

# Understanding Pastoral Counselling & The Science of Psychology



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**A Layman's Guide to the**

**UNDERSTANDING**  
**PASTORAL COUNSELLING**  
**&**  
**THE SCIENCE OF**  
**PSYCHOLOGY**

**Adapted from**  
**Friends of the Bridegroom Ch. 1 & 2**

by  
**Lee Bee Teik**



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# **Where Do We Stand?**

## **Part I**

### **The Relationship between Pastoral Counselling and Secular Counselling**



**PART I**

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**Perspectives in Pastoral Counselling**

Paul urged, in 1 Corinthians 14:20 (regarding controversial issues)

***“Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regards to evil, be infants, but in your thinking be adults.”***

Dr.D.A.Seamands stated:

***“Pastoral counselling is a matter of the heart as well as an art.”***

Therefore, it cannot be practised by a mere knowledge of techniques picked up formally or informally.

In earlier years, as the wife of a pastor who later turned seminary lecturer, I was eager to help those in deep spiritual and psychological needs. So I quietly observed and searched for models of ministry teams whenever suitable opportunities arose.

### **The Search**

I recall vividly how I once tried to help a young lady whom I thought needed an overhaul in body, spirit and soul, but my good intentions was to no avail. I had seen one prayer team pray for others who felt better so fast...freed and “whole”. So I thought this overhaul ministry of deliverance and prayer for healing and blessing would solve so many problems quickly i.e. in hours, days or just weeks. Many

will be helped in a shorter period so that we could move on to help many more others in need! But as time passed and I looked at those who had benefited from such ministries, I felt something missing in the recipients of such healing. They were often left not knowing how to live their “overhauled” lives. Their lifestyles often typify those who have recovered from one illness just to get ill again. What happened in between? Were they not cleared of their past bondages? Or were their new problems due to new “sins” and/or oppressions?

Not knowing what to make of such happenings, I continued my casual search for models. I read books and watched mature believers from the East and the West ministering to those with deep needs in life. I compared notes. On hindsight, I now see that, gradually, the Lord was moving me nearer to the wounds in my own heart. Till He dealt with those wounds, I had no direction for formulating any guidelines for helping others. I could not pass on the hope in Christ to my counselees with confidence. But after receiving deep emotional surgery at the Master Surgeon’s hands and having known the healing power of His truth and grace, I was able to pass on the hope and reality of God’s desire to transform His beloved children [1]. Though I have not arrived, nor will I ever arrive in this world, with regards to pastoral counseling or any area of earthly life, I am more certain now that though certain principles are rooted in Scriptures, the task of counselling someone in deep spiritual, emotional and mental anguish requires a contextualised God-man-world view. This needs to be derived from humbly searching the Scriptures, from watching the life of Jesus, the Son of Man in the Scriptures and from learning from His faithful disciples’ ministries down

through the ages (by the reading of biographies) and through personal experience.

In addition, we also need to believe that God also speaks to us through His general revelation in the universe around us [Romans 1:19-21]. As one of Jesus' friends, John, said, if everything about Christ were to be written, there would not be enough space to store the books about Him [John 21:24,25].

So I realised that I have to be open to the Holy Spirit's constant counsel as I sit before someone seeking answers for his/her personal problems. No wonder then that counselling is a matter of the *heart* as well as an *art*. With tools of the written word of God in one hand and with general knowledge concerning God's creation on the other hand, we need to let the Counsellor of counsellors guard our hearts and minds as we exercise the gift of counselling. But wait...what is the gift of counselling? For this I shall need the help of professionals who have done more systematic research. As lay pastoral counsellors [i.e.those without any professional qualification in counselling such as a Bachelor of Arts or Masters in Counselling degree], we often help someone without being conscious of our roles. However, learning from systematically trained counsellors may sometimes help us clarify our own thinking about the subject.

## Discovery of Gifts

I recall with a sense of guilt that, up till the eighties, though I knew what was wrong with friends who came for advice, very often, I did not know how to help them apply that knowledge to benefit them. Hence, with remorse, I had left a few trusting friends in limbo. Now I am more careful to ask the Lord for discernment and wisdom in each step of the counselling process so that I may hear them and Him correctly. Then will I be able to teach them to solve their own problems, by God's enabling grace.

In other situations, not realising what to focus on, I ran out of stamina and left a few people helped half-way. It was in 1986 that, through the confirmative discovery of the Creator's basic/natural giftings for me, that I was then able to begin to say "No" to what I was not called to do regularly and say "Yes" to what I believe I have been called to do. It is my hope that some readers will ask God to show them their giftings, especially if they are in their late thirties, so that the rest of their lives will be lived in fruitful service for God.

## Definitions

\*

*"The gift of pastor* is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to assume *a long-term* personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers." (Peter C. Wagner in his book "Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow") [2].

A cell group leader in a local church or a Bible-study group leader in a college Christian fellowship, for example, would need this gift for the effective caring of his flock. The ideal

number of group members would be around 10-15, as exemplified in Jesus' own discipling method. In fact, this has already been wisely suggested by Jethro to Moses in Exodus 18:13-26. There is a high possibility that *Jesus learned* this principle from the Old Testament!

\*

“*The gift of exhortation* is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to minister *words* of comfort, consolation, encouragement and *counsel* to other members of the body in such a way that they feel helped and healed”

It is noted that the gift of exhortation is so wide and deep at times that there are few who could effectively exercise every aspect of it thoroughly unless their lifestyle allows them to be free enough for such a purpose i.e. if they were single or have no dependent children with them. In reality, we see more people helpers who have one or two of the *sub-gifts* (according to this definition) of comfort, consolation, encouragement or counsel. Having said that, I must say that gifts may also come in various degrees of *combinations*. For example, during a counselling session, the pastoral counsellor often has to comfort and encourage as well. Coupled with this sub-gift of counsel, the counsellor would also need the gifts of discernment and wisdom.

Further, as problems surface in people at odd and unpredictable times, the ratio of counselee: counsellor in the particular church or group may be increased as this is a *shorter term* ministry to someone, so that any one counsellor may help more members in a given time and energy capacity e.g. Jesus' encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were more like a pastoral

counsellor-counselee relationship than like a direct evangelistic relationship. Jesus probably had such short encounters with hundreds of people in His three years; but He intimately and intensively pastored only 12 disciples.

If you are not sure which special gifts you have, I would encourage you to read a biblically sound book which will help you identify your gifts. Before I discovered where my giftings were more focussed, (as I believe that in an emergency situation, we should all help a person even if we feel we do not have a special gift for the person's need), I had often harboured false guilt for not having the necessary stamina to follow through a friend needing pastoral care. In the end, the other person did not receive much long-term shepherding while I was left wondering before the Lord as to why I did not have sufficient energy to continue helping someone I cared for so much. Having discovered my strong and weak areas, I was freed from the false guilt of not taking on long-term pastoral care and was personally released for more short-term counselling work.

### **What then is the definition of a pastoral counsellor?**

Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary:1971 defines:

- \* a pastor as "one who has care of a flock or a congregation; a shepherd, a clergyman".
- \* pastoral as "relating to shepherd or to shepherd life".
- \* a pastoral letter as "a book on the care of souls".

Webster's New World Dictionary (3rd College Edition) 1988 defines:

- \* a pastor as a "shepherd".

Oxford Student's Dictionary of Current English for KBSM (1988, 2nd edition) defines:

- \* a pastor as a "Christian minister"
- \* pastoral as "of (duties towards) the welfare of people: pastoral care or responsibilities"

The term "pastor" is used in the Bible to describe the leaders' caring roles in churches in the Old and New Testaments [Jeremiah 23:1; Ezekiel 34:11-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4]. It rings the Shepherd's bell in those who have read Psalm 23. Since the word "pastor" is rooted in the Shepherd heart of God [Matthew 2:6], any definition of pastoral counselling has to return to the inevitable implications of its pastoral/shepherding context in which such a type of counselling proceeds.

**It is, therefore, the *attitude and heart* of a pastoral counsellor that *counts rather than the actual methods* used.**

A pastoral counsellor, hence, is someone who counsels another person with the sole intention of bringing the lamb or sheep home to the Good Shepherd. This has been clarified and demonstrated by Jesus Himself in John 10:11-18.

Irrespective of the abundance or lack of formal training, the pastoral counsellor, above all else, seeks to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who leads and guides His sheep to the green pastures of nourishment and to cool waters of refreshment. This is done under the protection of His staff and rod, and with total trust in His wisdom and power to direct and to keep. Hence, the basic foundation and hope for the

pastoral counsellor and the counsellee is in Christ and His manner of of ministry. “As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” [John 17:18]. Jesus is our only Example of persistent compassion and empathy, as shown in His interpersonal relationship with the Samaritan woman at the well. He took the trouble to cross cultural, racial, social, personality, moral/religious barriers to counsel her...thus she was transformed [3]!

*“Therefore, Christ realisation is our goal in pastoral counselling. A person may be emotionally healthy but spiritually dead. Our goal is to bring the people in need face to face with Him in order to receive His grace and truth.”*

*D.A.Seamands*

Conversely, though God’s children in Christ are spiritually alive, many are emotionally unhealthy, unable to experience the abundant life that Christ generously offers to them. But there is hope in Christ...peace and joy will come as His children are more forgiven, more healed, walking more in God’s light and love. Also, we need to accept that in most instances, healing that **begins as a crisis** needs to be **completed in the process of sanctification**. The pastoral counsellor’s realistic hope is that though the process can begin NOW, in most cases, it may take time for the counsellee to feel well emotionally and mentally. Otherwise, disillusionment will result and the consequences will be worse than before counsel was offered.

As such, pastoral counselling cannot be separated from **spiritual formation** though one with more of a pastoral gifting and more time may take over to walk on with the healing counsellee. Therefore, I would prefer to describe

pastoral counselling as one arm of spiritual formation while the practice of the Christian disciplines is the other arm. (See chapter 6 of *Friends of the Bridegroom*). Consequent to this perspective of pastoral counselling, the pastoral counsellor is free to use various methods to help the counsellee. This includes the use of researched truth through the science of psychology, developed in the western world, as long as those methods lie within the boundaries of guidelines laid down in the revealed truth of God (as shown in the Old and New Testaments and in the life of Jesus our Saviour and Lord).

Further, from Revelations 19:6-9, we may deduce that the bride of Christ is to prepare herself for the Bridegroom by the putting on of garments of good works. But what do we mean by good works when we already know that we are saved by the grace of God through faith? In the context of the mandate in John 13:34-35, good works are whatever we do in love that help others recognise God as Lord (as was repeatedly stated in the book of Ezekiel and re-emphasised by our Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:13-16.).

This implies that any type of work that helps others see Him clearer is good work. Non-believers will be brought to know Him and believers will be purified for the Bridegroom. In the doing of good works, the doer and the recipient of good works both move closer to God.

**Counselling**, therefore, is only **one of those good works** in the process of spiritual transformation.

## The Spiritual Formation Framework

*“This is the will of God, your sanctification...”*

*(1Thessalonians 4:3)*

*“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us...sanctification...”*

*(1 Corinthians 1:30)*

Spiritual formation, as I have come to understand, is a term used to describe the process whereby God uses various means to transform a child of His so that he becomes more and more like His Son Jesus. Therefore, we need to see the counselee as a Whole Person, **not** just as a Case or a Problem, though it is more practical to refer to them as “cases”.

The apostle Paul often reminds us that we have to put off our personal old traits - our weaknesses and sins in us - while putting on Christ’s new traits - of the character and behavior of Christ (as described in Colossians 3:1-17 & Galatians 5:16-26). We know that only the Holy Spirit can do the internal work of transformation of character. But there is a factor directly related to this transformation process. In Romans 12:1-2 that process is called renewal of our minds - about God, self, others, His creation and our relationships with them. Our whole God-view, people-view and world view have to be renewed. If we have been called to put off and put on, then this renewal must be something we can do and must do as God’s dear new children. Therefore, there is much work for a believer to do for himself and for others as well, as Paul exhorted in Philippians 2:12,13. As such, we may roughly describe this

process of spiritual formation in two aspects, all of which may overlap in time and extent.

## **A. Sanctification: Putting Off**

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, came to save us from our sins, diseases and infirmities or weaknesses (Isaiah 53:4-5). Therefore, we may say that any man or woman, adult or child on earth, needs help in these areas of her life [we shall use the feminine pronoun for a change]. Sin and its effects have to go as the life of the Son of God grows in her. Therefore,

1. her spirit needs repentance and forgiveness of sins
2. her emotions need healing from wounds caused by others' or personal sins; her mind needs renewal from old ways of thinking and her will needs to be submitted to serve Jehovah God (the emotion, mind and will are commonly viewed as different areas of the soul).
3. her physical body needs healing from diseases
4. the oppressions [which may produce symptoms and signs similar to those caused by the other problems mentioned above] caused by God's enemy need renunciation and/or deliverance from the powers of darkness.

### **1. Our spirits**

Whether counsellor or counsellee, we have to accept the fact of sin. God the Father punished Jesus because of our sins (Isaiah 53:5). Ultimately, the whole creation has been damaged by sin. Consequently, fallen human problems are also caused by the existence of sin, whether others' sins or ours. But most of us choose to avoid or deny the possibility that our personal sins still can and do cause us emotional, mental, spiritual and physical problems.

A.W. quoted John Wesley as saying,

***“...that we will not injure the cause of Christ by admitting our sins, but that we are sure to do so by denying them.”*** [4].

He further wrote,

***“A dreamy sentimental faith which ignores the judgments of God against us and listens to the affirmations of the soul is as deadly as cyanide. A faith which passively accepts all of the pleasant texts of the Bible while it overlooks or rejects the stern warnings and commandments of the same Scriptures is not the faith of which Christ and His apostles spoke”*** [5].

Oswald Chambers’s words reiterate this point,

***“Not being reconciled to the fact of sin - not recognising it and refusing to deal with it - produces all the disasters in life....If you refuse to agree with the fact that there is wickedness and selfishness, something downright hateful and wrong, in human beings, when it attacks your life, instead of reconciling yourself to it, you will compromise with it and say that it is of no use to battle against it”*** [6].

When we think about sin in our personal lives, do we think of some vague presence of evil intent in us or a specific fact we have to deal with in our lives today? Oswald Chambers puts it this way,

***“A person will easily say, ‘Oh yes, I am a sinner,’ but when he comes into the presence of God he cannot get away with such a broad and indefinite statement. Our conviction is***

*focused on our specific sin, and we realize, as Isaiah did, what we really are. This is always the sign that a person is in the presence of God” [7].*

The Lord Jesus Himself spoke to the woman at the well,

*“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).*

It is not surprising then, that in Revelations 3:20, Jesus’ request is that we open the door of our lives to Him. Cleansing begins from our innermost selves even if God has to separate the soul and the spirit, the marrow and the joints, as the writer to the Hebrews taught (Hebrews 4:12,13). The cleansing of the physical temple in Ezekiel 43 is but a symbol or type of the cleansing of the spiritual temple of God’s people after Christ has reconciled us to His Father.

## **2. Our minds, emotions and wills**

Paul urged us in Romans 12:1,2 to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. If we think about how we arrive at certain actions we take, the sequence of events goes like this:

\*

We are first presented with a **mental picture** of something or someone in a given situation e.g. a hungry child.

\*

Then we **feel** for the child’s condition, as Jesus had compassion on the “sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36-38).

\*

Finally, we may be moved to **give** the child food through e.g. **sponsoring** a child through an organisation such as World Vision. Faith without actions is dead (James 2:14-26).

Therefore, an action begins in the mind which stirs the feelings into action by the exercise of our wills. This is clearly seen in Jesus, who, on seeing the condition of the crowds, felt for them and then taught them to ask God for help. He then personally called His twelve handpicked disciples together, instructed them and sent them out to care for the lost sheep (Matthew 9:35-11:1). He did not do it all by Himself!

But, having been influenced by cultures that emphasise the importance of the mind and will power more than the emotions, we are often unsure of the significance of our feelings. Many feel guilty about expressing them or just talking about them. Some believers preach, teach and nurse without compassion while others focus so much on their feelings that they never get to do any long-term significant good for others. Hence, many place their feelings in cold storage till further notice!

However, if we are aware of the way human beings are made to function, we will be able to better help one another work out the salvation God has worked in us.

### **3. Our physical bodies**

We cannot overemphasise our need to be healed of diseases. Did not Jesus' instructions to the twelve disciples

summarise His ministry (Matthew 10:1)? In today's churches, God has shown, time and again, that though we may ask Him to heal in a certain manner, the prerogative is His as to which method He uses...whether miraculously, by exercise or by medication. In middle-age, I am learning to cooperate with Him in following the laws of nature in which He has ordained for us to function healthily though, in His mercy, He still heals miraculously and we shout for joy when that happens!

**4. Enemy's Oppression (e.g. by tempting us to sin by telling us lies about God so we will not love and obey Him, and by persuading God to reject us by telling Him lies about us – read Job and Revelations 12:10.)**

In Genesis chapter 3, Satan lied to Eve about the reason for God's command for Adam and her - they were not to eat from the tree of life. He wanted to show that God was not so good after all. He was also probably envious of God's love for the couple He had created in His image. God was portrayed as self-centred and fearful of man's abilities. *Adam and Eve believed Satan's lies about God. Consequently, they had to suffer for their sin of rebellion against God.*

In the Old Testament book of Job, God's enemy was *out to make Job suffer* in order to challenge his trust in the holy and gracious God's goodness to him. *Satan lied to God about the motive of Job's relationship with God.* He wanted to show that God was not worthy of man's fear, worship and love, though probably, again, he was envious of God's generosity to Job. *Job had to suffer though he did not sin because he trusted the God whose character he knew well.*

Suffice it here to mention this here with the hope that you will read up more on this issue if you are not familiar with the cunningness and wickedness of one who wants to *rubbish us before God, and rubbish Him before us*. Yet, God, in His wisdom, allows this for now. What He wants us to do is to put on Jesus Christ daily, constantly, for He alone is our Protector (John 17). If we think about the whole armour of God mentioned in Ephesians 6:10-17, Jesus is the whole armour of God, the obedient victorious Son of the living God.

By definition and experience, therefore, the work of a pastoral counsellor mainly deals with the emotional, mental, spiritual and volitional aspects of a person, though one may also meet with physical and oppressive problems in the counsellee.

## **B. Sanctification: Putting On**

This is working out the salvation that God has worked in us (Philippians 2:12-13). For this purpose, we need to exercise the now popularly known term “spiritual disciplines” in our lives. This is reiterated throughout the epistles in the New Testament. For example, we need to :

- \* feed on the written word of God by the reading and meditating on Scriptures (1 Peter 2:1-3)
- \* feed on the living Bread by spending time looking at Him through sitting in His presence (2 Cor.3:18)
- \* pray and fast in order to do His will (Mark 9:29)
- \* listen to God prayerfully in silence & solitude (Luke 9:18, Matthew 6:5-18)
- \* give generously to those needier than us (2 Corinthians 8 & 9)

- \* worship Him in adoration and with a pure and undivided devotion while relishing friendship with God (Rev. 3:20)
- \* serve God through serving others by the use of our natural and spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7-13)

In all these various aspects of our Christian life, we need to be continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we could not have been saved or be purified as we grow into Christ-likeness. We must not only pray but practise what we pray. We cannot and dare not substitute obedience with prayer (Matthew 7:21). [8]

By now we would have realised that to put off without putting on will not result in one's growth in maturity as God's child. For example, it would be ridiculous to keep taking antibiotics to rid ourselves of germs while neglecting the daily intake of a balanced diet food and water. Jesus Himself showed us that to drive an evil spirit away from a home without filling the cleansed home with His Holy Spirit will only lead to more evil spirits inhabiting that home. However, we must also have realised that to put on without putting off will hamper the normal growth process. Who wants to be suffocated by the carbon dioxide of our original unregenerated brokenness while infusing our lungs with the excess oxygen of mere academic bible study?

Therefore, **firstly**, we need to ***recognise the short-term benefit of pastoral counselling if we do not work together with others*** in our church or society who have other gifts that we do not have, especially the gift of pastoring. As may be seen from this perspective, one area of a person's life is always affecting the rest of the person. We cannot say, "Well, my job is finished...now could you please take care

of yourself,” if there are other areas of his life that may be helped with the giftings of others. Leaving the counsellee in the lurch after your sessions with him may be devastating if there is no proper follow-up. I had to learn this the hard way. Sometimes I was the recipient of such ‘dumping’ by another counselor, sometimes as the counsellor who did not know what to do next when there is no one, so it seemed, to follow-up the counsellee in areas where I could not help. Often, I became *helpless and fruitlessly exhausted* when I could not follow up on such counsellees on a long-term basis.

**Secondly**, we need to *accept our limitations* when we encounter a problem that we cannot handle. It may be better to over-refer than to under-refer though we must not refer just to get out of a job we do not like!

**Thirdly**, we will often *meet with counsellees who seek the help of several counsellors during the same period of time*, for the same or different problems. This is one of the most difficult situations to handle if we want to help someone move to a deeper life of renewal of the mind and transformation. If Christian counsellors learn to trust each other, things can be worked out so that there will be no misunderstanding or competition among the counsellors (to the detriment of the counsellee). Counsellors are also broken people on the mend. It would be best if one person deals with the counsellee for a period of time. Even if different people are helping him with different problems, the counsellee may not be able to take so many changes at one go anyway. Our aim is to help the counsellee see his problems from God’s perspective. If the other person can do a better job, gladly hand over the counsellee to him or her.

## **Effectiveness**

The aim of most counselling sessions is to help a person function as a freer person in his relationships with others and self. However, the various types of counselling differ in the persons involved in a counselling session. While secular and various religious counselling involves the counsellor and the counsellee with or without the evil spirits (as seeking bomohs and mediums' advice, for example, may be seen as seeking counsel as well), pastoral counselling involves the counsellor, the counsellee...and GOD, the Holy Spirit. The presence of God makes pastoral counselling hopeful and wholesome, if practised with excellence, of course, because we believe that, ultimately, how we live and work depends on how much we allow God to do His work of truth and grace in us. As those exercising His gift in this area, we need to live transparently in His presence.

Effectiveness in a project, as I have come to understand it, is the ability to deliver or produce what we set out to achieve. Therefore, if the purpose of pastoral counselling is to help someone be reconciled to God, and, consequently, to self, others and the environment, in preparation to meet with Jesus Christ as His Bride, then whether a counsellor is effective or not depends on whether the counsellee finds that he is better able to get on with God, self, others and the environment. However, the difficulty in assessing a counsellor's effectiveness lies here. Why?

The reason is that by nature of the counsellee's needs, no other human being may know about his problems or process of discovering solutions to his problems except the pastoral counsellor and him. In those situations where a counsellee seeks help only once, the counsellor can hardly know how

effective he has been unless the counsellee returns to share the joy of his reconciliation in relationships. Our hope, of course, is that he has been able to forge forward in their life in Christ without the counsellor's help any more!

The counsellor-counsellee relationship is very different from that of a teacher-student one. A good teacher sees the fruit of her labour in her students passing examinations well and moving on in their career. Similarly, a good architect has his completed structure to display to the public. A good doctor has the joy of hearing his patients tell him and others about their recovery upon receiving treatment. BUT a good counsellor is bound by confidentiality to keep his "successes" a secret. As we are talking about in-depth counselling, very few counsellees who have been helped will divulge their own secrets. Even when they do, they must speak with the utmost care and for the glory of the real Healer from whom all power flows.

Who then may assess your effectiveness as a lay counsellor? If you are taking a professional course, then of course, everything is structured so that your professor makes sure you have fulfilled certain requirements e.g. that you have seen 1000 cases before you are certified to be a clinical psychologist. But even then, after that, you may not be very sure that you are effective!

The comfort is, however, that God supports those who genuinely desire to follow in Jesus' footsteps in this area of His ministry of reconciliation. We must be clear in our minds before we go deeper into this work, that what we do in secret before the Lord will be marked with excellence. We need to also continue to live as persons, as children of the living God, and as learners in the skills of counselling.

We need to learn through experience in helping our counselees, learning from them, other counsellors and our own reading, whether of Scripture or other literature. Indeed, if the ministry of reconciliation is to bring man and God together, then we need to know man well and to know God well too.

### **Team Work**

Thus we may see that, originally, the role of pastoral counselling lay in the normal routines of a pastor who is deemed to be walking close with God. However, in today's larger churches going in the fast lane of the 21st century, it is not wise for members of the congregation to rely solely on their pastors to fulfill this role. In addition, with the effects of globalisation, members are more exposed to a terrifying range of experiences that their particular pastor might not have had. So it is wiser, I believe, to ask God for the gift of counselling for lay people and to encourage them to be involved in this much needed ministry. They may work side by side, but are held accountable to their pastor or other church leaders.

As God has created us to be community in Him, team work is necessary. It is nothing new as far as Scriptural guidance is concerned. If it is needed in smaller churches, how much more in larger and often more complicated ones. Then pastors may concentrate on the preparation for the tasks of preaching and teaching the word of God which can seldom be fulfilled fruitfully by those untrained, unhoneed and unprepared in life.

## Contextualisation

Let me end this section by mentioning that pastoral counselling is not secular because God is involved, sufficient and sovereign.

However, we still need to be like Jesus in identifying with the world views of our counselees. In our Malaysian context, we will have to be lovingly and sincerely sensitive to their developmental background too. We may also often need to cross cultural, religious and social barriers in order to love someone in a way that they understand. Dr. D. A. Seamands, having been a missionary in India for about 17 years, illustrates this point thus:

1. If we persuade our listeners to be born again before they can enter the kingdom of God without clarifying what that means, many Hindu listeners may agree easily. Why? Due to their belief in reincarnation, they in fact expect to be born again...and again...and again...and again....
2. To comfort someone in grief by saying that God has taken her loved one home may cause terror in her mind if she has come from a broken home. Why? While “home” may mean “heaven” to some, it may mean “hell” to others.

Consequently, we must ask God for wisdom, understanding and sensitivity to others’ thought patterns and world views in the use of words. Pastoral counselling is basically a ministry of words though the life of the counsellor is essential for the authentication of the words spoken.

## **Conclusion – The Critical Difference**

Therefore, what distinguishes pastoral counselling from other counselling forms is not in the specific methods used, multiple and flexible though they may be, but in **the persons involved in a counselling encounter**. Here, God, as revealed in His beloved Son, Jesus, is present and welcomed to be the invisible but not silent listener. He is there with the counsellor and the counsellee. He ministers through the listening, feeling, thinking, guiding, revealing, inspiring and enabling Holy Spirit who alone knows the secrets of the human heart.

It is His awesome yet gently gracious presence that makes counselling pastoral; it is His presence that differentiates pastoral counselling from all other types of counselling, be they called Christian, secular or religious. It is God's presence that enables limited and feeble human counsellors to walk with counsellees of similar limitations and feebleness till the counsellee willingly walks with God in His path of truth and grace.

### **The Presence of God**

*“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”*

**Exodus 40:34,35**

*“...For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will live with them and walk with them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people.”*

**2 Corinthians 6:16**

Wayne Oates, in his book called “The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling”[9], heartwarmingly discusses the reality of and the need for the presence of God generally and, particularly, in a counselling situation. My immediate response as I read its pages, was to feel encouraged that a lay person like me could be turned into an instrument in His hands if I continue to trust and obey Him day by day. What Francis A.Schaeffer wrote in his book “No Little People, No Little Places” [10] is true. Moses’ rod, he said, was a mere piece of old wood. However, when used by God through the obedience of His servant Moses, that rod did wonders.

A modern example of such an experience would be Rosemary Green, wife of the evangelist pastor Michael Green. In her book, “God’s Catalyst” [11], she shared regarding how God called her, a frustrated homemaker, and turned her into a lay pastoral counsellor when she followed Him through each step of informal training. I hope that you will read both these books so that you too will be encouraged to be the unique “rod in His hands”. We need to immerse ourselves in His presence like fish is immersed in water. They cannot live without water. Yet, as A.W.Tozer lamented:

*“There has hardly been another time in the history of the world when stillness was needed more than it is today, and there has surely not been another time when there was so little of it or when it was so hard to find.*

*Christ is every man’s contemporary. His presence and His power are offered to us in this time of mad activity and mechanical noises as certainly as to fishermen on the quiet lake of Galilee or to shepherds on the plains of Judea. The*

*only condition is that we get still enough to hear His voice and that we believe and heed what we hear.” [12]*

These four passages of Scriptures will instruct us in the meaning of the presence of God. Let us turn to the passages.

### **1. Read Psalm 139**

The writer talked about the presence of God that hounded *him* through life and even in death. God would not leave him alone for He who created him desired to care for him wherever he went. Psalm 100:3 affirms the message.

We may thus assure our counselees and ourselves that God knows all about us and He still loves us. Hope is still alive! We cannot simply fall out of His watchful concerned presence. Wayne Oates calls it God’s all-pervasive and all-knowing of humankind’s thoughts and doings.

### **2. Read Matthew 25:31-46**

Jesus Himself said that wherever His disciples went, they would see Him in the faces and forms of *the people they met*.

Mother Teresa was one of those who knew and experienced His presence this way and God used her life to bring many into His kingdom; in many cases, just before they died.

### **3. Read Psalm 19:1-6**

The psalmist declares His presence *in the environment around us*. Paul, formerly known as Saul, said the same in Romans 1:18-20 and Acts 17:24-31.

Let us note that His presence described in this manner is different from pantheism which believes that God is in and part of everything and everyone. No, the God of the Bible

is always portrayed as other than, different from, and sovereign over His creation. Thus, to worship His creation is to exchange “the truth about God for a lie and serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen.” (Romans 1:25).

It will be particularly comforting and energising to read passages from “The Presence of God” under the headings below. I will only comment briefly on them.

**\* The Presence of God as Dwelling with Humankind**

As we are assured of His desire to be with us, we may persuade our counsellors not to lose hope as God is waiting for them to return to Him.

**\* The Presence of God in a People with a Clear Identity**

For those who know themselves as God’s precious people, this knowledge will confirm them in the security of His covenant love sealed by the blood of His Son and administered by the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of their salvation. This will remind them to live as God’s community of believers through whom will flow His healing grace.

*“Increasingly, in Pastoral Counselling, the isolated care of an individual is being found helpful but incomplete. A community of concern, of faith and free of pretence is needed.”*

Wayne Oates

Another writer also stated that:

*“It is in communities of mutual caring that the fullest possible liberation of spiritual potentials takes place”*

Howard Clinebell

A psychiatrist made the same observation:

*“By the crowd they have been broken; by the crowd shall they be healed,”*

L.C.Marsh

\* **The Presence of God in Human Suffering**

God participates in the wounds of His people. When we are crushed, He is crushed even though we often suffer because of our sins (Jeremiah 8:21, Isaiah 1:1-6).

\* **The Lasting Centre of Pastoral Counselling**

**The Bible and Jesus Christ**

While affirming the authority of God’s word in our lives, we need to understand in practice that it is true that the letter of the law can kill while the Spirit gives life.

In recent years, in my meeting with people in need, I have also seen the “utter trappedness of husbands, wives and children in emotional and mental suffering” in families where one person, at least, is an extreme perfectionist. Such a person, though saved by grace, expects the impossible ideal (the letter of the law) from other members of the family when he/she himself/herself could not reach his/her self-imposed ideals. The victims of such distorted thought and behaviour patterns suffer in silence, especially if they come from outwardly decent Christian families. Quite often, the written word of Scriptures is erroneously used to support one’s demands on others.

Hence, we need to realise that the Bible by itself cannot save a person. Only **the Son of God** can.

*“In pastoral counselling, whenever I have seen the Bible used as the very centre of the process, invariably, the problem being considered...divorce, remarriage, Christians suing each other in court, and so on, ceases to be the issue. The main issue becomes the infallibility of the interpretation being given. And our eyes are closed to this.”*

Wayne Oates

Oates urges us to interpret the pastoral counselling relationship with the Presence of God as its lasting and abiding centre. His hope is that “this reality can be to the pastoral counsellor - a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night - in the wilderness of the human spirit in which we journey with our counselees.”

Consequently, *God does not keep to a fixed manner of healing someone or counselling someone.* Very often, on those occasions when we are at a humanly complete dead end in helping someone, His counsel breaks through and both counsellor and counsellee are surprised by the presence of God!

How much *we need the gift of discernment to function as His temporary assistant* in order that the counsellee hears the word of God for himself/herself. Like Oates, I would like to observe the various schools of psychotherapy and work alongside highly competent clinical counsellors. This will keep me informed without being centred upon any of those therapeutic disciplines but on the Sovereign God of all.

If we want to be God’s pastoral counselors, we must no longer see any human being from a human point of view but

from God's point of view. The church is an organism, NOT an organisation, for which Christ died.

We need to accept one another in love really for Jesus' sake. We are merely wounded healers in the process of being healed ourselves. It is God who gives the counsel, the healing, and it is God who gets the glory.

Ray Petry observes:

*"Ailing physicians are we all, students. But we will do, for God has chosen us to do so!"*

Let us close with 2 Cor.5:16-6:10....

***"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know Him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."***

Further, Romans 8:26 reads:

*"Likewise the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness..."*

D.A.Seamands, in his book, “Healing for Damaged Emotions” [13], describes the Holy Spirit thus: He comes alongside us as a nurse coming alongside a patient to help him walk again. The patient, though, has to do the walking in order to be restored to health.

Therefore, in this role of ministering God’s reconciliation, the counsellor is, in effect, merely walking alongside the counsellee, if he allows him to. The counsellor leads him into the presence of God... .till that person sees the very face of God, the will of God for him ...and is transformed by His enlightening truth and amazing grace!

# Reflection I

## Oates describes three basic types of counselees.

### 1. The Helpless Counsellee - *“I Cannot”*

He feels weak and needs help much of the way. He wants to be healed but feels that healing is for others, not for him. He believes that he is not good enough for God. He comes through as one who is *against* the will of God. If we recognise him as a helpless counsellee, we will not feel discouraged when he keeps trying to stop the sessions for fear of not getting the answers again. Many have gone through years of vicious cycles. Our part is to be patient and eventually move with him into the awareness of the presence of God to discover his new found freedom...and then leave him with his Friend and Healer.

### 2. The Hostile Counsellee - *“It’s all their fault”*

He fights against the will of God most of the way and is reluctant to change or be changed. He thinks and feels there is *no need to change his ways* but he still wants his problem to be solved. Usually our only help is in *crises intervention*, as such a person in need moves from crisis to crisis. I once tried to help a woman physically and verbally abused by her husband. Each time she would talk about his faults and her anger and threats to divorce him. Eventually, when I urged her to repent of some of her ways which had stirred up his anger against her on certain occasions, she stopped contacting me. She would not face her own brokenness. As far as I know, things have not changed much yet.

### 3. The Collaborative Counsellor - ***“Please Walk With Me”***

He forms an alliance with us as *“pilgrims on the way”*, realising that we are but interpreters of God's signs for him. He is keen to walk in the presence and will of God but *needs spiritual direction*. He needs someone to check out the maps with him. He assumes we know the territory because somehow, he senses that we have trod that way before. He knows that he carries the load, not us. He represents the many tired full-time or lay workers in God's kingdom. They carry the burdens of the church on their shoulders in the heat of the day. They too need our companionship. Will we walk with them?

The function of a Christian counsellor is to work with the counsellee in the presence of God. As we do so, we will witness a shifting from a position of walking away from God and his will for him (over-againstness God, others and self) to a position of walking with God in His will for him (an alongsideness with God). What liberation! What joy!

1. If I were a counsellee, which of the three types above would I be?
2. Is pastoral counselling needed in my church? If “Yes”, how may I help my pastor minister to those who need pastoral counselling?
3. What is God saying to me as I read this chapter? How will I respond?

## Notes I

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## PART II

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# Understanding the Integration of Biblical Faith and the Science of Psychology

Romans 1:20

*“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*

### Aims

We have two aims in this section. We want:

1. to show what psychology teaches and what it does not teach
2. to show what biblical faith in the Creator God encourages and what it does not encourage us to believe about man.

Before we go further, let us ask one necessary question:

“Why do we have to bother about what psychology is all about when we talk about pastoral counselling? Aren’t prayer and the Bible enough?”

**It is the author’s prayer and hope that this question will eventually be answered as we move through this booklet...**

## **Some Conflicts between Faith and Psychology**

I believe pastoral counsellors, especially the English speaking ones today, need to consider this because psychology has influenced our lives either through direct education or indirectly through the media without our fully realising it. I vividly recall Bee Y., my Chinese- educated sister, chiding Bee I., my English educated sister (who majored in psychology in her B.A. course in Australia), way back in the sixties, for “rationalising” some aspects of her behaviour which Bee Y. disliked. However, we do not need to have a degree in secular western psychology to be influenced by it, for good or for bad. Let’s just ask ourselves a few questions:

1. Who formulated much of our education system before Merdeka? Who planned the courses for the trainee teachers?
2. Which are the books we read most and by whom are they written?
3. Do we respect our Asian Christian preachers and teachers as much as the Western ones, if both are faithfully teaching His word?
4. How many of us grew up with missionaries as our mentors? Did not those missionaries grow up in a different culture and basic presuppositions in life though they are also Christians? How much were they influenced by the science of secular psychology in their motherland during their formative years of early childhood education?

Please do not get me wrong. God has saved many of us and brought us up in His word through Western missionaries, with or without the use of Asian languages. That is not the point of our discussion. The point is that we want to roughly gauge how much we have been affected by psychology, which, as a subject to be learned, originated in the Western world. Further, the word “psychology” may mean a neutral study of the mind, whether it is by the biblical or secular presuppositions.

But you may ask:

“Don’t we Asians grow up like any other children and mature as adults, whether we hold to this or that presupposition?”

Indeed we do. It’s just that each society at a particular stage of its history understands human behaviour, thinking and feeling from a slightly different perspective. Each seeks to change unfavourable behaviour in their own way. As God’s new people, we want to have His views on the general knowledge that we have inherited from our teachers.

Psychology, by itself, is good if taken as a subject like engineering, medicine, the fine arts or language study. Problems only arise when we over-respect it and grant it an authority equal to or greater than God’s word, or ignore it as completely unbiblical. Some even view it as originating from the evil one. Psychology is a way of understanding people (and living things) and functions at the horizontal plane rather than at a moral vertical plane. Therefore, we need to have the right perspective and use of it or discard its discoveries as we would to other fields of study. This is necessary because psychology is about the study of the

mind and emotions of a person made in the image of the living God. If there is anything good in it that will help us live more obedient lives in Christ, then we will not throw it away or it will be like throwing away good medicine for a specific disease. If there is anything bad in it, then we will want to be aware of it, reject it, and not let it hinder our growth in Christ.

Conflicts often arise between psychologists and teachers of the word of God because each group of professionals does not take time to discover what the other group is actually saying. We shall endeavour to gain some understanding about each of these fields.

Many secular psychologists, on account of the humanistic presuppositions from which their theories emerge, have little to do with religion. Indeed, if one believes that only the fittest will survive, then man needs to survive by his own effort. He has to depend on his own abilities or be hindered by his own inabilities. There is no reason to look outside of himself for answers. "If I live, I live for myself; if I die, I myself am responsible for my downfall" seems to be the logical conclusion. However, the picture changes if there is Someone who has come to seek proud man who dwells in his prison cell of self-deception and that Someone holds him accountable for his life.

However, sad to say, many pastors in Western countries have already too much respect for purely secular psychology which was nurtured in the period of the Western enlightenment from the 17th-19th century. Liberal theology was a result of that era. Thankfully, church revival through John Wesley's preaching and discipling was taking place then as

well. For decades now, too many American pastors have shifted, dangerously, from focusing on Christ's all sufficiency to forgive our sins, heal us and recreate us in His image to the shifting sands of humanistic psychology's self-sufficiency. I would tend to believe that this shifting is done more unintentionally than intentionally. Why?

In John White's assessment, it is a lack of first hand experience of the power of God in their personal lives, resulting in their inability to convey a deep sense of hope for transformation in the lives of their congregations [1]. As long as the congregation does not complain, just leave them alone. Hence, in their quest for answers and the power to heal, at a time when schools of humanistic sciences were flourishing, these pastors went for the promises of methods, techniques and theories of secular psychology which have no lasting foundation.

Even sadder is the fact that these church leaders who have been professionally trained now return to their flocks and, wittingly or unwittingly, influence their members with unbiblical views of the human persons. Whatever little truth is left is thus washed away. Is it any wonder, then, that Western society as a whole has continued to slide into moral decay? There are, however, signs of renewal. The recent American youth movement, started by a group of Christian young people in Texas that pledged to live as virgins till they are married, seems to be moving towards a return to God's values. Even more recently is the movement among American Christian men who pledge to be good husbands and fathers.

Humanistic psychological terms dressed in Christian terms can sometimes prove more toxic to Christian life than outright humanistic statements. John White describes such pastors as those who sell their birthright for a bowl of pottage.

But before we think that this only happens half-way round the world in America, let us be aware that such presuppositions have already reached our shores in the form of self-development seminars and books with attractive titles promising spiritual growth. Sometimes I wonder whether the popularity of dynamic Christian speakers with catchy messages may lead us to follow humanistic ideals blindly. Only time will reveal whether the source of such messages.

What are we looking for in pastoral counselling? Are we seeking to help the counsellee develop himself by self-realisation (which hints of ME-First-ism), whether it is called monoism, New Age, Eastern Mysticism or self-confidence boosting courses? Or are we helping him to grow into Christ realisation. Christ did not ask us to develop ourselves but to die to self (self-will) and to live only for Him and His concerns. Peter reminded us that Jesus, the perfect man, had no self-will, no self-justification and no resentment [1 Peter 2:21-25].

But this does not mean that Scriptures is against the scientific study of the mind and emotions. Did not Jesus show a deep understanding of the mind, emotions and will of the Samaritan woman by the well? Did He not use basic principles of psychology to cross psychological, cultural, social and gender barriers? Did Jesus not **understand and meet Peter's need for security** by holding him **first before**

**He reprimanded him** for having little faith in Matthew 14:25-31?

Can there be an integration of biblical beliefs and honest scientific psychology?

A. W. Tozer observes:

*“Actually, the sacred-secular dilemma has no foundation in the New Testament. Without doubt a more perfect understanding of Christian truth will deliver us from it. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our perfect example and He lived no divided life. God accepted the offering of His total life and made no distinction between act and act. ‘I do always the things that please Him’ (John 8:29), was His brief summary of His own life as related to the Father.*

*We are called upon to exercise an aggressive faith, in which we offer all our acts to God and believe that He accepts them. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find Him there!” [2]*

**The Christian faith and statements of secular psychological discovery view man differently.**

*Christians believe that man is made in the likeness/image of the holy Creator God to have a Father-child relationship and fellowship with Him.* Man has a body, soul and spirit; his purpose in life is to live as a member of God’s family in His presence of truth and grace. Fellow human beings are brothers and sisters caring for one another in His love. Man is a living person described by the pronoun “who”.

However, statements of *humanistic or secular psychology* (psychology may be viewed from other angles), *as a science, view man as that which could have come up from the evolutionary tree*. He, therefore, may be described by the pronoun “what” and not “who”.

Secular psychology, as a field of study, is not involved in matters of faith because it is not in its field to make statements about religion. A secular psychologist will use animals or man as tools in experiments because he is interested in that which can be proven visibly and tangibly. Further, due to its roots set in the period of western enlightenment when the western society increasingly rejected the existence and/ or relevance of God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe (though he had benefitted from the influence of divine biblical transformation in many areas of the society), many psychologists were rooted in humanistic presuppositions which exclude God. Many believed that if man could make more inventions and discoveries, they will become better human beings to the extent that individualism became a way of thinking and life.

The influences of such beliefs held by men and women of faith (with self as its object) remain till today. We have begun to experience the dire consequences of believing proponents of individualism, even in Malaysia, even though such gifted people have helped the world advance in the technological know how of daily living. This latter good, (such as the understanding of our colleagues in order to function more effectively as a team) we do not deny and receive with thanksgiving.

Hence, we would like to differentiate the good from the bad very much like teasing out the dirt from a lump of bird's nest from our East Malaysian caves. We need to know enough of the basic differences so that we will accept what we can and discard what we cannot accept. Ignorance will lead to wrong ideas, and wrong ideas often lead to suspicion and hostility, even among fellow Christians. We will not be able to do this perfectly, but we will try our best. Neither right theology nor biblical psychology can save us. Only the Lamb of God can.

Pause.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul talks about our looking at Jesus and being changed into His image bit by bit. To follow through that analogy, John White uses the illustration of viewing broken man as a cracked mirror [3]. A mirror reflects the real object in front of it. A cracked mirror still portrays some reality of the real object. But some other aspects will be distorted because of its own brokenness. So, psychological science (general revelation) and biblical faith (specific revelation) will both show some aspects of the true God. His perfect image is seen in the person of Jesus Christ, the perfect mirror.

### **Traps to Avoid**

There are two extreme views regarding psychology:

1.

*We tend to endow psychological statements with a final authority which is seldom meant to be such by those who first made them.*

What happens then? Christians erroneously clothe traditional biblical beliefs with psychological jargon hoping to get through to modern man better. This is thoroughly discussed by John White and Malcolm Jeeves in their books [4].

For example, Asians imported the view from our Western friends that marriage is for the couple primarily and not for the children. These friends have grown up inheriting some unbiblical world views of the age of western enlightenment. As the evolutionary theory of scientists like Darwin became popularly accepted at various levels of society, men and women believe that as only the fittest will survive, each person is therefore encouraged to fight for his or her own survival. Hence, if a man or woman feels dissatisfied (especially sexually) or underdeveloped (especially in careers) due to a particular marital relationship and lifestyle, then each has the right, in fact, has the obligation, to pull out of the relationship. The divorce process then is for his or her own good and for the good of the specie-homosapiens or human beings. Often, their resulting offsprings are neglected. They too will have to fight for their own survival.

This “Me First” principle implied in humanistic secular behavioural sciences, including psychology, is not new. It originated in humankind in the Garden of Eden through Adam and Eve’s falling into temptation to develop themselves. The infection of sin and its effects stubbornly penetrate our societies till today. Many westernised Christians still believe in the priority of the husband -wife relationship over the parent-child relationship.

I must confess, though, that I made a similar mistake in the early stage of our marriage. In the eighties, when my

husband and I returned to Malaysia to serve the Lord Jesus, I first encouraged some former fellow church members back in Kuala Lumpur to believe the same. But after several years of living in Asia again and having seen more of human fallenness in marriages, including our own, I have changed my mind. This is not due to cultural changes (although they have been catalytic to my searching the Scriptures deeper for God's answers) but through the rereading of Scriptures and certain relevant literature, while waiting upon Him for clarification.

For example, if Joseph and Mary had considered their personal survival as top priority, Jesus would not have been entrusted to their care. They took care of God's Son, and in a way, their foster child, at great risks to their personal relationship and reputation. They started off married life under a cloud of suspicion of unfaithfulness of the bride and the illegitimacy of their first born child (Matthew 2:18-25) [5].

Sadly, many sincere Christians still believe in the priority of the husband-wife relationship over the parent-child relationship. Some teachers even use the Genesis and Ephesians verses on the oneness between the husband and the wife as God's command to support their point. That is what we mean by clothing certain psychological teaching with Christian jargon. We can rationalise any belief in order to follow it with a personally clear but morally distorted conscience.

In the Western church, as mentioned earlier, many pastors take up the field of psychology because they find themselves powerless to help their members. Being unaware of the limitations of a science which appears so promising to

them, they may misuse psychological principles and statements so much so that in the end, though respected for their degrees and professional standing, many have betrayed their original calling as teachers of God's truth and shepherds of His sheep. But many have also begun to realise that, by itself, application of psychological principles cannot transform a person. **Though this switch of the centre for final authority is** notoriously rampant in the Western church, we in Malaysia are not exempted from its influence. This is largely due to our over-respect of the teaching of the Western church. We like to jump, often in ignorance, on band wagons pushed by outsiders. Sometimes, even at spiritual retreats, psychological jargon is used indiscriminately.

I hasten here to acknowledge, though, that "the West" covers a multitude of peoples, cultures and spiritual inclinations.

### **Example 1.**

While living in countries where humanistic presuppositions have taken root, I had become more aware of such methods used among people helpers. Once, in the seventies, in Melbourne, I babysat an elderly Jewish migrant widow who happened to be attending one of the **self-discovery groups** initiated by some psychologists. As I was about to leave her home, a middle-aged man with glaring eyes dropped by and, in excited tones, shared with her how good he had felt during one of those self-discovery sessions. At one stage, they had been told to switch off all the lights and to touch each other in the dark. How enlightening it was to discover human feelings in that way! I listened quietly while my

hostess tried to move away from the topic as I had just tried to share with her about the God I knew. After a while, I left them to talk further. I did not visit her again as her involvement with such groups made me feel uneasy, as God's child, even though I had wanted to keep her company.

### **Example 2.**

While flying from Kota Kinabalu to Kuala Lumpur last year, my husband sat next to a Dutchman who noticed that he was reading the book of Romans with the aid of a commentary. Immediately, the foreigner commented, "In my country you can't read a Bible in public; they'll laugh at you!" It must have been a comfort for him to be able to read a Dutch translation of Martyn Llyod Jones' "Preaching and Preachers" on board a MAS airplane. It alerted me to remember afresh that the ever-changing civilization process in this world does not necessarily mean transformation of precious lives, East or West. But freedom in Christ is transformation indeed.

On the other, other Christians completely reject the good in psychology as part of general revelation, which brings us to the second extreme view....

2.

***We tend to consider psychological statements as competitive with biblical truth rather than complementary.***

***For example, consider this psychological statement:***

*"Parents need to listen to their children so that they will feel they are of worth in the eyes of the adults who are significant to them."*

Traditional Chinese Christian parents may say, “No! If we listen to them, we are giving them face and they will think we are soft and then will not obey us. Further, the Bible says that children must obey their parents.”

In this case, the parents have neither understood the psychological statement nor the biblical teaching about children’s obedience to their parents. This conclusion is a result of observation of the behaviour of family members and the interviewing of children and parents. The passage parents use to support the objection to the above psychological statement is found in Ephesians 6:1-4, which teaches mutual submission side by side with the respect of lines of authority laid down to establish order in God’s church. It is not meant to encourage parents to force submission on children or to neglect their children by not listening to their points of view.

In the above example, personal prejudice and pride of culture have taken precedence over the issue of how to help children feel understood and valued. How often we, as Asian Christian parents, have behaved in this manner.

Even those from the West often blame the psychologists without a deeper assessment of the place of psychological statements which result from honest research. According to an author, David Neff, *“the vast social changes that have overtaken us during the last 50 years or so (1950’s-1980’s) owe much more to the mass production of automobiles than to humanist influence”* [6]. Perhaps the economists and business people, instead of the psychologists, are responsible for the disastrous social and personal conditions in the West. But no one wants to point a finger at those who are

giving them speed, comfort, pleasure and possessions, even though their families are at risk.

A balance, therefore, needs to be maintained. We must neither be hostile to the study of psychology nor grant it the unwarranted authority not due to it. Select and use the good it offers.

### **Psychology Defined**

(I have covered this briefly in my book “Building a Love House is Hard Work” [chapter 6] but will include more details here.)

Psychology is the science dealing with the mind of man and with his emotional processes.

Science is systematised knowledge derived from observation, study, and experimentation carried on in order to determine the nature or principles of what is being studied. From the results of data collected from such study, hypotheses (the science of mathematics) are formulated. When these results are repeatable, using certain methods, the hypothesis is called a theory [7].

Psychology has many views and models. It changes its methods and principles, hypothesis and theories, because man has not reached the end of discovering everything in the world or universe. Science is simply a useful way of looking at certain problems. John White explains that it is limited in scope. It cannot bring about world peace, remove death or lead us to discover God. And “while its application may add to the available supply of goods and services, it can do little to see that they are equitably distributed” [8].

Further, how we view things depends largely on our previous interests/training e.g. if we are from a biological background educationally, we will be interested in the physical/chemical processes that occur inside our bodies when we behave in a certain manner. Ignorance of this wider perspective has led some scientists to say that if one can explain away some aspects of religious behaviour psychologically, you have therefore explained them away. Consequent to such thinking, talking about the same events in religious language is false or superfluous (excessive). Such scientists strongly reject the possibility of the existence of God and His relationship with man.

BUT professional psychologists, especially those in active research, acknowledge the limitations of their findings and hesitate to generalise/speculate as complex a field and phenomenon as religion. Psychology, being dependant on data and repeatable evidence in research in order to establish a hypothesis, cannot cover areas where visible evidence is lacking and tentative, and where there are frequent modifications. The Holy Spirit blows where He wills (John 3:5-8).

If you wish to repair a watch, John White explains, you will have to understand the mechanics of repairing a watch and the concept of time. An understanding of only one or the other will not help in setting the watch right again. In the same way, a Christian's view of man is that he lives to fulfil God's purpose for man (the concept of the God-man relationship) whereas the understanding of man's behaviour through scientific research or psychology is to help in fulfilling that purpose. We need both views in the process of sanctification.

There is, therefore, no such thing as a “Christian psychologist” in the strict sense of the word, but only a Christian who works as a psychologist (i.e. “Christian” refers to his whole life, whereas “psychologist” refers to his occupation). As Christians, we need to humbly admit that conflicts often arise between these two language (religious and psychological) domains, because firstly, we fail to see that psychological knowledge is partial/inadequate and secondly, we wrongly interpret Scriptures to shut out what we can learn from psychology.

Some scientists are humble enough to acknowledge the limitations of their fields. For example, B.F. Skinner commented [9]:

*“I am in no position to pronounce judgements on the effect that religion has had on our culture.”*

And when speculating about how his psychological insights helped him to understand why people behave religiously, he added:

*“I am in no position to give you a complete account of religion any more than a complete account of anything else.”*

Psychologists are not always against religion. Many know they are merely ignorant of something outside their field of study and/or experience.

From this short presentation, I hope that we now realise that we need people who are proficient in both psychology and

theology (not necessarily seminarians), to integrate these two fields with more honest effort. Each will still have its limitations because we have not seen Christ as He is yet (1 Corinthians 13:12).

However, though psychology in the Western world has little to do with religion i.e. in countries where psychologists are professionals in their fields and are paid by the clients they see, religion can hardly seem to get enough of psychology. Many pastors have changed their vocation from feeding Christ's sheep with the regular teaching of His word to pastoral counselling and social work. Having found themselves rather unproductive in the usual caring and nurturing work of the church, they now hope to help others through these fields. Then they meet with secular psychological presuppositions which look attractive initially but later on are found to be impotent for long-term transformation of people or church. If we could learn from their errors, we may bypass the foolishness of throwing away every and anything that smells of psychological discovery or of accepting everything that comes from it. (Many Christian clinicians have been rendered spiritually impotent and spiritually infertile, thus becoming intellectual humanists in lifestyle and in the exercise of their profession.)

Thankfully, in this country and in the West, the biblical side of the charismatic renewal (which emphasises God's sovereign miraculous healing and transforming power in human lives once more) has somewhat retarded the spread of such wrong beliefs about psychology. However, they bring with them other problems which originated from the West but have been absorbed by us in the East because we over-respect them! [10].

We shall, therefore, discuss 3 issues of psychology that are relevant to our faith in the Creator and living Saviour God, Father of all mankind.

## **Common Examples of Conflict between Faith and Psychology**

Malcolm Jeeves, in chapter 8 of his book “Psychology and Christianity; the View Both Ways”, brought up three illustrations to show the difference between faith and psychology.

1.

### **The View of Man**

*Basic assumptions:*

\* **Humanistic/secular psychology** assumes that God is either

non-existent  
(atheism)

or

cannot be known  
(agnosticism).

This means that:

Man came up from below in the evolutionary tree. Human science and logic will have something like potential omniscience i. e. man can become good by himself if he tries hard enough (based on the theory that the fittest survives).

\* **Theistic thought** assumes the existence of a holy, omniscient and omnipotent God and the limitations of human science and fallibility of human wisdom.

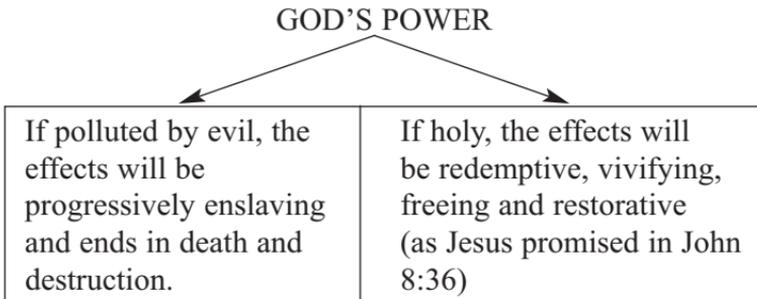
This means that:

God created man in His image.

Man has a high origin (from Him and belongs to Him) and a high destiny (going to Him).

The Theistic view believes that all power comes from God i.e. salvation and goodness come from God, not man. However, this power may be polluted by evil.

For example, visions, dreams and miracles may look the same but have different effects if polluted by evil. This may be likened to pure rain water becoming acidic as it enters the atmosphere of sulphur dioxide in a haze, before reaching us on earth. We would not be aware of the nature of that polluted water until symptoms appear in our bodies.



In pastoral counselling, we believe and know by experience that only the Holy Spirit can bring about lasting and holy transformation in our lives. Man can only cooperate with God in this process of inner change [11].

## 2. **Guilt**

To a secular psychologist, guilt is an event, a neutral state, a feeling. The causes of such a state is relative to social norms.

To a theologian faithful to Scriptures, guilt is a moral state, meaning, “I am responsible if I offend you”. There is a fixed standard set by God.

THEREFORE ,

### ***The role of a secular psychologist is:***

To help a neurotic sinner/saint (a child of God) become a “emotionally healthier” sinner/saint. His role is to help the client attain relative freedom from medical and social symptoms (phobias, tics, panic attacks, hysteria are commonly known as neurotic symptoms, usually caused by suppressed true/false guilt e.g. a woman who has a hand washing ritual may be washing off a deep-seated feeling of guilt due to being raped by a boyfriend) and experiences. He does not deal with universal moral issues that guard our civilian relationships (e.g. modern technology may get food supplies to famine stricken areas but is unable to see to the just distribution of those supplies to the actual starving people), though the healthier clients may have a better sense of morals as he has more emotional energy to consider the needs of others around him.

### ***The role of a pastoral counsellor role is:***

To help a neurotic sinner/saint become an emotionally healthier and morally cleaner saint.

**Note:**

By “sinner” below, I mean a person who has yet to believe and receive God’s forgiveness of his sins through Jesus’s death for him.

By “saint” below, I mean a person who has believed and received God’s forgiveness of his sins through Jesus death for him. However, he still sins while in this imperfect world but depends totally on Jesus’ forgiveness, not on works, to be reconciled with God.

Hence, we may see that generally,

- |                                                                         |                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| a. An emotionally healthy sinner has true guilt.                        | b. A neurotic sinner has true guilt and false guilt. |
| c. An emotionally healthy saint has no true or false guilt on an issue. | d. A neurotic saint has false guilt on an issue.     |

A secular psychologist is trained to deal with false guilt by changing the client’s ideas of guilt by teaching him to unlearn certain old thought patterns and habits while teaching him to learn new thought patterns and habits. This may not be completely wrong as we need to renew our minds in order to change our bad and/or sinful habits. What we mean here is that the secular psychologist’s role is not to tell us whether something is absolutely good or bad but to help us get rid of the unhappiness caused by the guilt *feeling*.

## WHILE

A Pastoral/Christian Counsellor (trained in biblical psychology and biblical theology) is trained to deal with false and true guilt by teaching the counsellee true repentance before the holy God AS WELL AS how to renew his mind by putting off sinful habits and putting on the character of Christ.

HOW MARVELLOUS IS GOD'S HEALING GRACE!

### 3. Conversion

A Christian's conversion experience is personal and probably unique to each person as the Holy Spirit has the prerogative to act where, when and how He decides.

- \* From a *psychological* point of view, it may be perceived differently.

To the newly converted born again child of God, he may describe it as:

a feeling - I was strangely warmed; I had a growing awareness of the reality of God in my life and in the world around me; I could not stop crying out to God to forgive me my sins against Him, etc.

But

- \* It may be just as honestly viewed impersonally. A *physiologist*, for example, may describe it thus:

At the time of conversion of this man, his heart rate and respiratory rates increased suddenly, followed by a rapid elevation of his blood pressure.

A *biochemist*, on the other hand, will probably measure the rise in adrenalin level in the man being converted.

All these three viewpoints may be giving a right version of the conversion experience though they are different. Each is merely describing the same phenomenon from very different angles. In the case of biblical faith as compared to psychology, the former is concerned about things from a vertical view point, as to why God relates to man and how He sees things while the latter is concerned with the horizontal aspect of how things are made and function visibly and tangibly in time, space and history.

### **The Tight Rope Life**

I encourage you to continue to read books relevant to this issue to increase your understanding of the integration of faith in our God and biblical psychology.

1.

In pastoral counselling, we are constantly engaged in relationships in close proximity. Hence, we need to dwell in the shadow of the Almighty all the time. We need to be secure as God's precious children. Our identity is in Him and not in our roles.

This will also prevent us from holding on to those who trust us to walk with them for a short period of time. The possessive syndrome [see chapter 15 of Friends of the

Bridegroom] is easily adopted if we are not aware of it as the people who seek deep healing are extremely insecure and may unintentionally hold on to us too long. We need to gently and lovingly relinquish each one to the Good Shepherd's daily and permanent care if we really want the best for them. To say that they need us for prolonged periods may mean that we are the more insecure ones needing to be needed. This is unhealthy and unethical for people helpers as we may actually be taking advantage of their weakness to fulfill our own needs.

Most pastoral counsellors become over-attached to their counselees without knowing the truth about themselves. When the Lord points this out to us directly or through others, we need to examine ourselves and not take it lightly, for the sake of the counsellee, counsellor and for the honour of the Lord. If necessary, we may need to be humble enough to seek the counsel of others first before we slide deeper into the possessive syndrome.

2.

We need to have an ongoing experience of having our own needs met by God. He requires transparency before Him for He knows all about us. As we allow Him to transform us, we will be freer in Christ to be used as His cleansed and filled channels of blessings for others [12].

3.

Hence, we need to spend time listening to the Master Shepherd's voice as much as possible, at quiet times or other times. If it is true that He delights in mankind, then surely He waits for us (Proverbs 8:27-31)! Let us allow a saint who has gone before us to speak thus:

*“The Holy Spirit brings the wonderful mystery that is God to us, and presents Him to the human spirit. The Spirit is our Teacher, and if He does not teach us, we never can know. He is our Illuminator, and if He does not turn on the light, we never can see. He is the Healer of our deaf ears, and if He does not touch our ears, we never can hear!*

*The Holy Ghost bestows upon us a beatitude beyond compare. He asks nothing except that we be willing to listen, willing to obey!” [13]*

Jesus said: ***“My sheep hear My voice and I know them....and they follow Me...not a stranger.”***

John 10:1-18

Let us, therefore, ask Him for His compassion, wisdom and discernment to fulfill the role of a pastoral counsellor. Let us put on the whole armour of God which is Christ Jesus Himself - He is our salvation, righteousness, truth, peace, Word of God; even the faith we have is the faith of the Son of God.

4

Read widely but selectively and be assured of the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ as you minister His healing grace and truth to your brethren and neighbours!

***PAUSE TO REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ.***

## **Reflection II**

How is your relationship with the Master Counsellor currently and where will you go from here?

## Notes II

1. The Shattered Mirror, John White, IVP 1987
2. Renewed Day by Day, Daily Readings for One Year, Vol.1, A.W.Tozer January 24, Christian Publications 1980
3. The Shattered Mirror, John White, IVP 1987... p.12-15
4. The Shattered Mirror, John White, IVP 1987 1976 & Psychology & Christianity: The View Both Ways, Malcolm A.Jeeves, IVP 1976
5. Building a Love House is Hard Work, Lee Bee Teik, Malaysian CARE 1996...chapter 1
6. The Shattered Mirror, John White, IVP 1987... p.14
7. Webster's New World Dictionary Third College Edition, Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1988...under "Science"
8. The Shattered Mirror, John White, IVP 1987... p.59
9. Psychology & Christianity: The View Both Ways, Malcolm A.Jeeves, IVP 1976...p.16
10. Bananas or Mango, Hwa Yung, Bantam 1997 (The author attempts to persuade Asian Christians to view God through Asian eyes. This ties in with the perception of the Creator speaking to us in a context that we

can understand Him, whether through the temperament He has given us or through socio-cultural upbringing in terms of, for example, language and customs.

11. Changing on the Inside-The Keys to Spiritual Recovery and Lasting Change, John White, Eagle 1991
12. 2 Corinthians 3:17  
John 8 :32
13. Renewed Day by Day, Daily Readings for One Year, Vol.1, A.W.Tozer February 3, Christian Publications 1980

