones?).

Small groups of ministers should meet to thrash out pastoral problems. There are some excellent ministers' fraternals which seek to address the real practical pastoral issues of the day but there is a need for pastoral workshops where case studies can be discussed and the scriptures applied. In this way ministers will regain confidence in their ability to give pastoral care and counsel. Such experiences would prove mutually edifying. Most professionals see the need for in-service training and the constant development of skills and insights - why not ministers? They are the ones whom God has called to be competent to counsel!

Gareth Crossley
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