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A critical evaluation of Rogerian counseling in terms of its usefulness in Christian counseling

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Abstract

Pastoral counseling, in its present condition, is dominated "almost exclusively by therapeutic psychology, principally by Rogerian counseling" (Aden, 1984, p. 38). Depending on one's perspective, such a charge is either a sign of hope or an omen of doom. Gaylord B. Noyce, professor of pastoral theology at the Yale University divinity school sees it as the latter. He charges that an "exaggerated deference" to the client-centered theory and methodology of Carl Rogers is "undermining the ministry in hundreds of congregations today." "We have taken the immensely helpful, nondirective Rogerian pattern and made it gospel, not only for wide areas of secular counseling but also for pastoral care" (1978, p. 103). The entire humanistic-experiential model, attributed to the influence of Rogers, Maslow, Perls and Berne, has been attacked by others (Fatis, 1979; Miller, 1977). On the other hand, Oden (1966) compares the Rogerian themes of empathy and unconditional positive regard with the biblical doctrine of love and has come to regard Rogers' work as an operational demonstration of the unconditional divine love which is the heart of the Christian gospel.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ROGERIAN COUNSELING IN TERMS OF ITS USEFULNESS IN CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Pastoral counseling, in its present condition, is dominated "almost exclusively by therapeutic psychology, principally by Rogerian counseling" (Aden, 1984, p. 38). Depending on one's perspective, such a charge is either a sign of hope or an omen of doom. Gaylord B. Noyce, professor of pastoral theology at the Yale University divinity school sees it as the latter. He charges that an "exaggerated deference" to the client-centered theory and methodology of Carl Rogers is "undermining the ministry in hundreds of congregations today." "We have taken the immensely helpful, nondirective Rogerian pattern and made it gospel, not only for wide areas of secular counseling but also for pastoral care" (1978, p. 103). The entire humanistic-experiential model, attributed to the influence of Rogers, Maslow, Perls and Berne, has been attacked by others (Fatis, 1979; Miller, 1977). On the other hand, Oden (1966) compares the Rogerian themes of empathy and unconditional positive regard with the biblical doctrine of love and has come to regard Rogers' work as an operational demonstration of the unconditional divine love which is the heart of the Christian gospel.

Psychotherapy and religion share a common ground (Bonnel, 1969; Hunter, 1981; Morris, 1980; Roth, 1976). Both

involve themselves in life's most basic questions: What is the human person? What are the proper goals and meanings of life? What makes life a problem for the person? What can be done about those problems? What does it mean to be "well" or "whole"? The concerns of religion and the concerns of the therapist inevitably overlap and intertwine.

It seems inevitable that those who practice pastoral care and counseling must come to terms with the issues raised by contemporary theorists and practitioners of counseling. Questions which must be faced include the following: Will this particular approach to counseling enhance my ministry, or hinder it? Are the theories and techniques of counseling which I now employ consistent with the faith which my ministry represents?

Purpose and Plan of Study

This study addresses the problem which Rogerian theory and practice pose for the Christian counselor. Its specific purpose is to critically examine the Rogerian approach to counseling in terms of its usefulness in Christian and pastoral counseling. In order to complete this evaluation the following process will be carried out. First of all, this study will describe the Rogerian views regarding the nature of humans, the process of therapy, and the concept of the fully functioning person. The specific concerns and aims of Christian counseling will then be set forth. The final chapter will critically evaluate the suitability of

the Rogerian approach from a Christian standpoint.

Definitions of Terms

The terms "nondirective," "client-centered" and "Rogerian counseling" will be used interchangeably to refer to the approach to therapy associated with Carl Rogers. In his earlier writings, Rogers called his approach nondirective with reference to the approach of the counselor in interaction with the client. Today, the Rogerian approach is more often called client-centered to emphasize that it is, in fact, the client who is in control of the therapeutic process.

"Pastoral counseling" traditionally refers to counseling which is done by a recognized Christian minister. But not all who are called upon as Christians to do counseling are ordained ministers. Christian counseling centers are often staffed by other than ordained ministers. Therefore, in ths paper, the term "Christian counseling" will be used to refer to the counseling work of anyone who is specifically and intentionally functioning in that role because of a recognized Christian commitment, regardless of whether that person is an officially ordained minister. In many cases the terms "pastoral counseling" and "Christian counseling" will be used interchangeably.

Chapter 2

THE ROGERIAN VIEW OF PERSONS AND THERAPY

Carl Rogers was born January 8, 1902 in Oak Park, Illinois. He grew up in what he called a "narrowly fundamentalist religious home" where he learned to adopt an attitude of "unconsciously arrogant separateness" toward others (1973, p. 5). Among his early experiences of attempting to help others was serving as a camp counselor for underprivileged youngsters. Rogers recalls with embarrassment that his "concept of helping another person was to get him to confess his evil ways so that he might be instructed in the proper way to go" (1973, p. 5).

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Rogers entered Union Theological Seminary, a liberal religious institution in New York City. While there, Rogers realized that the ministry and mental health professionals shared the common goal of seeking to help distressed persons. After growing increasingly skeptical regarding the literal truth of certain Christian teachings, Rogers transferred to Teachers College, Columbia University to pursue graduate study in clinical and educational psychology.

After receiving his doctorate in 1931, Rogers served in a community child guidance clinic in Rochester, New York and in faculty positions at Ohio State University and the University of Chicago, where he developed and propounded

his theories in the late 1930's and throughout the 1940's. The essence of the Rogerian approach to human relationships is very simply stated:

> I have come to trust persons--their capacity for exploring and understanding themselves and their troubles, and their ability to resolve those problems--in any close, continuing relationship where I can provide a climate of real warmth and understanding. (1973, p. 10)

The fundamental basis of client-centered counseling is, likewise, disarmingly simple. The theory is of the if-then variety. If certain conditions exist, then a process will occur which includes certain characteristic elements. If this process occurs, then certain personality and behavioral changes will occur (Rogers, 1966). If an incongruent, anxious client enters into a warm, empathic relationship with a counselor who accepts him unconditionally, then the client will inevitably move toward congruence, actualization and creativity.

The Rogerian View of the Person

Typically one's view of counseling theory and methodology flow quite naturally from one's view of the nature of the person. In the case of Rogers, clinical observation and practical experience first convinced him of the validity of a counseling method. Rogers was, above all, an experiential learner (Rogers, 1973; Landsman, 1967). Not until some five to seven years after the presentation of counseling as a method (Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts

in Practice, 1942) did its theoretical foundations emerge. In his 1947 address to the American Psychological Association, Rogers presented a set of theoretical principles which were heavily influenced by the then popular phenomenological psychology (Rogers, 1947; Landsman, 1967). Rogers discovered existentialist philosophy only after his students at the University of Chicago urged him to read Buber and Kierkegaard. Rogers was then able to identify his own thought as "a home-grown brand of existential philosophy" (1973, p. 10).

In Rogers' case, then, the theory of the person was made in order to fit the "fact" of what he had witnessed in experience. For purposes of analysis, this paper will first examine his concept of the person.

Rogers has a Rousseauean faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. Rogers denies that Rousseau influenced his thinking; Rousseau, like Buber and Kierkegaard, was discovered after the fact (1957b). But even a cursory reading of the writing of both men reveals a striking similarity in their thought regarding the goodness of man (Daubner, 1982). Rousseau's notion of the "noble savage" dwelling in peace and harmony with the world and others until civilization brought corruption is consistent with Rogers' descriptions of the innermost core of human nature as essentially purposive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic and trustworthy (Daubner, 1982).

Rogers blames Christianity, then Freud for first teaching and then reinforcing the idea of man as "fundamentally hostile, antisocial, destructive, evil" (1957b, p. 200). Rogers describes the person as follows:

> My experience is that he is a basically trustworthy member of the human species, whose deepest characteristics tend toward development, differentiation, cooperative relationships; whose life tend fundamentally to move from dependence to independence; whose impulses tend naturally to harmonize into a complex and changing pattern of self-regulation; whose total character is such as to tend to preserve and enhance himself and his species, and perhaps to move it toward its further evolution. (1957b, p. 201)

Rogers vigorously resists the notion that he is a "Pollyanna" in evaluating human nature (1961, p. 27). He is aware that there are people who behave in cruel and anti-social ways. Evil is simply not believed to be inherent in human nature. "In a psychological climate which is nurturant of growth and choice, I have never known an individual to choose the cruel or destructive path," Rogers claims (1982, p. 8). Evil behavior is seen as the result of cultural influences.

In recent years Rogers has expanded his optimistic view of man to include the very nature of the universe itself. "There appears to be a formative tendency at work in the universe which can be observed at every level" (1978, pp. 23-24). Entropy is not the model for the universe, but, rather,

> ...there is a formative directional tendency in the universe, which can be traced and observed in stellar

> space, in crystals, in microorganisms, in organic life, in human beings. (1978, p. 26)

It is self-awareness, consciousness, and, perhaps even altered states of consciousness which enable people to participate in this creative, formative tendency, to grasp the meaning of this evolutionary flow which moves toward the experience of unity. This is a universe in which the person can truly be at home.

Earlier expressions of the formative tendency were limited to the assertion that all human behavior is energized and directed by a single, unitary motive which Rogers called the actualizing tendency. This represents "the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the person" (Rogers, 1959, p. 196). Thus, the primary motive in people's lives is far from being a striving for sex or power. People are naturally driven to actualize, maintain, or enhance themselves. It is simply the nature of the biological human organism to do so.

In summary, Rogers sees the person as a striving organism which always, given the proper environment, seeks its own well-being. The person is able to do so because the person in inherently good.

The Process of Therapy

If people are inherently good and strive for what is best for them, therapy becomes a matter of simply setting

free the natural forces within the person and letting them fulfill their natural function of enhancing the well-being of the person. Rogers hypothesized that significant positive personality changes were made only in a relationship (1957a). If the relationship has the proper conditions, then therapy takes place.

The first condition necessary to a therapeutic process is the psychological contact between two persons. It is the degree and nature of this contact, the warmth, understanding and acceptance which it is characterized by, which determines the outcome of the therapy. This contact, as well as the other conditions, must exist and continue over a period of time.

Therapeutic contact, in order to be successful, cannot be limited to two people merely recognizing the existence of each other. The therapist is not required to maintain an attitude of professional distance; counselors can show genuine human caring. The degree to which the contact makes a difference to the parties, the degree of warm human understanding of which they are aware, may very well determine the extent of success of the therapy. This first condition specifically implies that two people are in a relationship in which each makes some perceived difference in the experiential field of the other. The remaining conditions define the necessary characteristics of each person in the relationship.

The second condition is that the client is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious (Rogers, 1966). Incongruence is seen as primarily a discrepancy between the true self and the experiencing organism. Incongruence may lead one to deny, distort or misrepresent the significance of events which impact upon self-understanding. The ultimate source of incongruence is the internalization of parental and societal values. Clients must perceive themselves as having a serious and meaningful problem. They perceive themselves as "X" but experience themselves as "Y". The discrepancy is incongruence.

Individuals picture themselves in a certain way. People then proceed to react to experiences in such a way as to be consistent with their self image. An example is the mother who develops illnesses whenever he only son makes plans to leave home (Rogers, 1957a). The actual desire she has may be to hold onto her only source of satisfaction, her son. To perceive this in awareness would be inconsistent with the picture she holds of herself as a good mother. Illness, however, is consistent with her self-concept, and the experience is symbolized in this distorted fashion. This mother is in a state of incongruence because there is a great difference between her self image and her actual reactions.

Vulnerability and anxiety are terms which Rogers uses to designate degrees of awareness the client may

have of the incongruence of their behavior (Rogers, 1966). If it is only dimly perceived, the resulting tension state is anxiety. If clients are suddenly made painfully aware of their condition, they may not be able to assimilate this awareness into their experience. Their self concept, then, would be vulnerable to complete disruption.

The third condition is that the therapist is congruent in the relationship (Rogers, 1966). Therapists are human beings and will, to some extent, have incongruences all their own. The crucial factor for therapy is that in the relationship with the client the therapist is well integrated, aware of personal inadequacies and feelings so that proper adjustments can be made for the benefit of the client.

The fourth condition of the therapeutic process is that the therapist experiences unconditional positive regard toward the client (Rogers, 1966). Therapy does not and cannot take place in a judgmental atmosphere. Since, as Rogers holds, goodness lies in the heart of all people, counselors must accept clients, warts and all, without imposing conditions of acceptance. They cannot say to their clients, "I will like you if you will act in a certain way," or "I approve of these characteristics you have but not of others."

Unconditional positive regard, or acceptance, is not some psychological trick which is available to the thera-

pist who is skilled in the dramatic arts. Respect must be an integral part of the counselor's personality makeup. "He can be only as 'nondirective' as he has achieved respect for others in his own personality organization" (Rogers, 1949, p. 83). Positive regard is based upon the conviction that if the client feels free, then the client will move toward positive action. Therapists must believe in the goodness of the nature of persons. When freedom exists, according to Rogers, the client will not become evil or anti-social. The client will, rather, then move not only toward deeper self-understanding, but toward more social behavior.

Rogers acknowledges that some of his critics contend that all counseling has always depended on the principle of acceptance, but he replies that earlier methods only paid lip service to its strength in the counseling relationship (1946). Since the same goodness is seen in people collectively as in the individual, the principle of positive regard holds true for group therapy as well as for individual counseling (Rogers, 1948, 1970).

The fifth condition of the therapeutic process is that the therapist must experience an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference (Rogers, 1966). To empathize is to "sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality" (Rogers, 1957a, p. 99). When the client, for

example, becomes angry, the counselor should feel the client's anger, but not experience it as their own anger. The counselor must be able to move about freely in the client's world.

Reflection is an important corollary to this fifth condition. Reflection is a response to the client in which the counselor is trying to understand the client's experiences from the client's point of view and to communicate that understanding (Phillips & Agnew, 1953). The therapist does not try to analyze or diagnose the condition of his client. The counselor's task is merely to understand the client from the client's own frame of reference. The verbal responses of the counselor are not evaluative, interpretive, probing or supportive. Therapists first and foremost invest themselves in understanding the client and reflecting this understanding back to the client, only sometimes in a clarifying fashion. The clarification is not so much aimed at producing insight as it is at communicating acceptance. When the client realizes that the counselor understands the client's feelings and accepts them for what they are, the client is free to explore his incongruencies and to make changes.

The sixth and final condition of the therapeutic process is that the client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, the unconditional positive regard and the empathic understanding of the therapist (Rogers, 1966). This

implies that the counselor, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, verbally or non-verbally communicates warmth and acceptance to the client and that the client receives this communication and interprets it properly. The client must not only be accepted and understood by the counselor; the client must be aware of this acceptance.

Since Rogers sees therapy as the process of releasing the inherent capabilities of the client, resulting changes in behavior come about as the client develops a new vision of himself which is congruent. It is hoped that negative feelings will change to positive, or at least to ambivalent, feelings (Snyder, 1945). The phrases "psychotherapeutic change" and "constructive personality change" are often used to refer to what the layman would call "cure". According to Rogers,

> By these phrases is meant: change in the personality structure of the individual, at both surface and deeper levels, in a direction which clinicians would agree means greater integration, less internal conflict, more energy utilizable for effective living; change in behavior away from behaviors generally regarded as immature and toward behaviors regarded as mature. (1957a, p. 95)

Rogers believes that therapy is roughly parallel in all cases, whether the problem is great or small (1946). Initially, the client expresses feelings and experiences a release of tension, a catharsis. As the client moves from that which is superficial to that which is deeper, the client comes face to face with reality. Insight then

becomes the most significant element of the counseling process, that is, the client's own insights into the client's own life become central to the therapeutic process. As the client's experiences are more accurately symbolized, incongruity begins to be overcome. The final state of therapy is marked by positive choice and action made possible by implementing a new concept of the self.

The Fully Functioning Person

The goal of life, the goal of education, and the goal of therapy are one and the same in the Rogerian framework, to become a fully functioning person (Rogers, 1983). In a sense, Rogers' description of the fully functioning person may be seen as his view of "the good life". It is not seen as a fixed state of virtue or even of actualization, but as a process or direction accompanied by certain personality characteristics.

The first and foremost characteristic of the fully functioning person is openness to experience (Rogers, 1983). Whereas defensiveness results in distorted symbolization in awareness, a characteristic of incongruity, "openness to experience" suggests that persons are "in touch with their feelings" and have all feelings available to their awareness. Rogers does not mean to suggest that the fully functioning person acts impulsively whenever the feeling strikes, but that no internal barriers or inhibitions prevent one's conscious awareness of what they

are feeling.

Rogers (1983) also states that the fully functioning person adopts an existential way of being. The incongruent person may will a particular line of action, but is unable to follow through because of a self-imposed determinism. The fully functioning person is able to live each experience of life as new and different, is able to choose and to follow through with choices by appropriate action. When each moment of life is lived as new and unique, it cannot be predicted in advance just what the individual will choose to do or to be.

The fully functioning person also finds "his organism a trustworthy means of arriving at the most satisfying behavior in each existential situation" (Rogers, 1983, P. 288). The organism, the living physical body, is not infallible, but Rogers believes that most of our mistakes relate to nonexistential material or to the absence of data. In most cases of importance the fully functioning person is able to do what "feels right" in the immediate moment and finds this in general to be a competent and trustworthy guide to behavior. The organism has the natural ability to give the best possible answer for the available data. Openness and awareness also allow for errors to be quickly corrected based on new and additional data.

The fully functioning person is creative. Such a

person could well be one of Maslow's self-actualizing people (Rogers, 1983). Creative products and creative living emerge from such people. They will be able to live constructively within their culture, but will not be bound by the limits of their culture.

Summary

Rogers sees the person as inherently and innately good. In a therapeutic environment characterized by trust, acceptance, and communication of feeling, the individual can be trusted to seek his own best interest in a helpful, self-enhancing fashion, and without seeking to take advantage of others. In the counseling relationship, the therapist's task is to provide a nurturing womb. The natural growth potential of the individual will be released, and the person will strive toward actualization and creativity.

Chapter 3

CONCERNS AND AIMS OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

In the first chapter of this paper it was argued that psychotherapy and religion shared a common ground of concern for life's most basic questions. The second chapter presented Rogers' response to those questions: The person is good; life is problematic or incongruous because the person internalizes the erroneous judgments of the social system; and to become whole is to be a fully functioning person. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the specific concerns and aims of Christian counseling. It will then be possible to evaluate the Rogerian framework in terms of its usefulness in Christian counseling.

Christian Counseling

Representative spokesmen for Christian and pastoral counseling have given varying descriptions of the practice. Gary R. Collins (1980), a well-known and popular conservative Christian counselor, describes counseling and then says that Christian counseling is something which is "in addition to" the personal interaction of counselor and client. As he sees it, counseling is a way of helping people by stimulating personality growth and development, by helping them cope more effectively with life and its problems, by providing encouragement and guidance, and by assisting those whose life patterns are self-defeating.

Then Collins says,

> In addition the Christian counselor seeks to bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and has the ultimate goal of helping others to become first disciples of Christ and then disciples of others. (Collins, 1980, p. 14)

If the distinctive element of Christian counseling is "to bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," then it is scarcely distinguishable from Christian evangelism. It has frequently been argued that all counseling involves a process of persuasion and a communication of values (Abroms, 1968, 1978; Bergin, 1980; Cross & Khan, 1983; Humphries, 1982; Ashby, 1981; Rosenthal, 1955; Wolfe, 1978), but this hardly justifies the conclusion that the goal of all Christian counseling is a conversion experience.

Another prominent representative of the field of Christian and pastoral counseling, Wayne E. Oates, defines it as "conversation with a Christian intention" (1962, p. 163). Oates discusses counseling in terms of talking with people, listening to them, and focusing on specific problems. He then observes,

> Pastoral counseling includes all of these, but it is not <u>just</u> any one of them. Pastoral counseling is spiritual conversation, i.e., conversation that takes place either implicitly or explicitly within the commonwealth of eternal life as we know it in Jesus Christ. The way of life we have known in times past, the decisive turnings in our way of life called for in the living present, and the consideration of the end of our existence, our destiny--all these come to focus in the spiritual conversation known as pastoral counseling. (Oates, 1962, pp. 164-165)

Even though Oates does suggest that the spiritual

dimension may often be implicit rather than explicit, from his description one might still conclude that Christian counsleing should invariably be existential in nature. But the literature does not support the idea that people take their problems to Christian counselors because they specifically see themselves as having a religious or existential problem or because they expect religious values to play a significant part in the working out of the solution (Natale, 1977; Posavic & Hartung, 1977). Furthermore, pastoral counselors themselves believe that about two-thirds of their cases are not related to distinctly religious concerns and most pastoral counselors seldom utilize theological or ethical sources in the course of the therapeutic process (Natale, 1977).

Another representative of Christian counseling, Shirley C. Guthrie (1979), does not see its distinctive element as being its intent to persuade the client (Collins) or in the religious dimension of the encounter (Oates), but in the counselor's own doctrinal and theological commitment and standpoint. According to Guthrie, the Christian commitment provides a framework for understanding the client.

> The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of Christian anthropology and therefore also the answer to the much-debated question about the difference between Christian pastoral counseling and psychological counseling and therapy in general....What makes Christian pastoral counseling unique is the fact that without arrogance but also without apology the work of counselors is based on the attempt to understand both themselves and their counselees in

> light of the God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver and thus the answer to questions about the ultimate origin, meaning, and goal of life which lie behind all other problems and questions. An anthropology based on this faith in the triune God distinguishes Christian pastors from counselors and therapists who do their work without any religious orientation at all, from those who work from the perspective of some other faith, and from those who take into consideration some neutral "religious dimension of life" in general. (Guthrie, pp. 131-132)

According to Guthrie, then, Christian counseling is not a particular theory or technique of counseling. Neither can it be defined as the attempt to persuade the counselee to accept the Christian way of life, nor as conversation about Christian interests. Christian counseling is not distinguished by the fact that pastors generally are expected to "act like a minister" by speaking about God or Christ, quoting Scripture and praying. In any given situation, the identity as a minister may be helpful or harmful, to the advantage or disadvantage of the Christian and those to whom they minister.

According to Guthrie, the Christian counselor is one who functions in the counseling role while attempting to understand the counselee and the counselee's problem in the light of a Christian view of the person. The Christian understanding of life will influence the Christian counselor's choice of options (McLemore, 1982), and Christian convictions will influence what the counselor says and does or leaves unsaid and undone. The counselor, Christian or otherwise, ignores to his own peril the wisdom and skills

provided by any and all sources for understanding people (Guthrie, 1979).

Christian counseling, then, does not differ from "secular" counseling necessarily in terms of attitude, approach or method. Christian counseling involves more than just saying that God is allowed into the relationship. Christian counseling is marked by the fact that it is carried on in a setting of acknowledged Christian commitment, and does not shirk to draw upon distinctively Christian resources when such are judged to be necessary or helpful. The Christian element is not an "in-addition-to", as if it were something lying outside the framework of the "real counseling". The commitment lies within the entire encounter and has its influence throughout the process. The particular dimensions in which problems and growth are viewed distinguish Christian counseling.

What will be argued in this paper, then, is that Christian counseling is not a specific method or theory of counseling. Rather, Christian counseling is distinguishable by its unique ethical and moral context, its presupposition of a Christian doctrine of the person, its openness to the spiritual, and the manner in which it makes use of specifically Christian resources.

The Ethical and Moral Context

Every therapist acts as a moral agent (McLemore, 1982; Bergin, 1980). Since the counselor must respond

to the expressions of the client, the very act of choosing what to respond to involves a value decision. It is presumed that the therapist will attempt to act in such a way as to serve the welfare of the client, but the counselor's own vision of "the good life" will inevitably play a major role in how the interaction with the client takes place. As Clinton W. McLemore says, "It may turn out that the therapist is always advocating some kind of religion (in the broad sense), whether Christianity or humanism" (1982, p. 185).

The Christian counselor intentionally and avowedly assumes a posture consistent with the historic Christian faith. Specifically, he acknowledges that God exists, that human beings are the creations of God, and that there are spiritual processes alive in the world whereby the link between God and humanity is maintained (Bergin, 1980). Bergin demonstrates that these Christian values clash with two basic classes of values which are dominant in the mental health professions, clinical pragmatism and humanistic idealism.

Clinical pragmatism, typically the favorite point of view of psychiatrists, nurses, behavior therapists, and public agencies sees the dominant values of the social system as that which should be implemented in therapy. In this system the health of the client is seen as a condition absent of any pathology or disturbance, such as anxiety,

depression, guilt or obsessiveness. Humanistic idealism, on the other hand, follows Rogers and other representatives of the humanistic-existentialist schools of thought, for example Erich Fromm and Rollo May. They emphasize such values as flexibility, self-exploration, independence, self-actualization, human dignity and self-worth, and interpersonal involvement.

The value systems of clinical pragmatism and humanistic idealism are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily at odds with traditional Christian values and ethics. But, as Bergin says, "Pragmatic and humanistic views manifest a relative indifference to God, the relationship of human beings to God, and the possibility that spiritual factors influence behavior" (1980, p. 98). The specific identity of Christian counselors involves the fact that they represent a group and the espousal of the value system of that group is a part of their identity. They are presumed to have judgments about human nature, character, personality and behavior (Madden, 1975).

The ethical and moral context of Christian counseling suggests, then, that the counselor identifies himself or herself with Christianity. But it does not follow that the process of Christian counseling is a matter of overtly or covertly persuading the client to adopt the counselor's viewpoint. McLemore, for example, argues,

> Moral decisions should be left to the client. When a therapist, especially a Christian therapist,

> perceives that a client has to make ...ethical decisions..., the therapist should say, to the best of his or her ability, what outcomes are likely to attend each alternative. Christian therapists... need to be particularly careful to communicate grace and acceptance rather than Law and judgment. (McLemore, 1982, p. 185)

William E. Hulme supports McLemore at this point. He observes that all counselors, including pastoral counselors, are reluctant to foist their values onto the counselee, and rightly so (1981). But this reluctance is accompanied by a realization that no counseling is value neutral. The Christian counselor openly acknowledges his or her identity as a Chrisitan counselor influences judgments concerning alternatives. Hulme says,

> Pastoral counselors... represent a particular tradition that involves a commitment to a way of life. While there is much flexibility within this way, there are nevertheless also explicit parameters. In a view of life in which one is not one's own, there are vocational responsibilities. (Hulme, 1981, p. 128)

The Christian View of the Person

Every counselor operates on the basis of some concept of human nature, and the Christian counselor is no exception. "Secular" views of the person are usually stated in the language of psychology and/or philosophy. In presenting their views on human nature, Christian theologians often interact with psychologists and philosophers (Brunner, 1952; Tillich, 1963).

Theology need not be reduced to discussions of esoteric doctrine and irrelevent questions involving data which is available only to the "enlightened". Theologians

such as Brunner and Tillich have seen the raw material for the Christian doctrine of the person in the common experience of people. Their discussions of anthropology center on the polarities of human experience. People constantly find themselves in tension between seeming contradictories.

People experience themselves as both of nature and above nature. When the creation narrative of Genesis 2 describes the man as created by God from the dust, it means that man is seen as an animal among the animals (Christian, 1973). Biologically, the human person is an organism among other organisms and, thus, capable of being analyzed as such by the scientist and the psychologist. But people also feel a sense of being able to transcend the given order and create a new order. By using the capacity for thought,people are able to escape limitations of time and space by contemplating the past and the future and by envisioning the unseen and the undone.

Biblically speaking, this capacity for transcendence is due to the fact that people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The human is thus distinguished from the rest of creation and given the capacity to enjoy the pleasures and satisfy the needs of human life in free partnership with God and fellow human beings. From the Christian point of view, the intended destiny of the person is one of creativity, freedom and choice (Christian, 1973).

Another aspect of the polarity of human existence is that people experience themselves as both determined and free (Brunner, 1952; Tillich, 1963; Christian, 1973). As is true of all creatures, the human is victim to the environment and to physiology. The weather, the food supply and the mating instinct serve to make people what they are. But people are both shaped by the environment and shapers of the environment. People are not free to be anything and everything; rather, their freedom is exercised within and shaped by limits. Daubner (1982) argues that some element of freedom is the cornerstone of all counseling, and, without it, counseling is a cruel farce and ultimately reducible to a form of control and manipulation that counselors exert over their clients.

Another aspect of the polarity of human existence is the fact that people are both good and evil (Brunner, 1952; Tillich, 1963; Christian, 1973). They are good in that they have been created by God and are valued by God. But it is also characteristic of the human person to refuse and to be unable to fulfill the purpose for which they were created. Christian theology speaks of sin as the prideful state in which people revolt against God and make themselves the measure of all things. Sin is seen as a state or a power which overwhelms people. People are not sinners merely because they commit sinful or evil acts; they commit such acts because they are sinners.

The history of Christian thought is replete with discussions of human "total depravity". The Augustinian-Calvinistic traditon of Christianity is often presumed to teach a view of the human as worthless and incapable of any good whatever. As Daubner (1982) observes, however, this conclusion is a gross oversimplification and misunderstanding of the heritage of the Christian Reformation. To say that people are "depraved" is not to say that the natural man, the man who lives apart from God, is incapable of good. To say that the human is "depraved" is only to say that sin penetrates all areas and aspects of life. As Christian (1973) argues, it is the person's capacity for goodness which sets them apart from the beasts, and also which makes them capable of the most exquisite corruption.

It is possible to look only at the good in the human person, to affirm creativity and the capacity for altruism and love. These are very real, but, as Counts puts it,

> The basic dilemmas of the twentieth century world--war, pollution, poverty, prejudice, population explosion, etc. are all of human origin. If something is not radically wrong with man, why does he continue to be the source of such gigantic problems? From the psychological viewpoint, if man is basically good, why does he so naturally and easily develop a bad self-image which leads to neurosis. (Counts, 1973, p. 40)

Counts' question is not answered by blaming the environment, for the environment is largely made by people.

A final aspect of the polarity of human existence is that the person is mortal, but has a taste for immortality

(Christian, 1973). People are aware that their existence is tenuous and fragile. Unlike other creatures people are aware of their finitude. Indeed, each moment is lived in the face of mortality. From the Christian point of view, people have been promised a new humanity which does fulfill the purpose for which God created it.

To say that human life is experienced in terms of polarities is quite different from saying that people are sometimes this and at other times that. It is something different from saying that people are a balance of opposites. The polarities suggest that human life is always lived in tension between two dimensions of human nature. A person is not a happy medium between good and evil, determination and freedom. To be a human is to be all these at the same time, and in such a way that to affirm one is to be driven to affirm its opposite as well (Christian, 1973).

Openness to the Spiritual

Christian counseling is characterized by the fact that the therapist is open to the discussion of spiritual matters and welcomes their entrance into the client-counselor relationship. Most counselors feel free to discuss personal, family, and a wide variety of sexual problems, but religious and spiritual issues are viewed with a great deal of apprehension (Henning & Tirrell, 1982). May argues that spirutuality is a taboo "because most of us

have not had the opportunity to work through our own psychodynamics concerning spirituality" (May, 1974, p. 84).

Spiritual issues need not be specifically Christian nor is it a requirement that they be defined exclusively in Christian terminology. May's definition is helpful.

> In using the terms "spirituality" and "spiritual experience," I refer to the direct feeling level experience of the ground of being, or of the process or flow of the universe. These terms refer to experience in which one feels at one with creation, deeply meaningful, and in pervasive union with all things. (May, 1974, p. 85)

Spirituality may include the experience of God in prayer, but it also includes those feelings of a deep sense of harmony with the universe and a sense of belonging in it.

Many counselors avoid this area because of ethical prohibitions against operating outside areas of professional competence (Henning & Tirrell, 1982). In such cases avoidance may be justifiable. Spirituality must be within the bounds of competence of the Christian counselor (May, 1977; Kelsey, 1979; Barnhouse, 1979).

The Use of Christian Resources

While Christian pastoral counselors have been busy learning the tricks of the trade as performed by various schools of therapeutic thought, the psychological professions have been envious of certain resources which they sometimes attempt to manufacture, but which are a natural part of the church. The Christian counselor stands ready to make use of unique Christian resources, such as the group

support offered by the fellowship of faith, the exhortatory and inspiration aspects of both fellowship and worship, ritual and sacrament as they relate to faith and meaning, and absolution or forgiveness as a means of coping with guilt (Hulme, 1981).

The Christian counselor is under no obligation to try to solve every problem by resorting to prayer or worship. Christian resources are available options which may be of use to some clients who are working on some problems, while remaining of no special value to other clients with other difficulties.

Summary

Christian counseling is not a specific method or theory of counseling. Christian counselors willingly accept whatever wisdom they are able to derive from research into the behavioral dynamics of people. Christian counseling is identifiable in that it is conducted in an atmosphere of acknowledged Christian commitment. Its ethical and moral context is that of avowed Christian faith. Its understanding of the person is enlightened by biblical data, as well as the history of Christian thought. The Christian counselor is open to discussion of spiritual concerns, and is privileged to make use of traditionally Christian resources.

Chapter 4

A CRITIQUE OF THE ROGERIAN APPROACH

At the outset of this study the common ground of psychotherapy and religion was identified as the fact that they both involve themselves in life's most basic questions. This chapter is an analysis of the similarities and the differences between the Rogerian and the Christian approach to those basic issues of life. It will then be possible to draw some conclusions about the suitability of the Rogerian approach from a Christian framework.

Discussion

The Nature of the Person

Rogers sees the person as naturally and inherently good. Christian theology sees people as both good and evil. Rogers blames the social structure for the problems which people face. Christian theology sees the origin of people's most serious problems as lying within the heart of the person.

The theological criticism of Rogers is that he has failed to see the polarity of human existence with respect to good and evil and has cast his lot fully with goodness. Rollo May's criticism of the Rogerian view of evil is similar. May asserts,

> The issue of evil--or rather, the issue of not confronting evil--has profound, and to my mind adverse, effects on humanistic psychology. I believe it is the most important error in the humanistic movement. (May, 1982, p. 19)

May notes that Rogers responds to every accusation

that he ignores the radical nature of evil by placing the blame, not with the individual, but with the culture, the educational system, the unjust way in which wealth is distributed, and generally anything which involves massive corporate effort. May's response is, "But who makes up the culture except persons like you and me," and "there is no self except in interaction with a culture, and no culture that is not made up of selves" (1982, p. 19). Evil that exists in the culture can only be a reflection of evil in the person.

May's analysis of the situation leads him to see the human as potentially good and creative as well as potentially bad and destructive. The determining factor is called the "daimonic" urge to affirm, assert, perpetuate and increase the self. Since the daimonic can be either constructive or destructive, it must be successfully integrated into the personality, else destruction is the result (May, 1969, 1982). If properly integrated, creativity is the result.

May did not write with the intention of doing Christian theology. But his thought is, at this point, quite similar to that of theologians such as Brunner and Tillich.

The counselor's view of the goodness or evil within the person has serious implications for the process of counseling. Daubner (1982) argues that the Rogerian position that clients are naturally good if only they are

given a chance to be,

> ...is not corroborated by the facts of life. To assert that clients can be trusted to choose and to do the good if only they are freed from all restraint, and from all threat to their self-concepts, is a view that flies in the face of countless real-life situations with which all counselors, and indeed all students of human nature, are only too familiar. (1982, p. 199)

Howard Clinebell, a pastoral counselor who once adopted a Rogerian framework but has since moved away from it, criticizes Rogers' view of the person.

> It seems as if in freeing himself from moralistic fundamentalism, he dismissed any need for a depth understanding of human pathology, evil, and destructiveness. When one encounters persons in whom the growth elan has been frozen for many years in a self-crippling psychosis, the inadequacy of Rogers' understanding of such grotesquely distorted personhood is evident. (1981, p. 122)

Clinebell, like May, now argues that the counselor must be willing to challenge evil that is seen in clients.

The Counseling Process

From the Rogerian point of view, the key to the healing process of therapy is the communication of the counselor's acceptance of the client. Clients discover the power to change themselves when they sense they are fully and unconditionally accepted by the therapist. Acceptance on an "as is" basis releases the power to change. As Rogers says,

> The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change. I believe that I have learned this from my clients as well as within my own experience--that we cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are. The change seems to come almost unnoticed. (1961, p. 17)

Christian counselors also realize that acceptance is vital to therapeutic effectiveness. Hulme says, "The power for change centers in the acceptance of the self unchanged" (1981, p. 25). But, as Browning notes, "Forgiveness and acceptance are meaningless concepts outside of a world of meanings where moral seriousness is central, sin is a possibility, and real ethical distinctions are a reality" (1979, p. 154). Christian counselors do not base acceptance on the inherent goodness of people, but on the radical paradox of the gospel.

The radical paradox of the gospel is that people cannot make themselves acceptable to God; but, still, God justifies the ungodly and accepts the unacceptable. It is based upon Paul's doctrine of sin which sees it as a powerful force which dominates, controls and destroys people (Romans 7: 7-25). The power of sin is found in something good, the law, which imposes its demand upon people. Though sin is not necessary, it is inevitable; people lose the struggle between sin and the law. Resolution of this difficulty comes from God, not the person. It is God who loves and accepts the person before, not after, behavior improves.

Christian counselors who take theology seriously will not impose conditions of worth on the client. But the Christian therapist also knows that the worth of the client is not based upon some inherent quality of the individual. Aden clarifies the contrast between the Rogerian view and

Christian thought as follows:

> Rogerian acceptance rests on the innate goodness and inherent self-worth of the individual; divine forgiveness rests on the love and mercy of God. Between these two there is a giant chasm, not because God and persons are totally unrelated but because our standing with God, if it depends on who we are or on what we can do, is bound to end in either destructive despair or unbridled egoism. (1984, p. 40)

Rogerian and Christian counselors agree that acceptance of the client is a vital condition of therapy, though they base acceptance on different understandings of the person. An important question can be raised at this point: Do different views of acceptance make any important difference with respect to the counselor's relationship with the client? Rogerian and Christian counselors believe differently, but do they act differently?

Clinebell believes that they do. Based upon his own experience as a Rogerian therapist, Clinebell says, "People who were raised by permissive parents use Rogers' emphasis on self-evaluation to legitimate narcissistic 'me-ism'" (1981, p. 123). Clinebell's point is that the Rogerian view of acceptance leaves the counselor with no tools for challenging clients who are all too willing to accept themselves without criticism and without change. In Aden's terminology, Rogers' view of acceptance tends to leave the client in a state of "unbridled egoism" (1984, p. 40).

The Christian view of acceptance leaves room for confrontation. As Clinebell says,

> For persons with weak or confused consciences and those who act out their inner pain in ways that are damaging to themselves and others, the most loving and growthful thing a therapist can do is to confront them honestly with the consequences of their behavior! (1981, p. 121)

The confrontation which Clinebell advocates is not moralistic judgmentalism. Confrontation does require the counselor to assume an active, participative, constructive role in the client-counselor relationship. It calls for something more than mere reflection.

The Fully Functioning Person

Oglesby (1973, 1979) suggests that therapies can be categorized according to whether they emphasize "right knowing," "right doing," or "right being" as the most vital aspect of wholeness. Those which emphasize right knowing see intrapsychic processes as the cause of human problems. In psychoanalytic theory, transactional analysis, logotherapy and Rational-Emotive Therapy, cure is located in insight and self-understanding. Behavioral theory and Reality Therapy see right doing as the way to break out of bad habits. Rogerian theory, as well as Gestalt and other forms of humanistic therapy, sees right being as the solution to human problems. The perfect model of wellness in the fully functioning person.

Generally speaking, all therapies include all of these dimensions to some extent. Distinctions in therapies emerge in regard to which aspect is seen as primary and which

derivative (Oglesby, 1973, 1979). Oglesby suggests that, from the standpoint of Christian faith, all are important, but throughout Scripture right knowing and right doing result from right being or change of heart.

Thus, Christian counselors share with Rogers a similar point of departure, a world view which allows for pursuit of basic aims and which facilitates coherence of experience in the actual encounter with things, events, and people as those aims are pursued (Hunter, 1981; Rogers, 1955, 1963). Rogers and Christian counselors see people as created for wholeness and fulfillment. The characteristics of a person with a healthy religion are consistent with Rogers' conceptualization of the fully functioning person. These characteristics include an affirmation of life, the ability to choose, the acceptance of responsibility, the ability to make satisfying emotional involvements, the avoidance of guilt and self-damnation, and the avoidance of blind faith and rigid dogma.

When Christians speak of people as "created for wholeness and fulfillment," they are affirming a specifically religious dimension of life. Rogers' vision is spiritual only in a very secular sense. But when Christians speak of right knowing, right doing, and right being, they are thinking of knowing God, doing that which is made possible only by faith, and having a right heart which is characterized by love and forgiveness (Oglesby, 1979).

Implications for the Christian Counselor

Christian therapists who have been critical of the utilization of Rogerian therapy in ministerial settings (Aden, 1984; Fatis, 1979; Miller, 1977; Noyce, 1978; Oglesby, 1973, 1979) lament the fact that theological convictions do not generally inform the counseling process. Oglesby reviewed hundreds of taped recordings of counseling sessions of student pastoral counselors, and commented,

> A characteristic that stands out in the actual work of these persons in the cure of souls is the neglect of theological constructs toward the informing of theory and practice. What the minister believed about sin and salvation often bore little if any resemblance to how s/he related to a parishoner in pastoral encounter. Ordinarily, the process was informed by a mixture of "common sense," some understanding of therapeutic and counseling procedures drawn from varieties of sources, and a genuine desire to be of help. (1979, p. 159)

Studies suggest that helping professionals who are accurately empathic, unconditionally positive, and genuine are indeed effective therapists (Truax & Mitchell, 1971). No critic of Rogers can fairly conclude that his studies of the counselor-client relationship have not contributed much that is worthwhile and useful to all therapists, Christian or otherwise. For clients who are bright, verbal, and strongly motivated to change, an approach that is essentially Rogerian may well be the treatment of choice (Clinebell, 1981).

What the Christian criticism of Rogers points to is that the attempt to interpret the Rogerian process of

therapy as some sort of incognito Christian experience (Oden, 1966) is not valid. Broad areas of agreement make partners of Christian and Rogerian therapists, but equally broad areas of difference prevent the identification of the two. The idea that the Rogerian therapist is really a priest in a secular disguise and that empathy and acceptance can be equated with biblical love, should be set aside. Therapy is "not a distinctly Christian experience, but is rather a deeply human one" (Natale, 1977, p. 25). It is a common concern for humanity at its best which links the Rogerian and the Christian therapist. It is the ultimacy of the context in which humanity is to be understood which keeps them somewhat apart.

Noyce's article (1978) asks, "Has ministry's nerve been cut by the pastoral counseling movement?" He criticizes the Rogerian approach as too limited, but still affirms that pastoral counselors learned much from him.

> They learned to stop preaching and to do more listening in the pastoral encounter. They learned, going beneath the parishioner's words, to "follow the affect," as we say now, and to reflect feelings back to the parishoner.... We learned ... to avoid intruding with the assortment of anecdotes, easy encouragement and doctrinal baggage that had so often been the stock in trade of well-meaning ministry both as we visualized it and as we had seen it practiced. We stopped imposing unwanted prayer on people. (Noyce, 1978, p. 103)

What was learned from Rogers still stands as "the truth." Noyce says, "We begin with Rogers even yet" (1978, p. 114). What Rogers does not provide is the "whole truth" or "gospel truth." Christian counselors need to be informed by Rogers,

but they must not be limited by Rogerian theory and methodology.

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